THE PRESS AND THE JOURNALIST AS A VEHICLE IN SPREADING NATIONAL IDEAS IN SYRIA IN THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD

BY

ELIEZER TAUBER

Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan

In the period from the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, several Arab societies, or branches of Arab societies, that became disseminators of national ideas, were established in Syria and the Lebanon. Some of them (such as al-Fatat, with its headquarters in Paris) strove for the general Arab idea while other promoted the Syrian and Lebanese ideas (the Decentralization Party, with its headquarters in Cairo, and the Society of the Lebanese Revival). One of the most important mediums to popularize the ideas of these societies, in their various nuances, was the Arab press.

The following list of newspapers includes the newspapers that appeared in Syria and in the Lebanon during the period of the Young Turks and explicitly supported the general Arab ideas or the particularist ideas—the Syrian and the Lebanese. The political identification of these newspapers was decided by two criteria: (a) the specific society supported by them; (b) participation of newspaper owners or editorial staff in the societies. In Syria and the Lebanon at the beginning of the 20th century there were, of course, many other newspapers besides those listed here. Some of these unlisted ones were unqualifiedly pro-Ottoman (such as al-Balagh), or pro-Committee of Union and Progress (CUP)¹ (al-Ra'y al-'Amm and Abābīl), while others had no clear political tendency and did not meet the two prescribed criteria.

¹ The dominant society of the Young Turks which became the ruling party in the Ottoman Empire.
The most important source for the history of the Arab press at that time was Tarrāzi’s book on the Arab press, and it still is. But for most of the newspapers mentioned in his book, Tarrāzi gave no more than a chronological list, divided into cities. Therefore, in order politically to identify the newspapers included in the following list, the author of this article based it, among other sources, on an article written by Nisīm Malūl, himself a journalist of the important newspaper al-Muqattam and a prominent member of the Decentralization Party. The article, under the heading “ha-‘Itonūt ha-‘Aravīt” (the Arab Press) was published in 1914 in the Hebrew periodical ha-Shiloah printed in Odessa. In his article Malūl reviewed the condition of the Arab press in the said period and the attitude of the Ottoman authorities towards it. At the end of the article he added an important list of many Arab newspapers, their place of publication, frequency of appearance, circulation figures and political identification. Another source for the author was a letter sent in April 1914 by the same Malūl to Nahum Sokolow, including a similar list of newspapers published in Syria and Egypt and identifying their political inclinations. This letter was found by the author in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. The political identification of some of the journalists mentioned in the following list was made on the basis of a private card-index compiled by the author, on more than 1,200 men who were connected with the promotion of national ideas in the Fertile Crescent during the first two decades of the 20th century.

The next list consists of newspapers that appeared in Egypt under the ownership or editorship of Syrian and Lebanese émigrés. Their influence in spreading various national ideas, Arab, Syrian and Lebanese, was not inferior to that of the newspapers that appeared in the Levant itself. Many Syrians and Lebanese

---

2 Philippe de Tarrāzi, Ta‘rīkh al-Sahāfa al-‘Arabiyya (Beirut, 1913-1914, 1933).
4 Ibid., pp. 447-449.
5 The Central Zionist Archives (Jerusalem) A18/14/6: Nisīm Malūl (Jaffa) to Sokolow 15 April, 1914.
6 This card-index, in the possession of the author, refers to the whole Fertile Crescent, till 1920, while the details in the following lists apply only to Syria and the Lebanon (and the Syro-Lebanese community in Egypt) from 1908 to 1914.