

Unveiling the Evolution: Tracing the Growth of Arabic Journalism in the Arab World

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Abstract:

The emergence of Arabic journalism in the Arab world can be traced back to the nineteenth century, characterized by a dynamic interaction between Eastern and Western influences. Napoleon's campaign in Egypt marked the beginning of this transformative period, paving the way for the introduction and refinement of journalistic practices in the region. The inaugural Arab newspaper, *Al-Tanbîh*, was issued in 1800 by General Bonaparte, with subsequent publications like *Al-Waqâ'i' al-Miṣriya* and *Al-Mubshir* following suit. Arab journalism was perceived as a tool for societal transformation and liberation, aiming to free the nation from colonial rule and oppressive regimes. Despite initially imitating Western practices, Arab journalism soon adopted its own character, driven by a spirit of jihad and nationalistic fervour. Over time, the Arab press expanded across various countries, with newspapers like *Al-Ahram* in Egypt and *Al-Nahār* in Lebanon becoming enduring fixtures. This historical overview underscores the evolution of Arabic journalism as a pivotal force in shaping the modern Arab world.

Keywords: Arabic journalism, Nineteenth century, Eastern and Western influences, Napoleon's campaign, *Al-Tanbîh*, Nationalistic fervour, Colonial rule, Modern Arab world etc.

Introduction:

The emergence of Arabic journalism during the nineteenth century stands as a testament to the dynamic exchange between Eastern and Western cultures, spurred in part by historical events like Napoleon's campaign in Egypt. This period witnessed the birth of the Arab press, marked by the publication of seminal newspapers such as *Al-Tanbîh* and *Al-Waqâ'i' al-Miṣriya*. Arab journalism, initially influenced by Western practices, gradually developed its own character, driven by nationalistic fervour and aspirations for liberation from colonial rule. The Arab press, perceived as a tool for jihad and societal reform, wielded significant influence in shaping public opinion and advocating for political change. This introduction

sets the stage for exploring the origins, evolution, and impact of Arabic journalism within the broader context of the modern Arab world.

Description:

The research paper titled "Unveiling the Evolution: Tracing the Growth of Arabic Journalism in the Arab World" delves into the intricate history and development of Arabic journalism from its inception in the nineteenth century. The paper begins by highlighting the pivotal role played by historical events such as Napoleon's campaign in Egypt in catalysing the birth of the Arab press. It explores the earliest Arabic newspapers, including *Al-Tanbîh* and *Al-Waqâ'i' al-Miṣriya*, shedding light on their significance in laying the groundwork for subsequent journalistic endeavours.

As the narrative unfolds, the paper delves into the evolution of Arab journalism, tracing its transition from an initially Western-influenced practice to a distinctively Arab enterprise driven by nationalist aspirations and a fervent desire for liberation from colonial rule. The paper examines how Arab journalists perceived their craft as a tool for societal reform and liberation, wielding the press as a weapon in the struggle against oppression and tyranny.

Furthermore, the research paper provides a comprehensive overview of the expansion of Arabic journalism across various Arab countries, highlighting key milestones and significant publications in countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, and Libya. It explores the diverse cultural, political, and social contexts within which Arabic journalism evolved, illustrating the dynamic interplay between local dynamics and global influences.

Overall, "Unveiling the Evolution: Tracing the Growth of Arabic Journalism in the Arab World" offers a rich and nuanced exploration of the historical trajectory of Arabic journalism, shedding light on its transformative impact on Arab societies and its enduring legacy in shaping public discourse and political activism in the region.

The birth of the Arab press:

The modern literary revival observed across the Arab world since the nineteenth century is attributed to the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures, a phenomenon accentuated by Napoleon's endeavours in Egypt. This era witnessed the rise of Arab journalism, spurred by the interplay between Western ideas and the nations of the Arab East. The influx of Western

influences not only introduced and polished the concept of journalism but also facilitated its spread throughout the Eastern territories.¹

The first Arab journalist

The first Arab newspaper to ever appear was the *Al-Tanbîh*, issued in Egypt in 1800 by General Bonaparte. Following this, the “*Al-Waqâ’i’ al-Miṣriya*” was published in 1828 by Governor Muhammad ‘Alî Al-Kabîr, making it the second oldest Arab newspaper. Subsequently, *Al-Mubshir* emerged in Algiers in 1847 under French colonial rule, commissioned by King Louis Philippe. However, Arabs soon began venturing into journalism independently, developing their own distinct character without relying on Western practices.

Viewed as a tool for jihad, the Arab press was perceived as a means of warfare, struggle, and revolution. It aimed to liberate the nation from the Ottoman Sultanate, stirring souls and awakening motivation. Consequently, technical aspects were often overlooked as the press focused on combating ignorance, poverty, and illiteracy, with the ultimate goal of national liberation and reform. Over time, the Arab press confronted tyranny, aggression, feudalism, and oppressive rulers, aspiring to establish a national school rather than being solely driven by commercial interests. However, this dependence on both conveying a message and sustaining a trade left the Arab press vulnerable.²

The first Arab issued a newspaper:

Razzâq Hassûn al-Halabî, the first Arab to publish an Arabic newspaper, established *Mir’at al-Ahwâl* in Istanbul in 1855. Following his lead, Khalîl al-Khourî of Lebanon launched “*Hadîqa al-Akhhâr*” in 1858, based in Beirut. Another newspaper, “*The Sultanate*”, was published in Cairo in 1857 by Iskandar Shalhûb, under the directive of the Sublime Porte. However, this endeavour was short-lived, lasting only a year.

During the same period, Count Rashîd Al-Dahdah, also from Lebanon, introduced an Arabic newspaper in Paris, named “*Bringis Paris*”. Subsequently, after the emergence of “*Hadîqa al-Akhhâr*” and “*al-Waqâ’i’ al-Miṣriya*”, a succession of Arab newspapers emerged in various countries. By 1870, the count of these publications had risen to twenty-seven newspapers and magazines, a remarkable achievement considering the prevalent illiteracy and lack of education across the Arab countries during that century.³

The beginnings of the Arabic Journalism:

Arabic journalism finds its roots in Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign against Egypt in 1798, evidenced by the publication of two French-language newspapers in Cairo. In 1828, Muhammad Ali Pasha initiated the official newspaper named the Egyptian Gazette. Later, in 1885, Rizqallah Hassûn established the Mirror of Arab Affairs, a private Arabic newspaper in Istanbul. As the twentieth century unfolded, the number of Arabic newspapers, particularly in Egypt, witnessed a significant surge. Titles like Al-Mu'ayad, Al-Liwâ', Al-Siyâsah, Al-Balâgh, and Al-Jihâd emerged during this period.

Notably, enduring newspapers like Al-Ahram, established in 1875, and Al-Akhbar, founded in 1944, continue to shape the media landscape. In Algeria, the publication of Al-Mubshîr in 1847 marked a significant milestone. Subsequently, Kawkab Africa emerged in 1907 as the first Arabic newspaper published by an Algerian.

In Lebanon, the debut of "Hadîqat al-Akhbâr" in 1858 led to the emergence of several subsequent newspapers, including *Nafîr Syria* and *Al-Bashîr*. Presently, newspapers like *al-Nahâr* and *Al-Anwâr* continue to thrive alongside numerous other publications.

Similarly, Tunisia saw the establishment of *al-Ra'id al-Tūnisî* in 1860, while Syria witnessed the inception of "Syria" in 1865. Specialized newspapers like *Ghadîr al-Furât* and *Al-Shahba* also emerged. In Libya, *Tripoli Al-Gharb* was published in 1866, and Iraq saw the debut of *al-'Irâq* in 1869, followed by newspapers like *Mosul*, *Basra*, *Baghdad*, and *Al-Raqîb*.

Here an attempt has been made to show some other Arabic newspapers ⁴ as follows:

Name of Newspaper	Place of publication	Year of first publication
Jariîda al-Maghrib	Morocco	1889
Jariîda al-Nafîr	Palestine	1908
Al-Haqq Ya'lû	Oman, Jordan	1920
Al-Ittihâd al-Sha'b	Iraq	1959
Al-Jamhuriya	Iraq	1958
Jariîda Umm al-Qurâ	Saudi Arabia	1924
Jariîda al-Imân	Yemen	1926
Jariîda al-Kuwait	Kuwait	1028

Jariīda al-Bahrain	Bahrain	1936
Jaziratul-Arab	Amman	1927
Al-Urdun	Amman	1927

The beginning of the Arabic Press in Egypt:

At the close of the eighteenth century, the Arab press emerged in Cairo, courtesy of the French campaign led by General Napoleon Bonaparte, who later ascended to the imperial throne in France as Napoleon I. This pivotal moment ushered in the introduction of modern journalism to the Arab world by France.

The campaign's strategic move involved transferring its official printing presses and its president, Hanna Yūsuf Mursal, to the ship named "the East," accompanying General Bonaparte. These presses, collectively known as the Naval Army Press or *al-Mataba' al-Jaish al-Bahrî*, were established in Alexandria before relocating to Cairo. Initially, they disseminated circulars to soldiers and Arabic publications upon the campaign's arrival.

Ibrahim Abduh meticulously documented the books published by French presses in Egypt, which included the Eastern Press, Citizen Mark Orwell Press, Army Typography, and Domestic Press. These publications covered various genres, such as statements, books, alerts, calendars, and documents.

The creation of the newspaper *Al-Tanbih* is shrouded in historical debate, with conflicting attributions to Napoleon, Menou, or Ismail al-Khashab. Nevertheless, its existence lacked concrete evidence.

Twenty-seven years later, Muhammad Ali Pasha the Great, ruler of Egypt, established the "Egyptian Chronicle", marking the advent of official Arabic newspapers. Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi introduced *Rawḍat al-Madāris* as a popular semi-monthly literary magazine, assuming the role of an official newspaper.

Upon the French withdrawal, Muhammad Ali al-Kabir initiated the "Domestic Press" or "Bulaq Press," becoming a hub for official publications, governmental documents, and newspapers like *Al-Waqā'i' Al-Miṣriya*.

In 1867, the governor of Aleppo established the newspaper *Ghadīr al-Furāt*, later renamed "Euphrates," which printed in Arabic, Turkish, and Armenian. Additionally, the first

non-governmental Syrian newspaper, *Al-Shahba*, emerged in Aleppo in 1877 under ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Kawakibî’s leadership.

Palestine witnessed the establishment of various newspapers, including *Al-Nafâ’is* by Khalil Beidas in Haifa in 1909, *Al-Akhhbâr* by Faddoul Sabaghah in Biafa in 1911, and *Al-Quds Al-Sharîf* in Jerusalem in 1912. After Palestine's occupation, numerous newspapers emerged, reflecting the Arab resistance's diverse factions. These include *Al-Hurriya* in 1959, "Voice of Palestine" in 1968, and others, striving to amplify the Palestinian voice amid geopolitical challenges.⁵

The Emergence of Press Unions in the Arab World:

The introduction of printing to the Arab world occurred in 1702 AD through the efforts of religious scholars and missionary endeavours. However, the inception of journalism didn't occur until 1798 AD, coinciding with the French campaign's arrival in Egypt led by Napoleon. Trade union organization within the Arab press began in 1911 AD in Lebanon and gradually took root in various parts of the Arab world. The Union of Arab Journalists, established in 1964 AD in Egypt, played a crucial role in fostering and solidifying press union organization across the Arab world.

The origins of this organizational structure can be traced back to 1911 in Lebanon, initially as a committee, which later evolved into an association by 1918, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Lebanese Press Syndicate in 1919.

In Egypt, an informal gathering of journalists was commenced in 1921. However, in 1941, legislation was enacted to formally establish the Syndicate of Journalists.

Syria saw the establishment of the press syndicate organization in 1936, initially known as the Press Syndicate, which underwent reformation in 1949 and was renamed the Journalists Syndicate in 1950.

In Iraq, the first journalists’ organization was founded in 1946 under the name of the Journalists Association. However, it was dissolved in 1959. Following the July 14 revolution, a law was issued in 1959 to establish the Journalists Syndicate in Iraq.⁶

Historical Development of Printing in the Arab World

Historians present differing viewpoints regarding the establishment date of the first printing press utilizing Arabic letters. Some argue that it was inaugurated in Rome in 1514. Throughout the sixteenth century, numerous scientific and Christian religious books were printed within it and subsequently distributed to markets in the East. This perspective finds support in certain publications issued by Ottoman Sultan Murad III in 1594, produced in this press. In the seventeenth century, Arabic territories saw the introduction of several Arabic printing presses in various Arab capitals.

The propagation of printing began in the East, particularly in Constantinople, utilizing Arabic letters. However, the earliest Arabic printing press in the Arab East emerged through the establishment of a press by one of the patriarchs in Aleppo during the early eighteenth century, around 1702. It is believed that its typefaces were obtained from Bucharest. Subsequently, Constantinople witnessed the establishment of its second printing press, despite facing staunch opposition from governmental authorities and clerics. Fatwas were issued denouncing the printing press as a malevolent creation of Satan. Nevertheless, with support from select scholars, the Grand Vizier managed to secure a royal decree in 1712, granted by Sa'id Effendi, permitting the establishment of a printing press and the printing of all forms of literature, excluding interpretations, hadith, jurisprudence, and oratory.

The roots of Arabic printing are also found in the village of Choueir in Mount Lebanon. Deacon Abdullah Al-Zakhir is credited with establishing Lebanon's first Arabic printing press in 1733 within the monastery of Mario Hanna Al-Sâygh, later bequeathing it to the Assyrian monks. This press stands as one of the earliest in the Arab world, primarily focusing on religious texts. While initially using Syriac letters, it later adopted Arabic letters cast at the Aleppo Press. The Orthodox and Catholic proprietors of Dair al-Choueir followed suit, establishing an Arab printing press in Beirut in 1750, modelled after the al-Choueir printing press.

In Lebanon and Syria, printing presses primarily concentrated on religious books until the nineteenth century. Subsequently, new printing presses emerged, not only printing religious texts but also scholarly and literary works, revitalizing the ancient heritage. Among the first Arab printing presses in Lebanon was the American printing press, founded in Beirut in 1834 by Gâli Smith. Another notable press from the mid-nineteenth century was the Jesuit writers' press, renowned for its opulence and comprehensiveness. This press continues to

operate today, significantly contributing to the dissemination of Arab culture encompassing sciences, arts, and literature from both antiquity and the modern era.⁷

The Renaissance of Arabic Printing after the establishment of Bulaq Press:

In either 1819 or 1821, the Bulaq Press or Domestic Printing Press played a pivotal role as the gateway through which the Arab world entered the modern renaissance. Initially serving as a printing press for Muhammad Ali's army, it was responsible for producing materials related to military affairs, engineering, geography, weaponry, medicine, veterinary medicine, and other necessities of the military establishment. Subsequently, additional presses emerged that were affiliated with army departments and higher educational institutions. In 1966, I came into possession of a veterinary medicine book of medium size, impeccably printed and bound, despite my underestimation of its value due to my young age and lack of awareness at that time.

Following the year 1820, Arabic printing press rapidly advanced in Egypt, India, and Russia, diligently investigating, correcting, and beautifully rendering the most important books.

In 1821 AD, the establishment of the Dâr al-Salâm stone press took place in the city of Kaẓîmiya. It printed the book "Dumat al-Zawrâ' fî Târikh Waqâ' al-Zawra," authored by Sheikh Rasul Effendi al-Karkûli. Some sources suggest its establishment in 1830 AD.

In 1855 AD, the first Arabic printing press emerged in Damascus, with Hanna al-Dumani being its most recent owner, eventually selling it to Hanna Al-Haddad and later to Muhammad Effendi Al-Hafnî.

In 1883 AD, Othman Nurî Pasha, the Ottoman governor, established the first printing press in the Arabian Peninsula, specifically in Makkah Al-Mukarramah. Known as *Al-Matba' al-Miṣriyya*, this press published works in Arabic, Turkish, and Javanese languages.

The year 1885 AD saw the publication of the newspaper "Al-Mosul" in the state of Mosul, although its release was halted just prior to the announcement of the 1918 armistice between British and Turkish forces.

In the state of Basra, during the year 1895, the newspaper "Al-Basra" was established by Suleiman Al-Bustanî, a Lebanese individual born on May 22, 1856. The initiative came about at the behest of the governor, Qâsim Pasha Zuhair.⁸

Jarīda al-Sharq al-Awsad:

It is a prominent international Arabic newspaper, available both in print and online format. Offering a diverse range of content, the newspaper covers regional political developments, social issues, economic and commercial news, as well as sports and entertainment updates. Additionally, it features 21 specialized supplements catering to various interests. Founded by the brothers Hisham and Muhammad Ali Hafez, the newspaper published its inaugural issue on July 4, 1978. Based in London, it is published in the Arabic language by a publishing company owned by the Saudi Research and Marketing Group. As a comprehensive daily newspaper with a focus on general news, it serves Arab readers worldwide.

Al-Ḥayâh:

Founded by Kamil Marwa, the independent international Arab political daily newspaper *Al-Ḥayâh* made its debut in Beirut on January 28, 1946. This name was chosen by its founder, signifying vitality and vigour, a theme maintained even after its reissue in 1988.

Since its establishment, *Al-Ḥayâh* has been at the forefront of innovation, pioneering new forms, content, and journalistic practices. Upon its modern revival, it swiftly embraced contemporary developments and communication technologies, blending news dissemination with independent and reasoned opinion. Its steadfast commitment lies in fostering Arab openness and integration with the era while preserving its distinct identity.

Headquartered in London, *Al-Ḥayâh* boasts an extensive network of correspondents worldwide, enabling it to gather news promptly. This news is disseminated via satellite for printing in various Arab and foreign cities.

Since its resurgence in October 1988, *Al-Ḥayâh* has prioritized diversity and specialization. In an era inundated with information, traditional journalistic practices no longer suffice merely to satiate curiosity. Recognizing the value of time in today's fast-paced world, *Al-Ḥayâh* and its contributors have adeptly adapted to this reality. News reports have become more concise and direct, topics more accessible, and the visual aesthetics of the publication have evolved gracefully to align with its new appearance.⁹

Here an attempt has been made briefly to shed light on the Arabic magazines ¹⁰ as follows:

Name of Arabic Journal	Publisher / Publishing places	Year of Publication
Al-Iqtisād al-‘Arabî	the Arab African Publishing Company	1975
Dastûr	Dar Al Orouba, London	1976
Al-Şayyâd	Dar al-Sayyad Lubnaniya	
Al-Majalla	The Saudi Research and Marketing Company	1979
Al-Taḍâmun	Fuad Matar	1982
Al-Kombutar wa al-Idarah	Dar al-Sayyad, Lebanon	1982
Sayyidaṭî	The Saudi Research and Marketing Company	1981
Al-‘Alam	Lebanon	1983
Al-Nâqid	London	1988

Discussion:

The historical development of printing and journalism in the Arab world is a rich tapestry of cultural exchange, innovation, and socio-political evolution. From the introduction of printing presses utilizing Arabic letters in the 18th century to the establishment of the first Arabic newspapers and the subsequent emergence of press unions, each milestone reflects a dynamic interplay between Eastern and Western influences.

Napoleon's campaign in Egypt in 1798 served as a catalyst for the introduction of modern journalism to the Arab world, leading to the emergence of the first Arabic newspapers like *Al-Tanbih* and *Al-Waqā'i‘ al-Miṣriya*. These newspapers, though initially influenced by Western practices, soon developed their own distinct character, emphasizing the role of journalism as a tool for societal reform, liberation, and national awakening.

The establishment of press unions in the Arab world, starting in Lebanon in 1911 and later spreading to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, marked a significant step towards organizing and consolidating the journalistic profession. These unions played a crucial role in advocating for press freedom, professional standards, and the rights of journalists.

The proliferation of Arabic newspapers and magazines across the Arab world reflects the diversity and vibrancy of the region's media landscape. From prominent international newspapers like *Jarīda al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ* and *Al-Ḥayāh* to specialized publications covering

a wide range of topics, Arabic journalism continues to evolve and adapt to the changing media landscape.

Overall, the historical development of printing and journalism in the Arab world underscores the enduring importance of the press as a vehicle for information dissemination, cultural exchange, and societal transformation.

Conclusion:

The evolution of printing and journalism in the Arab world reflects a fascinating journey of cultural exchange, innovation, and socio-political transformation. From the introduction of printing presses utilizing Arabic letters in the 18th century to the establishment of the first Arabic newspapers and the subsequent emergence of press unions, each milestone has shaped the region's media landscape.

Napoleon's campaign in Egypt in 1798 served as a pivotal moment, ushering in the introduction of modern journalism and laying the foundation for the development of the Arab press. The subsequent establishment of Arabic newspapers across the region, coupled with the formation of press unions, marked significant steps towards organizing and professionalizing the journalistic profession.

The proliferation of Arabic newspapers and magazines, both domestically and internationally, underscores the diversity and vibrancy of the Arab media landscape. From general news publications to specialized magazines covering a wide range of topics, Arabic journalism continues to evolve and adapt to the changing media landscape, embracing new technologies and communication techniques.

Overall, the historical development of printing and journalism in the Arab world highlights the enduring importance of the press as a catalyst for societal change, cultural exchange, and the advancement of knowledge. As the Arab media landscape continues to evolve, it remains a vital pillar of Arab society, reflecting the region's rich cultural heritage and its aspirations for the future.

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