Rashīd Riḍā: Introduction to the First Annual Volume of *al-Manār* (Egypt, 1909)*

Introduction

The Journal *al-Manār* (The Lighthouse) was founded in 1898 in Egypt by Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), a Muslim scholar and writer from Lebanon who had settled in Cairo one year before and had become a close affiliate of Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), the most prominent reformist thinker in Egypt in his time. Riḍā, himself from a highly respected family of religious notables in Qalamūn (near Tripolis), had been trained at one of the earliest reformed Islamic schools in Lebanon, the National School (*al-madrasa al-waṭaniyya*, founded in 1879). Its founder, Ḥusayn al-Jisr (1845–1909) was by then known for his cautious attempts to harmonise Islamic teaching with the modern natural sciences. After the closure of his school by the government in 1882 he had founded a local newspaper in Tripoli, where he also discussed issues of educational and communal advancement. Riḍā was thus fully exposed in his home region to the early beginnings of reformist teaching and writing. His own activities in Egypt were to lead him far beyond the rather conservative positions of his teacher who had a communal and, at the same time, largely Ottoman orientation.

* I want to express my gratitude to Rainer Brunner for his critical reading of a draft of this article.


2 See chapter 1.10 in this volume, with further bibliographical information.

The idea of a journal calling for a restitution of Muslim unity and strength by educational and religious reform, which Riḍā initiated soon after his move to Egypt, was modelled after the earliest journal in this field, al-ʿUrwa al-wuthqā (The Strongest Bond) published by Muḥammad ʿAbduh during the days of his exile in Paris (1884), in cooperation with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–1897), the leading Pan-Islamic activist of this time. ʿAbduh himself was won over by Riḍā to contribute substantially to al-Manār until his demise in 1905. The new Arabic journal published important works by ʿAbduh, including his contributions to Quranic exegesis which went into the Quranic Commentary presented in small portions in the journal. It thus developed into the leading international mouthpiece of Islamic reformism before and after the First World War. As it spoke to all Muslim communities affected by European imperial and cultural expansion it gained a wide range of interested readers in the Arabic-speaking regions and beyond, from as far as Central Asia, South and Southeast Asia. Al-Manār came to fill a special place in the expanding landscape of newspapers and journals published in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Its beginnings fell into a period when British rule had been consolidated in Egypt and when, at the same time, the first stirrings of nationalist opposition, often expressed with strong Islamic sentiments, could be felt. In the early years Riḍā maintained close relations with the Ottoman opposition movement against the ruling sultan Abdülhamid II, even if the introduction of the journal stresses the Ottoman and Hamidian loyalties of its author. He had already become a foundation member of the Jamʿiyyat al-shūrā al-ʿuthmāniyya (Ottoman Consultative Society), which had been initiated in Cairo in 1897 by Syrian Muslim Arabs and Young Turks from Istanbul. It called for Islamic unity embodied in Ottoman unity under the
