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Cover illustration Photo no.5 from Hedda Morrison's 'Jehol album 1', Hedda Morrison Collection, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University (© President and Fellows of Harvard College, Bequest of Hedda Hammer Morrison)

MAKING MEIJI MUSLIMS: THE TRAVELOGUE OF 'ALĪ AḤMAD AL-JARJĀWĪ

 Michael F. Laffan

This is not so much an article about East Asian history as a description of how, in 1907, one Egyptian attempted to invite the Japanese to embrace Islam and thereby to fit Japan into his conception of the East. I should also state from the outset that the views that he would espouse were by no means unique. At the beginning of the twentieth century Meiji Japan was often held up in Muslim societies as an example to be followed, especially as it had defeated Russia, the arch enemy of the Ottoman Empire, in the war of 1904–05. In Cairo in 1904, the nationalist demagogue Muṣṭafā Kāmil Pāshā (1876–1908) even wrote a monograph cataloguing Japan's history and predicting the defeat of Tsarist Russia. This book, *al-Shams al-mushriqa* (The Rising Sun), proved very popular when released.¹ Indeed, it attracted so much attention that it was later translated into Malay by a group of Muslim reformers from Singapore who had strong educational connections with Cairo.² The scene was thus already set when, in 1908, 'Alī Aḥmad al-Jarjāwī, who attended the 1907 Tokyo Congress of Religions, released his travelogue. But al-Jarjāwī's account was not just a book about Japan as a modern example for Muslims. Indeed his book, *al-Rihla al-Yābāniyya* (The Japanese Journey),³ is a snapshot of key changes affecting Muslims at a time when colonised peoples were resolving the ambiguities and intersections of Islamic and 'oriental' identities. Both seemed formulated against a monolithic oppressor that was both Western and Christian. And whereas Muṣṭafā Kāmil had thrilled to the military victories of Japan over Russia, al-Jarjāwī had set off for the Japanese islands in 1906 with the hope of embracing that victory for all Easterners from Morocco to China, and of making it the prelude to the greater victory of Islam over Christianity in the modern world.

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of *East Asian History* for their advice and corrections. I should also like to express my appreciation to the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU, for providing me with the facilities to conduct my research. Permission to use selected images of Meiji Japan held by the Nagasaki University Library ("Japanese Old Photographs in Bakumatsu-Meiji period": <<http://www.oldphoto.lib.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/unive/>>) is gratefully acknowledged. Images of Cairo are from the author's collection of postcards. Due to the orthographic irregularities in the Arabic rendering of Japanese names, no characters are provided in this text.

¹ Muṣṭafā Kāmil, *al-Shams al-mushriqa* (Cairo: al-Liwā', 1904), p.5. On this work, its reception in Southeast Asia and Egyptian origins, see Michael Laffan, "Waṭan and negeri: Muṣṭafā Kāmil's 'Rising sun' in the Malay world," *Indonesia Circle* 69 (1996): 156–75; and "Mustafa and the Mikado: a Francophile Egyptian's turn to Meiji Japan," *Japanese Studies* 19.3 (1999): 269–86.

² *Matahari memancar* (Singapore: al-Imam, 1906).

³ Published in Cairo by al-Irshād, 1908.

⁴ Muṣṭafā Kāmil, *al-Shams al-mushriqa*, p.5.

⁵ The details of the Dinshāway incident, and the subsequent rise of the nationalists, are best described in Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in the liberal age 1798–1939* (London: Cambridge, 1983), pp.201ff.

⁶ On occasion al-Jarjāwī related information identical to that reported by Kāmil. Such included the Tsar's promise to destroy Japan "a hundred times" (*Rihla*, p.204).

⁷ Barbara Andaya "From Rūm to Tōkyō: the search for anticolonial allies by the rulers of Riau, 1899–1914," *Indonesia* 24 (1977): 139.

⁸ On the Aceh conflict and attempts by the Acehnese to gain support from Istanbul and Tokyo, see Anthony Reid, *The contest for North Sumatra; Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858–1898* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969). After being fêted as celebrities in Tokyo, the crew of the *Ertrogrül* were forced into quarantine on the Miura Peninsula after one of their members contracted cholera on shore. Most of the survivors of the ensuing epidemic were drowned when a typhoon sank the vessel on 16 September 1890. For an account of the *Ertrogrül* and its tragic end, see Michael Penn, "The last months of the *Ertrogrül*: Yokohama, Tokyo, and the Miura Peninsula," *Bulletin: Shōwa Pharmaceutical University* 34 (2000): 1–12.

The Rihla, its Context and Protagonists

For the affordable sum of ten piastres, a well-read Egyptian would have been perhaps interested enough in 1908 to buy the travelogue of 'Alī Aḥmad al-Jarjāwī. In 1904 a contemporary, the ardent patriot Muṣṭafā Kāmil, had already devoted a panegyric to the people "most outstanding—in relation to the nations of the East—for profitable study."⁴ However, by the time al-Jarjāwī's book came out, events in the vicinity of Cairo had overtaken the mania for news of the people that had managed to send the Russian fleet to the bottom of the Straits of Tsushima. Egyptians were instead obsessed with the over-zealous punishment of a number of peasants from the village of Dinshāway, who had taken justice into their own hands when a party of British officers chose to shoot their pigeons. By a coincidence of fate, the first sitting of the court that would sentence the men of Dinshāway to the scaffold for the murder of a British officer convened as al-Jarjāwī was taking the first steps of his journey, travelling from Cairo to Alexandria on 30 June 1906.

Much of the subsequent agitation in the Egyptian press against the harsh sentences, and indeed the British occupation, would be led by Kāmil and his Patriotic Party (al-Ḥizb al-Waṭani).⁵ But if al-Jarjāwī shared with Kāmil an interest in Meiji Japan, the religious reformists with whom he was aligned scorned Kāmil and his followers. And while there are some hints in the *Rihla* that al-Jarjāwī was familiar with *al-Shams al-mushriqa*, such a link is never explicitly made, nor is Kāmil mentioned.⁶ Finally, whereas Kāmil had been eager to announce that Japan's material elevation rested on its exemplary patriotism (*waṭaniyya*), urging Egyptians to imbibe love for the homeland, al-Jarjāwī had taken it upon himself to use the example of Japan to advance the cause of Islamic propagation.

Al-Jarjāwī was not articulating a new idea. There had already been widespread speculation about the potential for a Japanese Muslim Empire acting in concert with the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. In the 1890s, letters seeking aid against the Dutch had already been sent to the Japanese Emperor by a number of Southeast Asian rulers.⁷ The most celebrated of these attempts was that made by the rulers of Aceh, still fighting for independence, who had tried to dispatch a letter on the ill-fated Ottoman warship, the *Ertrogrül*, which passed through Singapore on the way to Yokohama in 1890.⁸ In 1906, the editors of a reformist journal in Singapore (*al-Imam*) devoted an article in their inaugural issue to the potential for a Muslim Japan. Having mastered Western technology, it was argued, Japan should now convert to one of the four revealed religions (Magiism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) in order to enter "the modern world." This choice should be governed by whether the existing exponents of that faith would accept them as leaders and true allies and, more specifically, as equals of England. Only Muslims, it was argued, would accept the Japanese on such a basis. Thus, given the enormous potential for pan-Eastern fellowship, the Japanese should embrace Islam and

join their brothers in China, Siam, the Malay Peninsula and the Netherlands Indies. Moreover, the editors claimed, "it would not surprise the reader ... if we say that a Muslim Japan would become the leader of all the people East of the entrance to the Red Sea." This proposal was drily described by one colonial observer as "sheer bombastic nonsense."

It is almost impossible to conceive of a people in the forefront of civilization like the Japanese adopting a religion so hopelessly out of touch with the modern world as that amalgam of Judaism and Christianity which Mohamed planted in the mind of the seventh-century Arab. ... The outcome of the Russo-Japanese War has certainly been a check to the eastern progress of Russia; but it may result equally, though the fact is not yet patent, as a check to European aggression in other parts of Asia.⁹

Regardless of the practicality of such calls, with the announcement in the press in 1906 that the Japanese would host the second World Congress of Religions the following year, al-Jarjāwī resolved to travel there to witness the proceedings. And if he could not preach Islam on that occasion—as delegates were selected by invitation only from the various states representing their faiths—al-Jarjāwī set out to have a personal impact on the Mikado's subjects.

Al-Jarjāwī advertised in his own paper, *al-Irshād* (Guidance), that he planned to make this journey and invited any interested Muslims to join him—but with the proviso that they should be entirely self-funded. Al-Jarjāwī's appeal gained him two fellow travellers, and dictated the circuitous route of his travels. The first was, according to al-Jarjāwī, an important Tunisian who wished to remain anonymous. The second was the distinguished Egyptian religious scholar and incumbent prayer-leader (*imām*) of the Great Mosque of Calcutta, Shaykh Aḥmad Mūsā (b.1863). This party of three would later be joined in Hong Kong by a Chinese Muslim, Sayyid Sulaymān, and thereafter in Japan by a Russian, Ḥajjī Mukhlīṣ Maḥmūd, as well as an Indian preacher, Sayyid Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Mun'im. Whilst all six men are deserving of attention, al-Jarjāwī only supplies a biography for his principal travelling partner, Aḥmad Mūsā.¹⁰ The Tunisian is barely mentioned, while Sayyid Sulaymān and Mukhlīṣ Maḥmūd seem to have been used mainly as guides in China and Japan. Moreover, I have had difficulty locating any biographical information on the author himself, and the image of the protagonist that emerges from the *Riḥla* is entirely that of his own making. He stands as a modern man of wealth and learning, committed to the elevation of Egyptians, the preservation of the Ottoman state, and the spread of Islam—not 'Islam' as represented by Muslim societies of his day, but the religion revealed through Muḥammad and the youthful venture of Islamic conquest and empire.¹¹

As mentioned above, the route taken by al-Jarjāwī over some eight months was a circuitous one. Yet the very course of his travels underpins the narrative that he developed as he sought to link the peoples of North Africa with those of East Asia. After due reflection on the state of his nation, and indeed on the once Muslim Mediterranean, al-Jarjāwī boarded an Italian steamer and headed

⁹ See *al-Imam*, vol.1 no.1, 26 July 1906, and the subsequent report, probably written at the Netherlands consulate in Singapore, "Japan and Islam: Eastern's wish for militant over-lord," ARA (General State Archive), The Hague, Series A.190, box 451:59.

¹⁰ Aḥmad bin Mūsā bin Muṣṭafā bin Ismā'il was born in the district of Manufiyya and attended the University of al-Azhar from 1878. He travelled in Upper Egypt in 1887 and took on the role of Qāḍī (Judge) of Qena and maintained connections with fellow Azharites in the district. He then used these networks to move on, serving with the Egyptian army as a prayer-leader (*imām*), before departing from the Sudan for the Hijaz in 1890. In Medina he studied for six months under the Sūfī activist Muḥammad 'Alī al-Sanūsī, before travelling in India, China and the Netherlands Indies. Finally, after studying Ḥanafī jurisprudence in China, he moved to Calcutta in 1900, becoming *imām* of the Great Mosque the following year.

¹¹ In many respects al-Jarjāwī conforms to the self-image of the Muslim reformer as discussed most recently by Skovgaard-Petersen. See Jacob Skovgaard-Petersen, "Portrait of the intellectual as a young man: Rashīd Ridā's *Mubāwarāt al-muslih wa-al-muqallid* (1906)," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12 (2001): 93–104. (There are indeed interesting comparisons that could be made between the discourse of 'youth' in many 'modernist' movements, such as those of Egypt [the Manār group]; the Ottoman Empire [the Young Turks]; Southeast Asia's reformists [the Kaum Muda]; and that of Meiji Japan.)

¹² See H. A. R. Gibb, ed., *The travels of Ibn Battuta AD 1325–1354: translated with revisions and notes from the Arabic text edited by C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti*, Hakluyt Series 2, vols. 110 and 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958 and 1962).

¹³ See Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, eds, *Muslim travellers: pilgrimage, migration and the religious imagination* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990).

northwest for Sicily, stopping in the towns of Messina, Naples and Palermo, and then occupied Tunis. This was probably done to rendezvous with his anonymous companion and to indulge his curiosity. After this very long digression (of over 66 pages in a book of 240 pages), the journey is resumed as they pass through Suez and afterwards a series of ports, including Aden, Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong and, at last, Yokohama. The return leg included Calcutta, where Aḥmad Mūsā rejoined his congregation, and the book concludes with an address to al-Jarjāwī's audience, most notably scholars of religion (*'ulamā'*) and men of letters (*udabā'*).

I should pause here to note the literary tradition within which al-Jarjāwī placed his narrative, for it is one that lies at the confluence of the interests of the *'ulamā'* and the *udabā'*. The purpose of the travelogue (*riḥla*), is to apprise the reader of the wonders beyond his or her shores. Often the *riḥla* is a tale culminating with the experience of the Ḥajj, when Muslims from all parts of the world assemble together at Mecca to perform the most arduous rites of their faith. Having reached this spiritual apogee, the account continues with a description of the way home, perhaps by an alternate route. Yet the Ḥajj itself can be subsumed in other accounts of travel, such as the famous *riḥla* of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, whose wanderings pre-dated and far exceeded those of Marco Polo.¹² Others might even compose a *riḥla* without the Ḥajj or a visit to the Arabian peninsula. Yet the spiritual journey often remained a part of the physical journey as the traveller calls in at great centres of Islamic learning, or at the tombs of mystical saints.¹³

Furthermore, by 1900, Egyptians were familiar with a new style of descriptive writing generated by the many students sent to France to further

Figure 1

Cairo—
general view
from the citadel



their education. Contributors to this literature included Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Taḥṭāwī (1801–73), with his account of Paris, *Takblīṣ al-ibrīz ilā talkhīṣ Barīs* (Sifting for Pure Gold, or Paris in Detail), and ʿAlī Mubārak Pāshā (1823–93), whose fictional *ʿĀlam al-dīn* (The World of Religion) included conversations between savants of the East and the West.¹⁴ Again the Muslim set forth to explore his faith, but in some cases he or she travelled beyond the protection of the Islamic world and into one that seemed diametrically opposed to it. There remained the impulse to come to grips with one's faith. But coupled with this, in the increasingly colonized Muslim world, there was the need to critically compare one's home to the outside world—both colonized and free—and perhaps, thereby, to draw some lessons for the future. Certainly al-Jarjāwī wanted to impress upon his Egyptian readers the exemplary aspects of Japanese society in exchange for claiming this Eastern people for a united Islamic future.

Home, Religion, Reform

Home, for al-Jarjāwī, was Egypt, with its glorious past being unearthed by Western archaeologists and contrasted with the supposed decadence of contemporary 'Oriental' culture. There, under the British occupation begun in 1882, al-Jarjāwī and his fellow newspaper editors vied for the attention of an avid reading public absorbed by their own history and politics. Cairo seemed both strikingly modern and traditional, with its new Westernized quarters slowly absorbing the medieval city. Many young Cairenes crowded

¹⁴ Indeed, Sawaie argues that al-Taḥṭāwī's language, as developed in works like *Takblīṣ al-ibrīz*, shaped the very development of modern literary Arabic. See Muḥammad Sawaie, "Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi and his contribution to the lexical development of modern literary Arabic," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32.3 (2000): 395–410. On the *Takblīṣ al-ibrīz* (Cairo, 1834), see Hourani, *Arabic thought*, pp.70–1. On ʿAlī Mubārak's *ʿĀlam al-Dīn* [The world of religion], see Skovgaard-Petersen, "Portrait," p.99.



Figure 2

The Qasr al-Nil Bridge, Cairo, c. 1900

¹⁵ See Tomothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*. (New York, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For a less theoretical and more lively description of the Francophile modernisations imposed on Egypt in the nineteenth century, see Trevor Mostyn, *Egypt's belle époque: Cairo 1869–1952* (London and New York: Quartet Books, 1989).

¹⁶ See A. Eccel, *Islam and social change: al-Azhar in conflict and accommodation* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1984).

into both the new government schools, modelled on French lines, and the traditional *kuttab* (elementary schools) where students learned to recite the Qur'ān.¹⁵ Despite enormous government investments, these latter schools vastly outnumbered the former. Access to the foreign-language instruction of a government school was thus very much the preserve of the élite sons of an emerging middle class. And as a result of such schooling, some Egyptian Muslims, such as Muṣṭafā Kāmil, did gravitate to a Western mode of thinking as regards state-sponsored nationalism and constitutional government.

Yet, as far as religion was concerned, the educational divide was not overwhelmingly one of modernist secularists and traditional scripturalists. Egyptians differed instead on how Islam was to be interpreted and applied to their own circum-stances. Students of Western methodology and science

seldom revoked their loyalty to the primacy of Islam and the supremacy of the Ottoman Sultan. Some still looked to the authority of the mosque-university of al-Azhar.¹⁶ Then there were other Egyptians who, dissatisfied with the 'ulamā' of al-Azhar and ever conscious of the rivalry of Western and Muslim civilizations, sought an accommodation between them, agreeing on the core principle that civilization depended on religion correctly understood. This line was pioneered by Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905) and then his devotee Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1936). Both men classified the Islam embodied by the 'ulamā' as stultified by ages of superstitions and non-Islamic accretions. Through modern techniques of education they sought to infuse Muslims with a desire for scientific achievement and a rational inquiry into the foundations of their faith. Once they gained this 'true' and modern understanding of Islam, Muslims could compete on the world stage as independent agents.

Given that al-Jarjāwī was aligned with this reformist movement, he remained constantly mindful of comparisons between the religiosity of the Egyptians and their co-believers. The clearest manifestation of this was often to be seen in their religious schools on which he often commented. However, there is irony in the fact that al-Jarjāwī's first point of educational comparison in the *Riḥla* was not Muslim. When sight-seeing in the Sicilian town of Naples he met a local teacher of Arabic, at whose college Al-Jarjāwī found a mixture of French and Italian students industriously engaged in studies of Arabic and Islam. He was further amazed by their proficiency in formal Arabic:

Figure 3

Courtyard of the university-mosque of al-Azhar, c. 1910



Let the Egyptian Arab look upon the great care and attention devoted to the study of Arabic and the Holy Qur'ān by a people who are neither Arabs nor members of the true faith of Islam. Then let him compare this care, intelligently and dispassionately, with how he has learned our own language and further let him take that [care] as an example.¹⁷

By way of further comparison, al-Jarjāwī was depressed by the state of Tunis's famous Zaytūna Mosque, once considered second only to al-Azhar. There he noted the relative lack of students, and worse still, the absence of any instruction in science or medicine, once the very strength of Islamic institutions during their medieval heyday.¹⁸

He would go on to make similar educational comparisons throughout his journey: whether looking from the deck at the impoverished populations of the Indo-Iranian coast, "where there was nothing resembling an educational institution other than the sort of Qur'ān school of rural Egypt ... where [the people] lived in the utmost ignorance, were illiterate and ruled only by their desires and passions"¹⁹; in Colombo, where local Muslims needed to compete with the very active Christian schools²⁰; or in Singapore, where the ways of the local Muslims seemed "alien" to the Malays:

maintaining the manners of faith, but only in matters of worship. In other respects there was nothing to distinguish them from other peoples. They have no aim nor motivation impelling them to adopt the means of obtaining [their arisal].²¹

The only bright light on the Muslim horizon, in al-Jarjāwī's estimation, was that of Aligarh College in India; however, he knew only of its fame and did not make a detour to visit it.²² Beyond the borders of the Muslim world, Japan had outstripped them all. I shall describe al-Jarjāwī's reaction to Meiji education further below.

Lost Independence, Colonialism, and the Caliphate

The relationship between colonialism and the contemporary state of the Muslim world absorbs al-Jarjāwī throughout his *Rihla*. It was a relationship that pained him all the more as he was obsessed with the historical supremacy of Islam on the world stage. He introduced this narrative of lost empire when standing on the corniche at Alexandria:

If only the Straits of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal and the Bosphorous had remained in the hands of the Caliph, then today our [Ottoman] state would control the Mediterranean without contest or interference from any other state! ... So it was that I contemplated the shores of the Mediterranean, my mind roaming from coast to coast of the Muslim lands, sometimes thinking of their present, and at other times of their pages in history ... Let the wise man reflect on these kingdoms. Islam would realise its power were they to

¹⁷ *Rihla*, p.25.

¹⁸ *Rihla*, pp.34ff. This was not to say that he considered Tunis bereft of educational opportunity. The newly-established *Khal-dūniyya* school, under the direction of the French-educated Muḥammad al-Bashīr Ṣafr (b.1863)—whom al-Jarjāwī described both as the heir to Aristotle and a Tunisian Muḥammad 'Abduh—appeared to offer some hope (see *Rihla*, pp.45, 73–4).

¹⁹ *Rihla*, p.90.

²⁰ *Rihla*, p.92ff.

²¹ *Rihla*, p.95.

²² *Rihla*, p.218.

²³ *Riḥla*, pp.18–21.

²⁴ *Riḥla*, pp.49–59.

²⁵ See *Riḥla*, pp.63 and 84.

²⁶ *Riḥla*, p.81.

²⁷ *Riḥla*, pp.81–84.

²⁸ These two dynasties claimed the hegemony of much of the Muslim World until the Mongol destruction of West Asia in the thirteenth century.

²⁹ *Riḥla*, p.62ff.

³⁰ *Riḥla*, p.20.

unite completely and effectively in the elevation of the people, man for man, with the [Ottoman] Caliphate in union with the kingdoms of the Maghreb and the other Muslim domains. Indeed ... there is a need for Islam to return to the age of its youth, its glory and might, filling the heart of every Muslim [with pride].²³

Al-Jarjāwī's view of an Islam weakened with age would be reinforced at the French protectorate of Tunis. But his long initial detour in North Africa served most effectively in the *Riḥla* to highlight the differences between the Muslim lands and Japan without needing to bemoan the situation in his homeland. In Tunis, al-Jarjāwī dwelt on the oppression of the French, exposing their allegedly benign intentions.²⁴

Al-Jarjāwī was furthermore disturbed that Europeans could see the Muslims of the world as their fanatical enemies. This, al-Jarjāwī claimed, was fictitious, and he pointed out that if all Muslims were truly united by hatred, then they would rise up as one—"from the Black Sea to China"—and overturn the colonial powers.²⁵ Al-Jarjāwī, rather, hoped to explain Islam as unity of a different sort, being the faith "of human nature, justice, civilization and freedom."²⁶ Of these it was civilization that was paramount.

Al-Jarjāwī advanced his argument in his account of a conversation (perhaps real) with a French passenger on the steamer between Tunis and Suez.²⁷ According to al-Jarjāwī, this certain Mr Pernot was attracted to him and his Tunisian companion as "Muslims of learning" who could explain why the state of Muslims at the time was so divergent from its ascendant past. This gave al-Jarjāwī the opportunity to outline his argument: true Islam, if practised properly, is the religion of civilization. This was shown in the glorious achievements of the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd caliphates.²⁸ Yet Islam had been weakened from within by wrongdoers and sinful rulers, whose edicts were validated by corrupt '*ulamā*', and the West had taken control of the East. Even Islamic law itself was subject to a Western code in Egypt. Egyptians only took from the West what threatened their faith, whereas the West had learned true civilization (*madaniyya*) from Islam. Was it not ironic that Westerners regarded Muslims as fanatics? Had not the Crusades been the greatest display of Western fanaticism against Islam? Still, if Muslims were once again to live their faith, then they could return to their past greatness.

As can be seen, al-Jarjāwī was eager to defend his faith, and to do what he could to reverse the myth of a universal Muslim hatred of Christians. But while Muslims were cast by al-Jarjāwī as unable to act in concert, he still championed the notion that the Muslim world was united in its affection for the Ottoman Sultan. In Tunis, we are told how the dedication to the Caliph was absent from the official Friday prayers, but that it was recited by every Muslim in prayer privately.²⁹

However, by comparison with his earlier eulogising of the historical caliphate of unity,³⁰ there is a hollowness in the affection for Sultan Abdülhamid II (r.1876–1909), which al-Jarjāwī declared to be "something

natural implanted in the heart of the Muslim by his religion.”³¹ He had no illusions about the shrinking Ottoman Empire being able to exercise a direct interest in the extraterritorial affairs of Muslims. This was implicit in his long exposition on the prominent place held by the Muslims in China, who, despite instances of harassment from their Han neighbours and organized imperial oppression, fully embraced their compatriots in all matters of national importance.³² I shall later show how, in Japan, al-Jarjāwī would try to turn to his advantage what he saw as the potential for a coexistent spiritual universalism and political neutrality. There, he believed, the greatest single obstacle to the conversion of the Japanese was their group loyalty and patriotism. Yet this obstacle was not one he wished to demolish by any means, as it was the essential quality which al-Jarjāwī, like Muṣṭafā Kāmil, believed had allowed them to remain independent.

³¹ *Rihla*, p.92.

³² *Rihla*, pp.95ff.

Japan at Last ...

Having finally left Tunis and its sufferings behind, and after the long voyage with its many ports of call, al-Jarjāwī arrived in Yokohama. As usual, he commenced his account with a potted history of the port, drawn from



Figure 4

*Yokohama wharf
(from the album of
Ogawa Kazuma)*

Figure 5

*Yokohama Post
Office (photograph
by A. Forsari)*



³³ *Rihla*, pp.104–5.

³⁴ *Rihla*, p.105.

³⁵ *Rihla*, p.106.

Western sources, as was indicated by his shift from the Islamic to the Gregorian calendars. Perhaps with quick glances at a Western encyclopedia from the saloon of his vessel, al-Jarjāwī had jotted down how the former fishing village had become a city, with its quarters for Chinese and Europeans and its modern facilities, which included churches and hospitals. Al-Jarjāwī did not neglect to mention its telegraph line, established in December 1869, and the slightly more recent trainline that would soon take him to the capital.³³

At the port al-Jarjāwī was met by Ḥajjī Mukhlis Maḥmūd, a Tartar who had been sent by his companion Sulaymān al-Ṣīnī to prepare the way for them. With due thanks to God for his safe arrival, al-Jarjāwī settled down in the bitterly cold town with its “paved streets” and where “the proof of its advanced civilization was especially to be seen in the electric lights which shone when the sun set behind the clouds.”³⁴ The already impressed al-Jarjāwī was even more affected by the sight of modern Tokyo (see below), and delighted in mentioning that—like Egypt—Japan was a land blessed with the proof of ancient civilization in its stelae and statues.³⁵

Such observations of both the modern and traditional aspects of Japan were also a feature of Kāmil’s history of Japan, *al-Shams al-mushbriqa*. But

**Figure 6**

*Club Hotel, Yokohama
(from the album of
Ogawa Kazuma)*

while Kāmil had enumerated the kilometres of track or cable which had been laid, and what the key events were in its history as a civilization, the eyewitness al-Jarjāwī could describe with greater authority the actual country, its people and religions. It was thus somewhat of a surprise to him to note that, “if we look at the advancement appropriate to a nation such as this, we would [expect to see] that it had a major library [*kutubkhāna*] stacked with the books of every civilized country and developed nation. Yet there was no such thing, other than one branch library [*maktaba*] of a mere 200 thousand volumes.”³⁶

Nevertheless, Tokyo overwhelmed and impressed him when, after three days recuperation, he and his companions emerged from their hotel:

How can I possibly talk about or explain what I saw in the capital of the land of the rising sun beyond what [I have already written] before? Moreover, how can I describe the civilization, the busy trade, the amount of merchandise and the ordered streets? The most remarkable thing on which one describing this capital [should comment] is its civilization in the flower of its youth. And if not that, then, save for the bitter cold, it could be counted the garden of the East in aspect and splendour.³⁷

Japan in March would have been cold indeed for an Egyptian. But the reader was made to wait for further sights of Japan, as al-Jarjāwī set out a brief history of the nation and the incumbent Emperor before moving on to explain his strategy for converting the Japanese to Islam.

³⁶ *Rihla*, p.107. Clearly al-Jarjāwī only deemed holdings of European texts as ‘libraries’. He is unlikely to have visited any temple collections, or to have regarded existing collections of Japanese manuscripts (which he could not read) as constituting modern bibliographic knowledge. By comparison the Khedives of Egypt had been investing for some time in the production of European text books, although the government warehouses at Bulaq were full of texts on gunnery that no-one wanted to read.

³⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 7

*Ginza c. 1910
(photographer
unknown)*



Figure 8

*Snow scene of Sanyabori
Canal, Tokyo
(photographer unknown)*

A Unique People with a Unique Emperor

Like most observers of the day, al-Jarjāwī regarded the Japanese as a people deserving of excellence. And like Kāmil before him, al-Jarjāwī accepted the argument that their Mongoloid appearance belied their true racial status. As he wrote:

Some [historians] say that they are of Chinese origin, as is evidenced by the similarity in appearance of Chinese and Japanese in colour and complexion. Yet the truth is very different to that. They are actually of a stock entirely self-constituted, and one of the distinct forms of mankind.³⁸

They had further wedded their uniqueness as a race to the structures of a modern state by adopting aspects of Western civilization on their own terms, with a modern constitution, free press, modern military and independent judiciary. All such observations seem to have been drawn from Western publications, or perhaps from Kāmil's book. And, like Kāmil before him, al-Jarjāwī devoted significant space to the embodiment of Japan's success—its Emperor Meiji:

The first thing to be said of him and his excellent manners is that he has the most apparent and abundant solicitude for his subjects and has emplaced within them his love. Hence both great and small have begun to adore him with a love unheard of In truth, the first reign in which Japan has advanced on the path of advancement and civilization [*madaniyya*] is that of today when this emperor sits upon the throne. This is because he looks to the civilization of Europe with wisdom and prudence. He observes the policies of the Western states towards their subjects and has embarked upon [a plan] granting his nation a constitution and representative assembly. At the same time he has turned to spread the sciences in his lands and is urging the nation to found scholarly institutions. . . . In sum he is Chosroes in his justice, 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb in his eloquence and self-denial, and 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz in his righteousness.³⁹

What more, indeed, could be said of the great Meiji Tennō? Apart from his own Sultan, the Emperor seemed to al-Jarjāwī to be the embodiment of all virtue and modernity. But it must be said that the Emperor lacked one thing as much as his subjects did: true guidance in religion.

Figure 9

The resplendent Emperor Mutsuhito as he appeared in the Netherlands Indies magazine Bintang Hindia in 1904



Keizer Mutsuhito,
Radja djepang; dilahirkan dalam tahun 1852, naik-nobat dalam t. 1867. Radja ini menjatakan selama ia menjadi radja, bahwa Baginda orang yang mengetahoei, betapa wadjibnja soepaja ra'iat dan tanahnja madjoe. Dalam 40 tahun sadja bangsa djepang itoe telah sama tinggi kedoeoekannya dimedan kehormatan dengan bangsa eropa.

³⁸ *Rihla*, p.108.

³⁹ *Rihla*, p.110 ff.

⁴⁰ *Riḥla*, p.113.

⁴¹ *Riḥla*, p.114.

Establishing a Muslim Presence in the Japanese Islands: Islam and Civilization

I have already described the traditional purpose of the *riḥla* above. And so it was that the *Riḥla al-Yābāniyya* was as much a device for al-Jarjāwī to demonstrate his integrity as a believer as to describe the Far East to his own compatriots. Not only did he locate himself and his faith in relation to the wider world, colonized and free, he acted out his belief through its propagation (*da'wa*), and thereby sought to claim Japan for Islam.

In Tokyo, al-Jarjāwī and his three companions joined an Indian missionary, Sayyid 'Abd al-Mun'im, who had been unable to gain any converts acting alone. Hence the five ambassadors of Islam resolved to act "as one hand" and to form an association (*jam'iyya*).⁴⁰ This was secured by the rental of a house from a prominent "Japanese" trader. The latter, a certain "Mr Jaznif," does not sound particularly Japanese, at least as far as his patronymic goes. Indeed the ambiguity of the Arabic script here allows for a somewhat Russian-sounding name. In any case, al-Jarjāwī is insistent that he was a particularly honourable and bright Japanese trader, whose backing for their cause led to an even more active role in their endeavours. For upon being introduced to the party, and thereafter having had the doctrines of Islam explained to him (in English) by Sayyid Ḥusayn, Mr Jaznif embraced Islam:

And when this Japanese stood before the truth of the Islamic religion and tasted its sweetness in his heart, he did not waste a moment before saying, "From this moment, you are to consider me a Muslim." So we witnessed the Declaration of Faith [*shabāda*], and congratulated him upon his coming out from the shades into the light of faith. And thereby all of us attained complete joy and celebrated the realisation of our hopes. After he converted, he said to us, "I am completely prepared to undertake all my responsibilities in regard to the interests [of Islam]. Henceforth I grant to you, and to your association, a residence of my own, for which I do not seek rent so long as you are here. I do this in honour of this faith to which I have pledged myself and through which I have become the happiest of men."⁴¹

The conversion of this "Japanese" is the key to the reputed success of al-Jarjāwī's mission. The regular meetings of the association they formed were held in the parlour of Jaznif's home—or rather his well-appointed floor of a private house. For the sessions, the '*ulamā*' composed brief tracts to be translated by 'Abd al-Mun'im into English and then distributed by Jaznif, who would also expound their contents verbally to the meetings.

So it was that al-Jarjāwī detailed in his account exactly how they introduced the Japanese to the Qur'ān, its revelation and inimitability; the mission of the Prophet; and the pillars of faith, including ritual prayers (*ṣalāt*), alms (*ṣakāt*), fasting (*ṣawm*) and the Ḥajj. In all the pamphlets, and at the meetings where they were distributed, a strong emphasis was placed on the direct aspects of belief, and on the equality of believers before God and with

each other.⁴² The Muslims affirmed the imperative to act as one, and to form a community of belief that could live beside other communities in the world.⁴³ Such concerns were by no means novel in the language of Muslim proselytisation, but it is interesting to observe the mixed language of propagation and, further, the sources of credibility. Not only did the group's calls to Islam move from the Arabic originals to simple and, in this case, direct Western-language tracts; their very substance demonstrated the reformist transition in argumentation and propagation. Al-Jarjāwī and Mūsā may have recited the classical dogmas of Islam, reflecting upon its superiority as the last of the revealed faiths, but they also cited the arguments of European orientalism, including selected Islamophile French scholarship, to affirm that excellence.⁴⁴ Thereby they elevated Islam as a religion not only of "intellect" (*'aql*), but as the one most closely conforming to the modern virtues of "civilization, justice and equality" (*dīn al-madaniyya wa al-'adl wa al-musāwa*).⁴⁵

Of this triumverate of virtues, the word "civilization" is repeated again and again in the *Rihla*. Whereas the authoritative Wehr-Cowan dictionary gives this as the only gloss for *madaniyya*,⁴⁶ for al-Jarjāwī, *madaniyya* often described something more than an advanced state of social organization. Certainly he wrote of *madaniyyas* past and present, but his usage for the latter evoked an additional sense of motion on the path to national advancement. When al-Jarjāwī wrote of *madaniyya* he visualized factories, urban centres and modern education. *Madaniyya* was the embodiment of progress, to be striven for and contrasted. Hence, in his description of the Meccan pilgrimage (Ḥajj), which attracted the most interest among the Japanese, al-Jarjāwī dwelt not only on its symbolic affirmation of Muslim unity, but claimed that it represented the great forum for believers to compare their respective levels of *madaniyya*.

The Muslims of every race come together in one place so that the Turk comes to know the Chinese, the Indian the Rumelian, the Arab the European, the Egyptian the Syrian, the Moroccan the Yemeni, etc. And they exchange with each other mutual understanding and affection. Everyone asks the other about the state of affairs in his country, and what they have of culture [*ḥaḍāra*], civilization [*madaniyya*], trade, agriculture and the like. In this way every Muslim in this place is a representative of his community and his country.⁴⁷

Al-Jarjāwī's impulse to highlight rationality, civilization and modernity came forward again in relation to the Congress of Religions (see below). Yet it was well and truly present in his description of the mass conversions over which he claimed to have presided in Japan. According to al-Jarjāwī, in commencing his account of their preaching of Islam in Tokyo, the Japanese public demanded arguments that were above all else logical. In this respect al-Jarjāwī likened his Japanese audience to the Pious Forebears of Islam, whom he asserted only accepted Islam in the first place because it was the

⁴² See *Rihla*, pp.120–40.

⁴³ *Rihla*, pp.114–39.

⁴⁴ Al-Jarjāwī refers to the work of a French scholar whose name I do not recognize. Nevertheless this fits the general form of citation among Egyptian literati exposed to Orientalist discourse. One favourite was Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931), who argued that Islam had civilized Europe.

⁴⁵ *Rihla*, pp.116–17.

⁴⁶ Hans Wehr, *A dictionary of modern written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, 1976), p.899.

⁴⁷ *Rihla*, pp.139ff. The new idea that the Ḥajj was more than the spiritual gathering of all Muslims and thus embodied the ideal assembly point for Muslims to compare their respective states in relation to Western colonialism had been recently advanced by al-Kawākibī (c.1849–1902) in his *Umm al-qurā* [The mother of towns] (1899). This work was serialized by Rashīd Ridā in *al-Manār* between April 1902 and February 1903. On the concept of the Muslim congress and its development see Martin Kramer, *Islam assembled: the advent of the Muslim congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁴⁸ *Riḥla*, p.118.

⁴⁹ *Riḥla*, pp.118–19.

⁵⁰ *Riḥla*, p.119.

faith of rationality.⁴⁸ But the demand for a religion that conformed to logic also intersected with another modern devotion:

What simplified the direction of the [Japanese] people to our straight religion was the natural state of the Japanese ... who, as a people, have an innate capacity to accept all that conforms to intellect and to reject all that conflicts with it—even when presented with all forms of sophistry and equivocation. The first proof of their complete readiness to accept The Most Defined Truth [Islam] was their love for their homeland, that rare love. Indeed, he who is possessed of this love naturally is closer to being directed away from darkness and guided from error. If only the Muslims had sent missions to Japan before now, and if only they had used our method [of propagation], then the Muslims among the Japanese would number in the millions and not the thousands!⁴⁹

It seems hard to believe that the eighteen assemblies convened in the month of al-Jarjāwī's visit, even if they crowded Mr Jaznīf's salon, produced hundreds (let alone thousands) of converts. To be precise, al-Jarjāwī claimed that, prior to leaving the enterprise in the hands of Sulaymān al-Sinī and Mukhlīṣ Mahmūd, their association had fostered the conversion of 1200 Japanese men.⁵⁰ Yet their entry into the universal faith came without the conventional abandoning of their indigenous names. This is somewhat unusual. For although it is not compulsory, in their rite of passage Muslim converts commonly adopt the Arabic names of the Pious Forebears, or of their clients, allies and aides during the early years of Islam. Nonetheless, the fact that al-Jarjāwī's converts did not do so reinforces the strong claims regarding Japanese patriotism which he extolled. He felt it only natural that they would prefer to keep the names that expressed their national identity.

The Congress of Religions and the Conversion of the Emperor

⁵¹ Apparently in error, the text gives the commencement date as 1 March 1906; however 1907 would appear more likely, as al-Jarjāwī claims to have set out on his eight-month journey on 30 June 1906, and arrived in Japan in winter. I am also less sure that this congress was the second ever, but it was certainly an imitation of the Chicago event of 1893.

After the long delay in Tunis, the significant space devoted to the state of Islam in China, and his detailing of the arguments of propagation, al-Jarjāwī at last turned his attention to the reason for his journey on page 140 of his *Riḥla*. This was the second World Congress of Religions, convened, it would seem, in Tokyo on 1 March 1907.⁵¹ Nineteen pages later he is done with the matter, having stated here and there that he did not wish to burden the reader with excessive description of the debates over the relative excellence of various faiths, or with details of the annoying intransigence of the Christians whose bickering had dominated the proceedings.

According to our guide, the Japanese had determined that while their knowledge of modern science and the arts of warfare was certainly equal to that of the West, their ancestral faith seemed to be inadequate, especially given that true scientific progress rested on sound religious belief.

It was as though the Russo-Japanese war had been a mirror for the Japanese

in which they saw reflected their societal identity. In it they saw glory and pride and other such qualities which elevated men to the loftiest stations of power and might. Yet they also saw something with which they were not blessed, being none other than religion. They saw there that their original beliefs, which their fathers and forefathers had followed, did not conform to intellect. And they were scornful of the fact that despite this great pride they were not adhering to a religion in keeping with their material and cultural excellence.

Therefore the great men, ministers, and the learned among them met together to discuss the adoption of a religion in accord with rationality (*'aql*) as the official faith. ... Baron Sutanao [Bārūn Sutanā'ū—not identified], ... agreed with the proposal and said, "A civilized nation such as ours must have a religion based on true foundations and principles that do not sow misgivings in [the believers'] hearts." ... So Count Katsura [Tarō], the former Prime Minister [1902–13], said, "I propose that we send official letters to the civilized countries inviting them to dispatch to us their men of religious learning and philosophers and religious legists. When they arrive let us hold a religious congress, with debates and discussions on philosophy and faiths and where each group explains the rules of their religion. And when they have directed us to the true religion, we shall adopt it and make it the official faith."⁵²

Hence the Congress was seen by the Muslims in attendance as an opportunity. They appeared to have little idea that it more truly embodied an attempt by the Japanese to put their nation on show to the world, and to emulate the first Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. Tokyo was to be a showcase of religious freedom and modernity, where the Japanese stressed to their hosts that they enjoyed complete freedom of religion. And whilst they were more than happy to listen to what the representatives of other faiths had to offer, the rules of the Congress stipulated that "any example brought forward" in the speeches of the delegates "must be rational."⁵³ The Japanese were not interested in the miraculous proofs normally marshalled to prove the validity of any faith. Religion was thus to be shown as being in step with the modern age. Thereupon the Ottoman delegate stood up to say that he accepted this constraint provided that any subsequent questions should also conform to rationality. And given this security, so long as he agreed to stick to his own proviso, the Ottoman delegate proceeded to read his speech in French.⁵⁴

There was a degree of irony in this speech, as the delegate used the Qur'ānic metaphor of Moses' mission to Pharaoh to parallel his own address. This was ironic because Moses had been summoned to prove his worth as a prophet before the magicians of Egypt—all assembled by Pharaoh in what al-Jarjāwī translated as a "congress" (*mu'tamar*).⁵⁵ It was further ironic that, despite the clear proofs mustered by Moses (and perhaps the Ottoman delegate), Pharaoh chose to continue regarding himself as a god to his people. I wonder indeed whether the Japanese in attendance would have seen any (intended?) parallel to their own divine Emperor.

⁵² *Rihla*, pp.140–1.

⁵³ *Rihla*, p.140.

⁵⁴ It is rather strange that the name of this delegate is not given, especially as al-Jarjāwī was an Ottomanist. It is further surprising that he seems to have had no contact with the Ottoman delegation. According to the Singaporean paper *al-Imam* (vol.1, no.1, 26 July 1906), which took its report from the Egyptian press, the Ottoman Sultan had selected three delegates to take part in discussions for the future religion of Japan. These projected inter-faith talks (the Congress?) were to be held in Tokyo and were expected to take two months. The representatives selected were Alḥmad Affandī Madhād, Muḥammad Affandī As'ad and Shaykh Ismā'il Munastarlī of Cairo's Dār al-Funūn college. The article also refers to the presence in Japan of an English convert, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Affandī, who had enjoyed some success in Japan, and who also seems not to have crossed his path.

⁵⁵ See Qur'ān 36:30–36; *Rihla*, pp.149–50.

⁵⁶ *Rihla*, pp.153–4.

⁵⁷ *Rihla*, pp.151–2.

⁵⁸ *Rihla*, p.154.

⁵⁹ *Rihla*, p.155.

⁶⁰ *Rihla*, p.157.

The Ottoman delegate then went on to argue that whilst Moses's message was appropriate for his time, and Jesus's miraculous powers as a healer had been appropriate for his, Muḥammad and the message he had brought was the final prophecy. The rest of the address was spent attacking the illogical aspects of Christian belief—particularly that God should have a son.⁵⁶ According to al-Jarjāwī, this speech had a definite impact.

As His Excellency read the speech, everyone was listening intently to what he said. And during this time, expressions of wonder, surprise and amazement were seen in their eyes, and all started to look at each other. However the solemnity of the occasion made the people silent with awe.⁵⁷

The various Christian “magicians” present in Tokyo may have listened politely, but in question time proceedings became bogged down when the participants began to debate precisely how Moses and the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. Some American delegates argued that recent archaeological finds had shown there had been a low tide at the time; hence the miraculous crossing of the Israelites could be rationally explained.⁵⁸ In response the Ottoman affirmed that it had been a miracle wrought by God, whose might should not be rationally explained away. This, according to al-Jarjāwī, won him applause from most delegates.⁵⁹ Dogma and dissent soon took over, and al-Jarjāwī said little more of the first session, other than to bemoan the intransigence of the Christian delegates, and to remark that they seemed to have been unsettled by the positive reception accorded to the Muslims.⁶⁰

At least here he could take comfort, having already boasted that “unlike a Christian, a Muslim can easily and rationally explain his creed.”⁶¹ It still seems somehow strange that al-Jarjāwī felt the need to explain to his Egyptian audience the message of Islam; but perhaps this reflects the reformist perception that Muslims themselves had a shallow understanding of their own faith.

Al-Jarjāwī accorded even less space to describing the proceedings of the second day other than to note that the presiding chair, Count Hijikata, made an appeal to the participants not to get distracted by particulars, for “the sole aim [of the Congress] is to decide which faith is to be adopted as the official religion of the Japanese government.”⁶² This plea appears to have been ignored, and al-Jarjāwī wrote that he would not recount the details of the debates, as they were offensive to Muslims and clear evidence of European fanaticism towards them. With that, his account of the Congress ends, although he notes in conclusion that Count Katsura closed proceedings with a speech in which he stated that while the Congress had achieved some of its aims, there was a need for further debate as the Japanese were divided. Some preferred Islam, some Buddhism, some Confucianism:

Yet there is no fear, gentlemen, for there is complete freedom of religion in our land. Each individual Japanese adopts the religion he chooses, without

animosity or compulsion; there is no restriction if he chooses to leave one for another.⁶³

He then thanked the participants on behalf of the Emperor (who did not attend the fractious second session) and conveyed his greetings to the rulers of the various states who had sent their delegates, stating that the Emperor had heard enough for the moment and would convene a further congress if required.⁶⁴

Despite the absence of the Emperor on the second day, al-Jarjāwī believed that the Muslims had made a genuine impression on him. He even devoted a section to explaining why the latter had not undergone conversion. The ‘Mikado’, he claimed, whilst extremely impressed by Islam, was above all else a pragmatist and one who ruled by popular consensus. He was presumably worried that his conversion to Islam would not be accepted by his subjects, for whilst he could give out any edict, his rule was based on popular affection and not fear. Al-Jarjāwī felt, therefore, that the way to convert the Japanese emperor was by making Islam the predominant faith among his subjects. For whilst the Christians had been in Japan for so long and had reaped so few converts, he had already netted 1200 in a mere thirty days, and by extrapolation it would not be long before Japan was significantly Muslim. He therefore felt bold enough to predict that, “the Islamic faith will be the official Japanese religion of the future.”⁶⁵ Nevertheless, he betrays a hint of his frustration at the Congress when later remarking how strange it was that the event was not reported widely in the Japanese newspapers.⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Riḥla*, p.125.

⁶² *Riḥla*, p.157.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Riḥla*, p.159.

⁶⁶ *Riḥla*, p.196.

First Schools, then Gun-Boats

As can be seen, al-Jarjāwī placed great hope in the conversion of the Japanese to Islam as the religion best suited to accommodate modernity, civilization and progress. In his *Riḥla* he often contrasted Islam with the rival faith of Christianity, pointing out the historical reluctance of the Japanese to embrace the faith of his colonial adversaries.⁶⁷ Such reluctance stemmed not only from the foreign nature of Christianity and the allegedly inept methods of the Christians. He asserted that it was born of the intense patriotism of the Japanese.⁶⁸ And as the Japanese appeared to be a people patriotically obedient to their leaders, then the best way to convert them was naturally from above, through their leading merchants, and men of politics and the arts.⁶⁹ Here he seemed a little triumphalist, having supposedly solved the riddle of the conversion of the Japanese and claiming certain insights into the Japanese mind. Al-Jarjāwī arrogantly assumed that, as “Easterners,” his missionaries understood Japanese culture, unlike their Christian adversaries.⁷⁰ They were thus on the brink of a major coup. For unlike the Christians, their converts were genuine—something that al-Jarjāwī asserted was proved by the sadness on the faces of their followers when he and his two primary

⁶⁷ *Riḥla*, pp.143ff.

⁶⁸ *Riḥla*, p.153.

⁶⁹ *Riḥla*, p.154.

⁷⁰ *Riḥla*, p.155.

⁷¹ *Riḥla*, p.209.

⁷² *Riḥla*, p.98.

⁷³ *Riḥla*, pp.201–3.

⁷⁴ Kāmil, *al-Shams*, pp.44–5.

⁷⁵ *Riḥla*, p.202.

⁷⁶ *Riḥla*, pp.101, 230.

companions departed Japan with little warning.⁷¹

Al-Jarjāwī regularly linked the activities of the Christians to the nature of colonialism. He claimed that the events of the 1900 Boxer Uprising in China proved that the Christian missionaries were but the harbingers of an invasion of a far more material kind.⁷² And whilst the Japanese may have had absolute freedom of religion—or so he believed, he asserted that this was a precarious freedom, as missionaries would be followed by schools and finally gunboats.⁷³ Doubtless, like Muṣṭafā Kāmil before him, he would have approved of the expulsion from Japan of the Christians by [Toyotomi] Hideyoshi in the sixteenth century.⁷⁴ And while he inaccurately portrayed contemporary Christianity as a global plot, organized from Rome, he happily reported that the Japanese government, and its leaders such as Count Katsura, were “awake” to the ulterior motives of the Christian missionaries and their home governments. In this respect, too, al-Jarjāwī quoted what he said was a Japanese expression: “Treat the mighty with respect, but be aware of their intentions.” And he gladly related the repeated warnings that had been given to the Missions through the official press:

Missionaries! When you arrived in Japan to spread the teachings of the Christian religion and to open schools to teach vital contemporary sciences, we praised your intention and thanked you for your humanitarian endeavours, welcoming you and providing you with all means to stay among us in ease and security, and with all the funds and honours accorded to the stranger who comes to our land for the benefit of his fellow man [lit. “for the son of his race”]. Yet it was not long before we realised that you were abusing us in this matter. So we drew up a policy [*khiṭṭa*] for you to follow, informing you that this was official and that it appeared that you were ignorant of the manners and customs of the land. [But] you were not at all apologetic for what you had done and did not abide by the policy. ... And now you have contravened it again, and therefore the Government is giving you a final warning lest you deviate once more, for you know what we permit you to do, and what you may enjoy—lest you suffer the fate of your fellows in China.⁷⁵

Dark threats indeed, which shed a different light on the freedom of religion in Japan. Perhaps al-Jarjāwī eagerly awaited the expulsion of the Christians, in the naïve hope that the way would become clear for his own missionaries to be despatched from Cairo’s al-Azhar University in the future.⁷⁶

The Curiosities of Japan and its Patriots

After the serious business of establishing a Muslim presence in Tokyo, attending the Congress and cataloguing the success of their mission, al-Jarjāwī and his comrades were free to take in some of the sights of Japan. So having stayed in modern Tokyo, they headed for the old imperial city of Kyoto by train. And whilst al-Jarjāwī was captivated by the scenery, with its

**Figure 10**

*Five-storey pagoda
and bell-tower at
Sensoji Temple, Tokyo*

spectacular mountains and the homes and temples of the “idolators” who revered them, he could not help but return to his central theme of the oppression of Muslims throughout the world. This time he recounted their mistreatment at the hands of the Russian government, as detailed by his travelling companion Mukhlis Maḥmūd.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Rihla*, pp.204–5.

⁷⁸ *Rihla*, p.205.

On this trip, too, the party had an encounter with a *bintū* (*bentō*) box, seemingly for the first time:

After travelling past a few stops, we began to feel very hungry, not having eaten anything apart from some bread and fish, and not having anything with us. Then we saw a hawker at a station carrying containers resembling small square wooden boxes about twenty centimetres long. We learned that within them was food, so we bought six boxes—two each—for about four-fifths of a piastre. We opened them to find on one side some delicious peppered rice on which lay a piece of omlette made of egg-white with bread. And on the other side was a piece of fish fried in oil, and some sort of green vegetable of an unknown type. The rice was separated from the other things by a fine piece of wood, and at the bottom of the box was something like large chick peas, baked and salted. All of this delicious food was called “Bintū,” like the Turks call mixed vegetables “Turlī.” However the difference between the two in succulence is very great! We had gained a great meal from the purchase of these boxes, and discovered something completely unknown to us!⁷⁸

⁷⁹ *Rihla*, pp.180–3.

⁸⁰ *Rihla*, p.188.

⁸¹ *Rihla*, pp.198–200.

⁸² *Rihla*, pp.171–2.

⁸³ *Rihla*, pp.172–4.

⁸⁴ *Rihla*, p.169.

⁸⁵ *Rihla*, p.171.

⁸⁶ *Rihla*, p.195.

⁸⁷ *Rihla*, p.191.

⁸⁸ *Rihla*, pp.183ff.

⁸⁹ *Rihla*, pp.184–5.

Such an incident is almost a relief in the *Rihla*, with the earnest author ever anxious to prove his convictions, and to outline a prescription for Muslim advancement. Fortunately, too, it is not alone in the catalogue of comparisons, and al-Jarjāwī was careful to include details of Japan's history, its religions and even funerary rites.⁷⁹ Further, it was whilst on a tour of the Directorate of Education that al-Jarjāwī offered another amusing anecdote. Having been conducted into the august presence of the Secretary of the Directorate, he and his colleague Sayyid 'Abd al-Mun'im were bemused by the official's failure to provide them with coffee, tea or even a biscuit! The Japanese, at least in al-Jarjāwī's experience, appeared to place a great deal of emphasis on speaking and listening rather than on the mere ceremonies of politeness.⁸⁰

Cultural observations are nonetheless rare and the didactic method of the author is never far below the surface. When al-Jarjāwī paused to describe the custom of story-telling in Japan, he emphasised that the mark of a good story-teller was his absolute faithfulness to the original account, which he made available in full to his audience in printed form should he be unable to complete it.⁸¹ Here the subtle lesson to be learned is that excellence is measured by the faithful retelling of a tale without alteration and by making it available in written form. This conformed to reformist emphases on the proper transmission of Islam. Only the original message (or what reformists regarded as the original message) was to be reproduced without excessive commentary. Muslims were then to complete their personal understanding of Islam by reading these texts for themselves.

But the reformism of al-Jarjāwī, as is clear, was not confined to the revival of textual knowledge. Japan was clearly a model for Muslims in a more secular sense, and in particular in demonstrating the advantages of state-sponsored patriotism and national development. As he saw them, the Japanese were united adoringly behind their ruler and they demonstrated absolute devotion to their homeland. And if, in his account, Russian women seemed content with selling themselves into prostitution while their men were at the front, Japanese women sought only to serve the nation that made them widows.⁸² In like terms al-Jarjāwī presented the published letters of war-heroes executed in Manchuria,⁸³ the populist tales of patriots selling their homes for the war effort,⁸⁴ and of mothers who committed suicide in order that their only sons could go to battle.⁸⁵

Al-Jarjāwī saw patriotism everywhere: in the newspapers, which were not paralysed by factional bickering as in Egypt⁸⁶; in the munitions factories, where armaments superior in design to those of Europe were produced⁸⁷; and in factories of a very special kind—the schools—where Japan's students learned the practical skills of the modern age and to appreciate their own kind of manifest destiny.⁸⁸ It was this last facet of Japanese society that particularly interested al-Jarjāwī the educationalist, who stated that the Japanese recognized education as the basis of *madaniyya* and had formed a working partnership between the people and government to spread the modern sciences.⁸⁹ But

the science they learned along with repeated doses of patriotism was all directed at putting Japan on a very aggressive course on the world stage, something of which al-Jarjāwī thoroughly approved. Thus, he quoted large sections from the diary of a Russian War correspondent who had visited Japanese schools, and had seen the students at work copying detailed maps of Manchuria and Korea, calculating the provisions necessary to supply an army, or reminiscing over the heroism of their success against Russia.⁹⁰

All this weighed upon al-Jarjāwī, who wished that his own Muslim people would return to their pure origins and map out a destiny for themselves in the modern world:

Look, dear reader, at this felicity obtained by the nation of Japan. And, together with me, raise your voice sincerely in prayer to God Almighty that He might inspire the Muslim community in the same way that He has inspired this modern nation [*badhibi al-umma al-muʾamaddina*] which has become concerned with the sciences and knowledge, and which has expended its effort on vital education, so that from its schools may graduate [people] elevating a concern for their homeland and who have begun to be counted among the best of men working for the felicity of their nation and lands.⁹¹

Pan-Islamic and Pan-Oriental Themes

Al-Jarjāwī, the ardent pan-Islamist, reformist and patriot, was obviously convinced that Japan offered the best example to the Egyptian people, and indeed to Muslims everywhere. Yet it should not be taken for granted that all Muslims found commonality with the Japanese. Certainly I doubt that the Japanese had any sense of fellowship with Arabs and Turks at this stage. Nonetheless al-Jarjāwī projected this sense in his *Rihla*, and constantly used the language of Eastern fellowship to tie the fate of Muslims to the rise of Japan. This he did both through the context of his book—being in effect the tour of an Orient set against the Western and Christian colonial aggressor—and through his writing of “the East” (*al-sharq*) and its “Easterners” (*al-sharqiyyūn*).⁹² Even his small party of missionaries embodied this ideal, being made up of an Egyptian, a Tunisian, two Indians, a Tartar and a Chinese. The conversion of “the Japanese” Jaznīf completed the circle.

Subtle inferences are to be drawn, too, from his recollection of the poetry of the Tunisian Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Zarabī, whom al-Jarjāwī likened to the Egyptian Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, whose best known poem related the story of a Japanese woman who left her lover to serve her nation at war with Russia.⁹³ Japan had similarly inspired al-Zarabī, who wrote of the East and *its* Japan, and then made comparisons with lost Islam:

They asked the East about its Japan,
Could it have surpassed the West without knowledge?
They asked about the case of our ancestors,

⁹⁰ *Rihla*, pp.185–6.

⁹¹ *Rihla*, p.193.

⁹² Al-Jarjāwī was by no means the first to employ this language. For example, writing from Paris in 1884, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838/9–97) and his then student Muḥammad ‘Abduh had devoted their influential journal *al-ʿUrwa al-wuṭṭiqā* [The strongest bond] to matters “that influence Easterners (*al-sharqiyyūn*) in general and Muslims in particular ... its founders are men with pressing concern for the East inspired by actions of benefit for their homelands (*awṭānibīm*) and their religious community (*millatibīm*).” See Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Bustānī, ed., *al-ʿUrwa al-wuṭṭiqā waʾl-tbawra al-taḥrīrīya al-kubrā li ʾl-sayyid jamāl al-dīn al-afghānī waʾl-shaykh muḥammad ʾabduh* [The strongest bond and the great editorial revolution of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn and Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh] (Cairo: Dār al-ʿArab, 1957), p.256.

⁹³ *Rihla*, p.77.

⁹⁴ As cited in *Rihla*, p.78.

⁹⁵ *Rihla*, p.164.

⁹⁶ *Rihla*, p.177.

⁹⁷ *Rihla*, p.183.

⁹⁸ *Rihla*, pp.159–60. The *qibla* is the direction towards Mecca's Ka'aba, the focal point of Muslim prayer.

For they had, through knowledge, achieved high station.⁹⁴

In the same manner, al-Jarjāwī could unite in his narrative his musings on the once ascendant Muslim world from Andalusia to India, his observations on Islam in China, and his projection of a future Muslim Japan. The Japanese, he argued, were naturally inclined to Islam because it was an Eastern faith. For example, the 'Mikado' was allegedly predisposed to Islam because, as al-Jarjāwī pointed out, he was an Eastern ruler like his Ottoman counterpart.⁹⁵

Al-Jarjāwī even likened the Japanese to the Arabs of the Prophet's time with their thirst for a rational faith. Further, he compared Japan's women with the Arabs, equating their patriotic fervour and the examples of those Bedouin who had fought alongside their husbands in the defence of Islam.⁹⁶ But this did not mean that he advocated the same share of public life that the Japanese women supposedly enjoyed, even if it was only manual labour in a factory. Women were in most need of true education in the Holy Law, and from their homes they would educate their children to create the surest foundations for modern civilization and scientific excellence. And education, of itself, was not the only guarantee of advancement. Rather, al-Jarjāwī pointed to the way that it had been instituted by a national government as a patriotic endeavour. Even Japan had once been a backward Oriental nation: "Indeed, before this century, Japan had been like the rest of the nations of the East, afflicted by ignorance, and not knowing anything of *madaniyya* worthy of mention."⁹⁷

As I noted in the introduction, Japan had already succeeded in capturing the imagination of parts of the Muslim world, even to the point where Malay and Indian Muslims could conceive of a Japanese Muslim empire. Such enthusiasm was obviously voiced in Egypt too. According to al-Jarjāwī, in his chapter "What is Ordained for Japan's Islam," there were two schools of thought regarding what Japan's conversion portended:

The first group says that the conversion of this nation will cause a great revolution in the whole Muslim world, and that there would be no stopping it having an effect on Islam [itself]. There is no need here to dwell on the problems afflicting the holders of this opinion. The others say that the conversion of Japan will bring back the past glory of this faith ... [It will] revive its lost attributes of power and greatness and implant in the hearts of all the nations the love for Islam that existed in those bygone ages. They adorn this by saying that Japan is the Eastern nation marked out for position and greatness in the eyes of every state and government throughout the East and the West. And if it converts, then there would be no stopping it from organizing the Muslims of China and India together as one in order to create a tripartite Islamic power on land and sea. Thus the whole Muslim word will be empowered, and the Mikado will be like Saladin. Then all the independent Islamic kingdoms will unite completely in the name of religion ... with Tokyo as the *qibla* of the Muslims in the Far East just as the Sublime Porte is to the Muslims of the Near East.⁹⁸

Of course al-Jarjāwī, who rejected the idea that Islam itself could change,

did not agree that Tokyo could become the physical *qibla* of Muslims. Yet he certainly aligned himself with those Muslims who felt that a Muslim Japan would revive a glorious past. If the East arose, then Islam would rise with it. Al-Jarjāwī gladly continued with the observation that, “if Europe was already frightened by the prospect of Japan’s conversion, just imagine if it took over China and India and became the major power in the Far East standing in the path of the nations of the West!”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *Rihla*, p.161.

Conclusion

On the whole, the *Rihla* is a curious piece of auto-orientalism with its essentialist calls to an Eastern character stretching to the point where the Japanese can be likened to the “pure” warrior tribes of pre-Islamic Arabia. But central to al-Jarjāwī’s project was the affirmation of a dualistic struggle for world hegemony. This was the global conflict between Christianity and Islam, with the latter to be led from Cairo educationally, and from Istanbul politically. Al-Jarjāwī thus urged his own Khedive to play a role and that Azharite missionaries be despatched to Asia to reinforce the lessons of the Tokyo Congress.¹⁰⁰ But this very matter which the Japanese had adjudged a political mission, al-Jarjāwī declared religious, and one of import for all Easterners.¹⁰¹ He believed strongly that the key to winning this conflict was to claim Japan for Islam. Then the ‘Mikado’ could even be a new Saladin against the forces of colonialism.

¹⁰⁰ *Rihla*, pp.101, 230.

¹⁰¹ *Rihla*, p.232.

¹⁰² For a recent study in this vein, see Xiaomei Chen’s collected articles on “occidentalism.” Here, she attempts to show the various ways in which Chinese writers have produced a discourse marked by the “combination of the Western construction of China with the Chinese construction of the West,” which has been used in turn by the state both to support its form of nationalism and to justify internal oppression. See Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: a theory of counter-discourse in post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Today this seems “bombastic nonsense” indeed, but let us remember that it was a hope that was widely voiced at the beginning of the twentieth century. Muslims were constantly being made aware of their declining fortunes on the world stage. This was felt all the more deeply in the shared discourse of both Western and Eastern polemicists. In elevating the place of the East in the past both were asking the same question: why are Muslims in decline? For each group of writers religion was inextricable from culture and in turn from modernity. And while some colonialists sneered about Islam as being “hopelessly out of touch with the modern world,” reformists like al-Jarjāwī urged their fellows to re-examine the true roots of their faith and infuse Islam—as the only truth capable of adapting to all times and conditions—with the modern sciences and even patriotism.

In this way al-Jarjāwī’s book may be seen as one more contribution to the acceptance of the idea of the Orient that was based on contrast with the West. Indeed, one of the anonymous reviewers of this article made the astute observation that further work could be done on the non-Western complications of Orientalism, and that al-Jarjāwī’s book could be seen as “a case study of the way that one society builds images of another for essentially internal imperatives.”¹⁰² Whilst I am unable to pursue this line of enquiry at the current time, I would welcome further studies in this area.

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Nonetheless, the precise impact of the *Riḥla* on its readership is hard to determine. Both it and Muṣṭafā Kāmil's *al-Shams al-Mushriq* were most likely eclipsed by domestic events in Egypt as the nationalists rode a wave of public anger over the Dinshāway verdicts. Moreover, even Ottoman pan-Islam seemed doomed in 1909 with the rise of the Young Turks. The Japanese moment had come and gone, at least in Cairo and West Asia, but it would linger on in Southeast Asia, to be reawakened when a different Japan started to assert claims of another form of pan-Asianism that was subordinate to its own internal imperatives.

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