

## INTRODUCTION

# Proem to *Indigenista* Photography

The structure of representation ... is intimately implicated in the reproduction of ideology.

VICTOR BURGIN

### Introduction to a Perspective

In February 1861, Muhammad Sadiq Bey (1832–1902) set off to survey the geography and pilgrimage route to Medina in the Hijaz (Hejaz). In his trunk full of new scientific equipment was a camera. In the blurry history of indigenous “Arab” photography, one thing seems certain. Sadiq Bey was the first person ever, Arab or foreign, to photograph the populace, pilgrims, officials, and holy sites of Medina and Mecca.<sup>1</sup> By any account, 1861 was an early time for anyone, let alone an Egyptian amateur photographer, to take photographs of the provincial capitals and cities in the Arab East, let alone the hinterland. Sadiq Bey’s cartographic journey was the first to use modern methods and equipment to survey the Hijaz. He spent two winter months measuring, charting, and photographing terrain, cities, holy sites, and roads between the Red Sea port of al-Wajh and Medina, the city of the Prophet’s refuge and burial place. The Egyptian mission mapped and registered the topography of the Hijaz and the pilgrimage route. Sadiq Bey’s precise recordings and diagrams were the first drafts of sites, saints’ shrines, and sacred buildings in and on the way to Medina, which were catalogued and published by the Egyptian court and European engineers and geographers. These accomplishments were a part of larger Ottoman Egyptian and imperial Ottoman projects that instituted new disciplinary regimes of organizing and controlling populations, land, and commerce throughout their rural, as well as urban, domains.

Sadiq Bey was fully cognizant of his role as the first photographer of the Hijaz. In a handful of fleeting self-reflections found in his four publications, he acknowledges that he was “the first to have ever photographed such images by using a camera.”<sup>2</sup> His accounts provide interesting clues to the place of photography in Arab Ottoman society by 1860. His most noteworthy account remains in *Nabdhah fi iktishaf tariq al-ard al-hijaziyah* (Window to the exploration of the Hijaz land route), published in 1877, where he relates his experience of photographing the Prophet’s Mosque in “the Radiant City”:

*I had taken a position on top of the Haram with a detailed and precise view [manzhar] and recorded its image down to the centimeter. I also took a picture [rasam] of Medina al-Munawwarah, the Radiant Medina, using a camera in order to take photographs of the honorable mosque’s dome and courtyard, choosing the armory [tubkhanah] as a focal point so that the view of the city gives perspective in relation to the neighborhood of al-Manakhah [in the background]. As for the view of the holy dome, I took it from within the Haram with the instrument, the camera, as well. No one had ever preceded me in taking these images [rasumat] with this apparatus, the camera.<sup>3</sup>*

Sadiq Bey’s account of photographing the Prophet’s Mosque and Medina for the first time titillates the imagination, inviting us to consider how the previously unrepresented would be narrated in an account by a man concerned with the modern representation of space. Rather than the camera intruding into a virgin space, Sadiq Bey’s account tells us how Medina had entered into the cartographer’s *manzhar* or “perspective”—into the visual framework that already existed within his mind and social “view.” He produced a number of panoramas and cityscapes taken from the vantage point of walls, buildings, and mosque roofs. They show a deep tonal range, with the foreground densely populated by architectural structures but only scant people, framed by mountains or disappearing horizons (fig. 1). In the most literal terms, he was a functionary of that perspective, charged with “recording” the panoramas of cityscapes, holy sites, and portraits of mosque officials within a new visual hierarchy most faithfully represented by his two technical specializations, the camera and the map.

This *manzhar* as “perspective” should not be confused with the Renaissance’s “perfect perspective,” collapsing the camera with a “European” vision of balance and symmetry. Sadiq Bey’s and his contemporary’s use of *manzhar* is not the same as centuries of Arabo-Islamic writings on “vision,” optics, perspective, perception, and representation in science and the arts since al-Kindi and Ibn Haytham.<sup>4</sup> While his *manzhar* does not lie outside his own historical memory of the Arabo-Islamic sciences, Sadiq Bey’s *manzhar* was as much an ideological as a visual position. To borrow from Christian Metz, it



**Figure 1.**  
Muhammad  
Sadiq Bey,  
Photographic  
panorama  
of Medina.

referred to a “scopic regime” where the “focal point” waited to be the anchor of the photograph’s frame. The photographer and the camera captured a “view” (*manzhar*) that was already organized “down to the centimeter” by the cartographer’s instruments. This capturing of a perspective that was waiting to be scientifically registered was part of not only a project financially and ideologically endorsed by Egypt’s Wali Sa’id’s own modernizing agenda, but also of the nineteenth-century Arab “Renaissance,” or *al-nahdah al-‘arabiyah*.

As Sadiq was an engineer and cartographer, his “perspective” led him to photograph the landscapes, cityscapes, panoramas, shrines, and monuments in the Hijaz’s cities, towns, and ports. Claude Sui hypothesizes that Sadiq’s training as an engineer predisposed his eye to a keen photographic sensibility because he commanded a knowledge of three-dimensional uses of space, lines, and vectors as well as the spatial interrelationship of objects.<sup>5</sup> Sadiq’s training was not only an individual accomplishment that speaks to the genius, skill, and courage of the photographer. Sui’s astute observation directs us toward Sadiq Bey’s education as part of a larger historical construct that informed the existence, use, and value of photography, namely, *al-nahdah al-‘arabiyah*.

Sadiq Bey’s cartographic and photographic perspective arose from a vision produced by an archipelago of new schools and national institutions in Ottoman Egypt. This cultural and ideological infrastructure reproduced and disseminated new forms of knowledge, new regimes of “seeing,” organizing, measuring, and categorizing the physical and metaphysical world. As a functionary of the Egyptian state and a product of new forms of education, Sadiq Bey was a product of this very social order and the perspective or scopic regime, cribbing Jonathan Crary, that formed the “background of a normative vision” of, what I will term in this book, *Osmanlilik* modernity and

*nahdah* ideology.<sup>6</sup> A history of early “Arab photography” cannot be separated from a history of that perspective.

### **Contre Orientalism: Toward Indigenista Photography**

Sadiq Bey will reappear later in this study, but he opens this book because his early activities contrast with the familiar story of Middle Eastern photography that we are traditionally told. Only two years after the 1839 announcement of the invention of the daguerreotype, Noël Paymal Lerebours exhibited images of Beirut, Damascus, and Egypt in his monumental world-travel survey, *Excursions daguerriennes*.<sup>7</sup> Gustave Le Gray improved on Henry Fox Talbot’s primitive paper negative process by adding wax to significantly increase the sharpness of the photographic image and taught many notable French photographers, not the least of whom was Nadar. Le Gray was one of the first architectural photographers in Europe who was nominated, along with Hippolyte Bayard and Henri Le Secq, among others, to participate on the Mission Héliographique in 1851.<sup>8</sup> After traveling as a photographer for ten years around the Mediterranean, he settled and died in Cairo, having established a photographic studio in the city for two decades, which served, among other clients, Khedive Isma’il Pasha. There is little information about Le Gray, but his life seems to be representative of many early photographers, at a time when they were avatars of art, science, adventure, and opportunism. In photographic historiography, which understands photography as a Western import into Eastern lands, he is demoted in its master narrative after he settled in Cairo, banished to serve invisibly as a portraitist and draftsman for the Egyptian aristocracy.

Like Le Gray, Maxim Du Camp and Auguste Salzmann were educated in draftsmanship and painting. They, along with Louis LeClerq, secured official state funding, particularly from the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres and the Ministry of Public Education, to underwrite their expeditions to the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> That Du Camp traveled with Gustave Flaubert and Le Gray with Alexandre Dumas gives us a hint that these photographers believed that their photographs were more than the “conclusive brute facts.”<sup>10</sup> The canonical images of Egyptian antiquities and ruins by Le Gray, Du Camp, and Salzmann reified a photographic syntax for the millions of photographs of Pharaonic Egypt and the Holy Land.<sup>11</sup> Whatever their philosophical, artistic, or political worldviews might have been, “the photographic imaginary” of these photographers, as Derek Gregory notes, “rendered the remains of Egypt as a transparent space that could be fully ‘known’ by the colonial gaze.”<sup>12</sup> It is well known, then, that the photographic missions to and European studios in the Ottoman East during the Second Empire and the Victorian era produced character-types, landscapes, architectural photography, and tableau vivant genre

scenes that were particularly useful for postcards, stereoscopes, and exotic tablature. This production of imagery was inextricable from the “period of rapid colonial expansion and imperialist adventures” and, as such, “the discourse of the Second Empire imperialism was couched in terms either of a *mission civilisatrice* or, more conspicuously in the case of Palestine, in a systematic denial of the existence of native inhabitants.”<sup>13</sup> Their “photographic rejection of contemporary Middle Eastern life” was “undeniable” and served a poignant ideological function in France’s rise as the preeminent colonial power in North Africa and the Levant.<sup>14</sup>

The legacy of this historiography lingers, powerfully overshadowing the quotidian role of indigenous photography. In addition to Le Gray, Du Camp, and Salzmann, the works of Tancrède Dumas, Francis Frith, Felice Beato, Emile Béchard, Hippolyte Arnoux, and Alexandre Leroux, as well as Maison Bonfils, Maison Lehnert & Landrock, Maison Garrigues, Photoglob Zurich, and Underwood & Underwood still define the imagery and historical narrative of photography of the Middle East. The colonial and imperious ability to compose the Oriental object and its locale within a changing pictorial syntax of Orientalism constituted a visual act of power. It persists even in well-meaning art history and curatorial discourses that continue to ask “how is Arab photography *really* different?” The question itself only promises to reinscribe the binaries of the dominant historical narrative of Middle Eastern photography. If the “Eastern” photographic image is distinct from the Western master-image, cultural difference is safely maintained, keeping intact Orientalism’s asymmetries of power. If we are told that the “Eastern” image looks the same, all indigenous photographic production is ascribed to mimicry of the European master-text, and indigenous photography is just a derivative variation of the Western original.

Post-Saidian studies of Middle Eastern photography have largely avoided indigenous photography but have concentrated on the Othering representations produced by “Western” photographers.<sup>15</sup> *The Arab Imago* shares with this critical research on Orientalist photography an interest in the ideologically laden act of looking, representation, and image production. The book, however, offers an explicit riposte to the master narratives of the “history of Middle Eastern photography” by bypassing photography’s history of service to the *colonisateurs* in favor of interrogating the history of “native” photography of the late Ottoman Arab world, or, in Deborah Poole’s words, *indigenista* photography.<sup>16</sup> Poole’s examination of photography in South America is instructive and helps tease out the similarities of indigenous photography in the global South. Riffing on the liberatory tradition of *indigenismo* in Latin America, Poole shows how the social practice of photography was a globalized phenomenon of *embourgeoisement* but simultaneously informed by the political, social, and ideological particularities of turn-of-the-century Peru. This is the global story of

photography, where formalistic patterns and social practices repeat themselves and even accompany the camera as part of the apparatus itself, but that formalism and those technical and social practices act within or toward their own ideological ends. This is not to say that such formalist practices that accompany the camera preclude the existence of vernacular forms of photography studied by those such as Christopher Pinney and others.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of the Arab world, *Arab Imago* redresses the dearth of critical attention to *indigenista* photography, excavating the production, discourse, performance (or what I term, following contemporary Freudian and object relations theory, as “enactment”), exchange, circulation, and display of photography in Ottoman Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine between 1860 and 1910. Portraiture, in particular, the *carte de visite* (visiting card), provides a guiding thread in the complex labyrinth of a vast and uncharted history of *indigenista* photography.<sup>18</sup> This study attempts to engage photographic portraiture as a social practice, a technological act, an ideological enactment, and a condensation of shifts in political economy that express as well as displace the history of the contexts of its production. *The Arab Imago* aims to “look through” and “look at” portraits in order to read them, in Geoffrey Batchen’s words, “as sensual and creative artifacts but also as thoughtful, even provocative meditations on the *nature of photography* in general.”<sup>19</sup>

This phrase, “the nature of photography,” will continually reemerge in this search to excavate the largely unearthed sites of indigenous photography in the Ottoman Arab world, drawing on a combination of Arabic sources, a variety of archives, and photography and critical theory. The use of this theory does not vacate the specificities of “Arab photography.” It is not meant to, nor should it be read as, a retrenchment of that imperious European master-narrative. Quite to the contrary, this work seeks to “provincialize” the history and “nature” of photography, probing the ways photography works within certain conditions without ascribing those practices, functions, and effects to an original site, that is, Europe.<sup>20</sup> This book does not dismiss critical and logical questions such as “What does Arab photography really look like?” It reveals that these questions are a part of a master-narrative that disenfranchises Arabs from proprietorship of the universalizing power of photography to which they subjugated their own subalterns and were subjugated in the colonial encounter.

Whether in Europe, the Middle East, or South America, the “nature of photography” is multivalent, contradictory, and holds its own limitations alongside its possibilities. This is the case even in photography’s most formalistic genres and formats such as the *carte de visite*. Abigail Solomon-Godeau warns us that “proposing an art history of photography, in which photography is understood as a history of distinct genres and styles, supposes that one can distill the cultural solution from which discrete images will precipitate out.”<sup>21</sup> The challenge, then, is to navigate between liberating the por-

trait from the master narratives of European photography without fetishizing it, between remarking on the formalism of the portrait and looking at and through its indexical content without succumbing to its headlock on “truth-value.” The challenge is to understand the physicality, materiality, and social history of the portrait along with an ideologically inflected signification system in order to resurrect not its essential meaning, but its relevance and force in naturalizing and perpetuating how social constructs of power enlisted and relied on the complicity and participation of its subject.

Within the formality, morphologies, semiotics, and ideology of the photograph and amidst the mass of known and anonymous photographers, studios, practices, formats, exchanges, social histories, and “paths” of the portrait, *The Arab Imago* asserts that the “nature of photography” of the late Ottoman Arab world is underscored by a few fundamental principles. First and foremost, *all photography expresses social relations*. Second, photography in the Ottoman Arab world is an *afterimage*, not producer, of the massive transformations in political economy, class structure, nationalism, and subject formation. Finally, as afterimage, the portrait is a material object that operates on multiple and coterminous levels, the manifest level of its ideological and representational life and the latent level, signifying histories that were excluded from the manifest. The photographic object is, as we will see, an “image-screen,” a *point de capiton* through which multiple vectors of political economy, subjectivity, signification systems, and social discourses meet in order to create a legible surface and an object of trenchant social value. These principles forcefully recenter indigenous photography production to the “history of Middle Eastern photography,” “provincializing,” in turn, the master narrative of the European arrival of the craft and its craftsmen to Arab shores.

### **Defining Modernity, *Osmanlilik* and *al-Nahdah***

In his book *Each Wild Idea*, Geoffrey Batchen poses the question, “How can photography be restored to its own history? And how can we ensure this history will be both materially grounded and conceptually expansive, just like the medium itself?”<sup>22</sup> In hopes of offering a preliminary answer, I suggest that the Ottoman Arab photographic portrait was the copula where signification meets material practice, and where ideology meets representation and sociability. But also, the medium itself is structured by the tension and contradictions of its own promises, and, by its own “nature,” works to push away the “alterity” of its own surface. More specifically, the portrait pushes away those social practices, economic organizations, self-conceptions, experiences, and social hierarchies that have been displaced by the disciplinary regimes of *al-nahdah al-'arabiyah* and Ottoman modernity, what Ottomans termed as *Osmanlilik*. This copula of forces is an

expression of a series of social formations among a *collective* of actors, classes, and ideological formations. When I speak of a collective of actors, I imply a social group, and in turn, class. While invoking the Gramscian concept of social group, I heed Gayatri Spivak's call for breaking with a Eurocentric concept of social organization without disowning the political and social economies of regions and microregions that were shaped by interlocking global and local forces.<sup>23</sup>

To begin to restore lost photographic histories of the Middle East, I consciously move away from a Eurocentric imagining of orthodox class structure just as I move away from a Eurocentric master narrative of photography. This is not because Arab Ottoman society and economy did not undergo a radical restratification and reorganization. As in the case of Gramsci's Italy, the social structures were nuanced in ways that might escape an orthodox European developmentalist template. This is not to exoticize the Middle East. Rather, it recognizes the centrality of class formation to capitalist, "modernizing," and "civilizing" processes, which occurred in virtually every location where natives held the camera. If the social history of photography and capitalism, indeed their natures, intertwine, this study also seeks to track how social, economic, and ideological formations within the Ottoman Arab world—namely, the *effendiyah* middle class—fostered specific sorts of *identification* between new subjects and classes that were instantiated through the portrait and its exchange.

While *The Arab Imago* breaks with the predominant tendency to focus on Western photographic history as a hegemonic lens through which to approach "photography in the Middle East," it finds the practice of indigenous photography in the complex epistemological, capital, subjective, and temporal matrix of "modernity." Modernity is perceived as a European phenomenon. To borrow from Dipesh Chakrabarty, this book studies a photography produced and a society ruled "by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise" coupled with "concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinction between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on ..." all of which "bear the burden of European thought and history." By the grace of colonialism and world capitalism, "modernity is now global," whereas non-Western societies and intellectuals have "warmly embraced the themes of rationalism, science, equality, and human rights that the European Enlightenment promulgated."<sup>24</sup>

Samir Amin reminds us that "the emergence of capitalism and the emergence of modernity constitute two facets of one and the same reality."<sup>25</sup> The Ottoman Empire's own history cannot be disentangled from its immersion in the world capitalist system, which invited native collusion and participation at every social level to work in concert and compete with colonialist, imperialist, and capitalist forces. Arab intellectuals consistently argued that capitalism "was a system geared

at improving people's lives and decreasing the gap between rich and poor." In the words of Yaqub Sarruf, "prosperity" (*tharwah*) was an essential result of progress and civilization, and wealth was "not taken from the poor but from the wealth of the earth."<sup>26</sup> Capitalist development and processes, including the formation of new classes who would produce and patronize the portrait, is a principal component of Ottoman and Arab modernity. In this regard, "modernity" serves as a useful organizing rubric that encompasses a variety of common factors and ideological precepts that underwrote ruptures and shifts in political economy, social hierarchies, and worldviews in a variety of localities under the universalizing schema of "civilization and progress."

The concept of modernity, then, is not a contrivance imported into the analysis of this book. Just as the term "perspective" is taken from the prevalence of *manzhar* in Arabic writing, the Ottoman term *Osmanlilik* (or *Osmanlicilik*) derives from Turkish writing about the reform movement. It localizes modernity, arising directly from the juridical, social, economic, and political program of "Ottoman modernity" and the reorganization of the empire, known as the Tanzimat (or Reorganization). In the case of the Arab world, *al-nahdah al-'arabiyah*, or what is commonly translated as the "Arab Renaissance," was the civilization project working in tandem with the Ottoman Tanzimat's empirewide establishment of *Osmanlilik* modernity. Within the context of the Tanzimat, Arab intellectuals in Beirut, Alexandria, and Cairo were formulating the role and reform of Arab society and identity in this "new era," or *al-'asr al-jadid*.<sup>27</sup> If any idiom represented the ethos of Ottoman modernity and *al-nahdah*, it was "civilization and progress" (*al-tamaddun wal-taqaddum*). This phrase and these goals structured virtually every cultural production of the era, mobilizing cultural acts in the cause of "reform" (*islah*), unity, and social betterment. Although what I term *nahdah* ideology shared with *Osmanlilik* ideology a common nomenclature of and formula for reform, it referred specifically to Arab identity, Arab culture, Arab history, and Arab societies. While *nahdah* writing was marked by a variety of competing, often opposing *political* positions, they all shared a concern with the local, thinking out Syrian or Egyptian identity in contrast to Turkish Ottoman identity. "Arab photography," like all cultural productions, must be understood within the context of *al-nahdah*, itself contingent on *Osmanlilik* modernity. It must be understood as a product of its own history.

### **Nineteenth-Century History and the Meaning of Social Relations**

That this book focuses on the social history of indigenous photography between 1860 and 1910 is not arbitrary. Those two dates roughly bookend the rise of the Tanzimat and *nahdah* in the Arab world and the demise of the *Osmanlilik* project with the Turkish nationalist coup of the Committee for Union in Progress. These events mirror the

popularization of photography in the Arab world and the rise, albeit not introduction, of the Brownie and Kodak cameras. Social organizations, urban and rural spaces, technologies, gender roles, education, cultural institutions and practices, religious *doxa*, and commercial and agricultural practices and populations shifted, grew, and transformed in a half century—more quickly than they had in centuries past. The empire witnessed legal and regulatory writs, codes, laws, and edicts issued and implemented by Sultans Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz. Although Sultan Abdülhamid abrogated the Ottoman constitution and dissolved the parliament, he continued the economic, social, and political reorganization under his recentralization of sultanic power. Rural and village space was completely reconceptualized, reevaluated (in terms of value-added vis-à-vis market exchange), and commodified under the new Ottoman Land Code of 1858.<sup>28</sup> New merchant and intellectual classes—called the *effendiyah* in Arabic—arose, and traditional urban elites were transformed (or destroyed) by accumulating new levels of wealth, consolidating ownership of unprecedented amounts of land, and leveraging this wealth to negotiate with the new system of provincial Ottoman administration, including the khedives of Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

The economy of the Arab world was becoming linked to the world economy, and the demand for raw materials in Europe, nineteenth-century Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt saw the role of owners, workers, peasants, and functionaries change in the cotton, silk, sugar, wheat, and tobacco sectors. With this, the traditional communal, religious, and legal practices and judgments that previously regulated the profits that local elites and *multazim* tax-farmers earned from landholdings were replaced by the Ottoman codes, permitting unprecedented accumulation of capital and legal claims on land that restructured relations between those on it and those who now “owned” it.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, space and its relationship to subjects and the state were changing. Istanbul, Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, and Haifa were being parceled, organized, and rationalized. ‘Ali Mubarak, legendary Egyptian reformer, litterateur, and the minister of public works, wrote his twenty-volume magnum opus, *al-Khitat al-tawfiqiyah al-jadidah* (The new Tawfiq plans), which recorded the history, monuments, and geography of Cairo and mapped and organized its new streets and development under the massive urban plan of Khedive Tawfiq.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, architects and urban planners such as Habib Ayrout and his son Charles compartmentalized the city into old and new quarters, including New Cairo (*Misr al-Jadid*), or Heliopolis, to accommodate the lives of Egypt’s economic elite and the ascendant *effendiyah*.<sup>32</sup> Beirut had its own indigenous engineers such as Yusuf Aftimus. Aftimus’s “civic and commercial landmark constructions blended Ottoman revivalism with local materials, vernacular styles, and his personal tastes,” contributing to Beirut’s transformation into “a place of order, sobriety, and rationality.”<sup>33</sup> This history of urban design was governed by in the local rulers and elites, foreign interest and capital, and Otto-

man precedence. Grand Vizier Rashid Pasha, along with Ottoman elites, “parceled” and “regularized” the urban space of Istanbul as early as 1832, after the city’s cataclysmic fire.<sup>34</sup>

Architecture, urban planning, and photography were the effect of these changes in political economy and shifts in social relations. Egypt witnessed the massive reorganization of its economy, especially around the internationalization of its cotton sector. Between 1860 and 1910, Egypt’s “governors” (khedives) became a dynastic royal family, which cultivated power by their alliances with France and Great Britain but also through the rise of bureaucratic and *effendiyah* classes, groups of middle strata, intellectuals, technocrats, professionals, and entrepreneurs who spearheaded the civilizational, nationalist, and anticolonialist projects. The country’s transformations in the nineteenth century were exemplified by the concession of land for, and construction of, the Suez Canal, to be completed eventually in 1869.<sup>35</sup> Massive state debt, owing to infrastructural investment, the reorganization of urban spaces, and vanity projects resulted in the ‘Urabi Revolt of 1881, which itself was crushed by direct British military intervention, effectively making Egypt a British colony.

In Lebanon, the 1860s started with bloody, intersectarian violence that was the result of the massive reorganization of the political economy and social hierarchy that developed out of the cultivation of the silk industry, which was solely dependent on the European market.<sup>36</sup> The influx of capital around sericulture, along with Beirut’s naturally deep harbor transformed this minor coastal city into a major port, economic hub, and cultural center. The Ottoman Bank opened in Beirut with French capital in 1856, and Crédit Lyonnais opened a branch in 1875. The Beirut–Damascus Road was built in 1857, and the Beirut–Damascus Railroad followed in 1895, funneling goods through Beirut into the hinterland that were previously imported from other Levantine ports, including those in Palestine. Tobacco became a cash crop in southern Lebanon, replacing silk; the Compagnie du Port des Quais et des Entrepôts de Beyrouth gained the concession from Ottoman authorities in 1886 to finally open a fully modern port, with customs duties, in 1894. Jens Hanssen shows how noncompliant workers, local notables, the powerful new bourgeoisie and *latafundia*, Ottoman bureaucrats, native intelligentsia, and foreign officials, missionaries, and compradors interacted, infusing the seaport with new capital and rearranging its “physical spaces” and “mental places.”<sup>37</sup>

Scholars such as Salim Tamari, Beshara Doumani, Mark LeVine, Gershon Shafir, and Michelle Campos have shown similar transformations in Palestine.<sup>38</sup> Traditional trade entrepôts were transformed, and craftsmen and tradesmen were enfranchised or dispossessed. Not unlike in Egypt and Lebanon, notable families reconsolidated their political importance and jockeyed with secular administration and upstart families. New forms of citizenship and sociability were created. All of these archetypal Ottoman transformations were

transpiring at the same time that Zionist colonial settlers began to arrive from Europe, whose designs on land acquisition had considerable impact on Palestine's political economy.

While this overview has left out far more than it includes, this study understands photography's advent and participation within the larger system of political, economic, cultural, and social changes that were occurring in the Ottoman Arab world. Alongside understanding the photograph as a representational and ideological space of enactment, this book identifies photography as a social practice as well as a technological act and examines how its social currency was intertwined intimately with these changes. Indigenous photographers such as Abdullah Frères, Pascal Sébah and his son Jean, Jurji and Louis Saboungi, the Kova Frères, Garabed and Johannes Krikorian, Khalil Raad, and many others thrived because they were involved in reproducing the economic and social transformations in their localities.

By locating early Arab photography within a matrix of capitalism, representation and ideology, social transformations, class formations, and state programs, we may then understand the photograph as an expression of "social relations." Marx elucidates that "social relations within which individuals produce, the social relations of production, are altered, transformed, with the change and development of the material means of production, of the forces of production. The relations of production in their totality constitute what is called the social relations, society, and, moreover, a society at a definite stage of historic development, a society with peculiarly distinguished character. . . . Capital also is a social relation of production. It is a bourgeois relation of production, a relation of production of bourgeois society."<sup>39</sup> This theoretical definition should recall that the effendi classes in Istanbul, Beirut, and Cairo patronized native studios as dutifully as royalty, high-ranking Ottoman and khedival officials, and economic elites. As we will see, Arab intellectuals, writers, and photographers saw the craft as a product of material, modern knowledge and social labor. This recalls Marx's observation that "the means of subsistence, the instruments of labor, the raw materials, of which capital consists" have been "produced and accumulated under given social conditions, within definite social relations."<sup>40</sup>

Claiming that, "all photography expresses social relations" is not intended to assign photography as some slavish factotum to native elites and those who dominate the means of production. Photography and the photograph were *enmeshed* in the shifting and multilayered social networks of the Ottoman Empire. They participated in facilitating social relations among new individuals, classes, and institutions and ideologically "hailed" the subjects who found themselves so clearly represented in the portrait. Some readers may ask, "Where is the photograph" in the social history of photography? To which this book replies that such a question poses a false dichotomy, where history stands in competition with reading the compositional formality of a photograph.

Photography was a practice that produced a material object that held social and ideological roles, including expressing, naturalizing, and reproducing particular social relations. The surface of the photograph is critical. It must be read and engaged. However, this surface, the portrait's content, formalism, composition, and format, are equal to its visible and invisible histories of production and contexts.

### **Lacunae and Gender**

This project was born out of the abject absence of critical research on indigenously produced photography in the “Arab East.” The “nature of photography” is precisely its abundance, its visual truth and excess that coexist to prevent us from defining its borders or even genres. This book is not a comprehensive history of “Arab” photography or even portraiture between 1860 and 1910. Far too many wonderful subgenres of portraiture fell by the wayside in composing this study: portraits of subjects dressed in theatrical costumes, self-Orientalizing portraits, amateur-produced intimate portraits, and playful pictures of fantasy such as subjects posing in and on cardboard trains and bicycles. I do not engage candid photography, for example, leaving out those many amateurs who toward the turn of the century produced the most intimate, even erotic, humorous, playful, personal, evocative, and emotional images of the era.<sup>41</sup> Portraits of faculty and students of new colleges and professional schools, along with group portraits of college staff, governmental bureaus, hospitals, companies, and banks, such as the Ottoman Bank, sports teams and social clubs similar to the Boy Scouts, literary and scientific associations, philanthropic organizations, and so on are found throughout the Arab world and the Ottoman Empire. While I will present some group portraits, this book is unable to flesh out group portraiture systematically as a subgenre or institutional practice, although it dominated publications and institutional and private albums of Ottoman southwest Asia and Egypt.

In terms of geography, my focus on Istanbul, Beirut, Jerusalem, and Egypt should not be understood as a choice of hierarchy. These were highly visible and active Ottoman provincial centers and representative of many trends that were occurring throughout the empire. Studios, professional and amateur photographers, and the Ottoman and early-twentieth-century histories of photography in Syria, Jordan, the Gulf, the Maghreb, and Iraq remain uncharted and deserving of serious scholarly attention. The photographic histories of Cairo and Alexandria remain incomplete because of the number of these cities' studios that were co-owned by non-Arab, often non-Middle Eastern, expatriates, who partnered with Arab Christian émigrés and Armenians, leaving little evidence of their lives except their names on scattered cardboard mounts.



**Figure 2.**  
Unknown  
photographer,  
Faridah  
Habib, Cairo,  
ca. 1900–1910,  
fragment,  
print on paper.

While the limits of this research are circumscribed by scope, scale, and economy, I most regret that it falls far short on fully considering photography's relationships with gender politics, class formation, and print media.<sup>42</sup> The photograph of Hoda Shaarawi and Saiza Nabarawi's unveiling at the Cairo train station in 1923 relates the centrality of photography in the formations of gendered identity politics in the Arab world and the interplay between activism, print, and the visual medium. Margot Badran tells us that Shaarawi's photograph and staged unveiling appeared immediately thereafter in *al-Lata'if al-musawwarah*, and *Le Journal de Caire* on June 4, 1923, then in the *Egyptian Gazette* on June 16, and even in Jeddah's newspaper, *al-Qiblah*, albeit without the image.<sup>43</sup> The scope of this book was unable to accommodate the need to address questions of how gender intertwined with processes of social, familial, and class individuation as enigmatically evoked by photographs such as Faridah Habib's ripped portrait (fig. 2). This tattered fragment of Faridah Habib draws out the gendered space of a photographic frame even if it clearly is "incomplete." The *nahdah* discourses of gender and domesticity impose themselves on us as much as on the production of the image. Faridah's posture and proximity to the image's border encourages homo-normative conjecture, where she is likely standing next to and/or behind a family, a husband, a sister, a child.

What we know of Faridah comes to us from sources exterior to the image itself—through oral, family history, passed to her grandson then his daughter, Isis Sadek. Faridah was a Coptic Egyptian woman, a mother, and the wife of a man who scandalously converted from Islam to marry her. Despite the scandal, her gendered role in reproducing an "in-tact family" operated along common lines of Coptic, Egyptian sociability and middle-class ideology, which are powerfully evoked when matching the photographic shard to the oral family history. This is certainly the case when national and subjective ideals were represented in metaphors of domesticity and maternity.<sup>44</sup>

This study has largely neglected gender not because its lack of importance but precisely because of the enormity of its complexity. Providing a space for the representation of women does not preclude the dangers of also flattening out processes of gender individuation across class, community, and geography. The striking bourgeois matriarch Faridah contrasts, for example, with a highly gendered portrait of the Israel family (fig. 3). The young girl with her arm around her brother and flowers in her hand is my great-grandmother, Philomena. She poses with the matriarchs of the family, widows whose husbands had died. My great-great grandmother, Hannah Azar Israel, sits firmly protecting her newly married son and his bride, Fouz. The portrait of the Israel sisters is almost like a Rorschach inkblot in its symmetrical doubling of two related and interconnected families.

But such symmetry does not give balance, a balance that is assumed in Faridah's original, untorn portrait. Rather, it communi-



cates a compositional irregularity that tilts the clean analysis of the formalistic new Arab family. Family portraiture, Arab and non-Arab, is formalistically structured around a male figure, usually the father, flanked by children and, frequently, a spouse (fig. 4). These family images are often pyramids where the father is the center, the base, or the pinnacle. The family portrait of Garabed Krikorian, a pioneer Armenian photographer in Jerusalem, is heavy with the vectors of patriarchy, despite his being a practitioner of the consummate modern technological practice, who also passed the craft along to his wife and daughter, Najla. His arms almost seem to envelop the women and children of his family, who, despite their air of modern domesticity, are under the protection of the *sayyid al-bayt* (master of the house). The gender dynamics, vectors, and placement of bodies of Hannah Azar Israel's family portrait are different. The male head, George Israel, is relegated to standing behind his mother. The symmetrical image of the Israel sisters and their families hints at a different set of networks of sociability that lead beyond the social history of these women and children.

These two stern, matriarchal widows from rural, northern Lebanon, forced to emigrate to Philadelphia with their children, chimes with the narratives of early Arabic novels that invariably involved widows, orphans, despots, villains, and Horatio Alger characters. This overdetermined, Rorschachian symmetry ushers women into the master ideological schema of *al-nahdah*, only to pose them outside class ideals but securely within a moralistic ideal of class ideology. The image—to me, a scion of the girl with her arm around her brother—demonstrates that the volumes photography speaks to about social hierarchy and ideology are matched by an ineffaceable silence about them, silences so powerfully contained in the image's gendered history. Despite this lacunae, *The Arab Imago* offers a theoretical apparatus that can engage in dialogue with a more nuanced and integrated gen-

**Figure 3.** Unknown photographer, Israel family portrait. *Standing, back row (left to right):* Fouz Israel and husband, George Israel; Fula (Philomena) Israel, with arm around her brother, Israel "John" Israel. *Seated (left):* Hannah Azar Israel; *right,* her sister, Isis Azar Israel. Mary Israel is on the floor; the boy in Isis's lap is perhaps Almozo Abdullah or George Israel Jr. Tripoli, Lebanon.



**Figure 4.**  
G. Krikorian,  
Garabed  
Krikorian  
and family,  
Jerusalem,  
1910.

dered history of photography. Such a gendered history could flesh out further how the portrait functioned as a stabilizing medium to enact new forms of subjectivity and to reconfigure patriarchy within modern Arab societies subject to capitalist transformations.

Finally, scholarship cannot avoid the materiality of photography or its own production; the mundane and frustrating administrative, financial, and legal realities inevitably shape scholarship. On the most banal level, the choice of portraits in this study is often limited to issues of copyright and accessibility. Apart from tracking down collections and “original” images, acquiring copyright releases to publish private portraits offers further challenges. In a region that suffered colonial brutalization and mutilation, the surveillance of police states, and that demonstrates credible paranoia owing to decades of foreign spying and machinations, one can hardly blame individuals and families for holding on to their photographs so as to protect their loved ones from the denuding and “wrecking effects” of mass dissemination.<sup>45</sup> While this caution makes publishing and writing about images all the more challenging, I am sympathetic to the photo owners’ justifiable distrust of losing control and proprietorship of their own personal heritage and experience. In this regard, I hope that this research offers a conceptual, theoretical, and methodological framework to engage in further inquiry into and discussion of the fecundity of *indigenista* photography of the Middle East.



### “Arab Photography”: Arabs and Armenians

So much is lost to us about the “nature” of Ottoman Arab photography. The repetitious representation of the portrait can be ferreted out through the writing of *nahdah* intellectuals, commentators, technocrats, and functionaries. The practice and sociability of photographers, studios, and their clients is less easy to retrieve. They have been lost in the tumultuous history of Lebanon and Palestine. Remnants erratically emerge in institutional archives, through family connections, in Cairo’s *Suq al-guma’* (Friday flea market), or a small legendary bookshop in Beirut, where we find names and traces such as Shoucair’s in Cairo (fig. 5). One wonders how long such a studio with a likely Lebanese Christian name was open, considering its prominent address on Nubar Street. One can also imagine that the studio had a relation to the atelier by the same name in turn-of-the-century Beirut.<sup>46</sup> As we will see, the inscriptions and stamps on photographs are breaches through which the repetitive and generic representation of the portrait communicate to us the social history of the photograph. In the

**Figure 5.** Shoucair, Ra’uf ‘Abd al-Hadi, “With fond memory to my dear friend [illegible name]. Sincerely Ra’uf ‘Abd al-Hadi,” October 20, 1917, postcard, 13.8 × 9.8 cm.

case of this postcard portrait, a popular format during the first quarter of the twentieth century, the sitter was Ra'uf 'Abd al-Hadi, an Ottoman officer from a prominent Palestinian family who was captured by the British and, in turn, enlisted to join the Amir Faisal's "Arab Army."<sup>47</sup> The double inscription on the back of his portrait, written in two different hands with two different pens, is exemplary of the "social networks" that we will examine in this study. But also, the image, inscriptions, and stamp provide us a composite image-screen that suggests how the meanings of identity markers and the photographic representation itself have their own histories that appear, already legible, in the portrait.

Foremost among these markers is "Arab." I use "Arab" with self-consciousness and self-awareness. It is, simply, used as a cultural designation, particular to those who speak Arabic and identify themselves with what would become articulated as "Arab" identity at the time Ra'uf 'Abd al-Hadi was posing in Cairo. As articulated by Arabism, "Arab" is not a racial category but one that involves a shared history and language that often includes non-Arab ethnicities and non-Muslim minorities. This is not an apology for the Arab nationalist regime's often dreadful history in "absorbing" or erasing ethnic minorities such as the Amazigh or Kurdish peoples, let alone 'Abd al-Nasser's expulsion of Armenians, Jews, Greeks, and Italians, most of whom spoke Arabic.

Photography's earliest production in Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon (as well as Ottoman Anatolia) emerged, largely but not exclusively, from established religious and ethnic minorities such as Armenians, Syriac Catholics, Italians, Greeks, and *shamiyin* (Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian Christian émigrés and expatriates in Egypt). The considerable presence of minorities in photography has been erroneously explained as a result of Eastern Christians' "natural" inclination for and historic ties to the West and Western knowledge as well as Muslim prohibitions on image production. One might ask whether the photographer's Greek ethnicity contributed to the success of the G. M. Georgoulas Pyramids tourist photography business, which was centered on tourism at Giza. The lion's portion of his surviving images are foreigners in front of the pyramids, most noteworthy a group photograph that includes T. E. Lawrence, Winston Churchill, and Gertrude Bell. A sparse number of existing photographs show his portraits of native Egyptians or Arabs. His work shows a characteristic diversity of photographic production, from institutional group portraits to tourist photographs to portraits of Egypt's *effendiyah*. One such rare image shows a man posing for a portrait, most likely in the gardens of the famous Mena House near the pyramids outside Cairo, where the Italian photographer Fasani had his studio (fig. 6). The cracked and liquidized emulsions and tatters of photographs are a reminder of the material history of the photograph's production, information that is now lost to us. The full-bodied effendi sits confi-



dently and relaxed in the light of the foreground, while more effendis sit in the background of the garden in the receding darkness at one side of the portrait, balanced by the column of trees, itself marking a special boundary in the frame and in the garden. We can surmise that G. M. Georgoulas's Greek ethnicity provided him access to develop certain social relationships, which positioned him advantageously over his Muslim-Egyptian counterparts such as court photographer Riad Shehata. While we might not fully understand why, one thing that is empirically obvious is that ethnic and religious minorities played a central role in the early decades of photography in the Arab world, most importantly the Armenians.

Armenians, including the Abdullah Frères and the Krikorians, were a critical lynchpin in the production and distribution of photography throughout the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, ethnic Armenians came to further dominate the studio scenes of virtually every major provincial capital from Beirut to Baghdad.<sup>48</sup> The role of Armenians cannot be overemphasized

**Figure 6.**  
G. M. Georgoulas  
Pyramids,  
anonymous  
portrait, Cairo,  
January 14, 1921,  
28.8 × 22.3 cm.

in the history of Ottoman photography.<sup>49</sup> Their predominance in the profession of photography is often attributed to the massive diaspora caused by the Armenian genocide and the destruction of Armenian communities in Istanbul and historic Anatolian Armenia in 1915. Skilled Armenians, including photographers, are said to have arrived in the Arab world after the Hamidian massacres and deprivations of 1894–96. The Middle East’s most prodigious postcard studio of the twentieth century was owned by Abraham (ca. 1873–1925), Boghos (1876–1934), and Samuel (1884–1941) Sarrafian, otherwise known as the Sarrafian Brothers.<sup>50</sup> They arrived in Beirut from Diyarbekir to open their studio in 1895 in Bab Idriss, likely because of anti-Armenian pogroms.<sup>51</sup>

Armenian social and economic connections to the Arab world predated the Hamidian massacres and the genocide by centuries. Long-standing Armenian communities in Arab cities such as Aleppo, Beirut, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Alexandria, some existing for centuries, were similar to but far more established than other minority communities such as the Greek, Italian, and Syro-Lebanese Christian communities in Alexandria and Cairo. These communities facilitated the geographic *mobility* of Armenian photographers from all parts of the empire. Armenian technicians and professionals could move between provincial centers to nest in similar ethnic communities in order to build their commercial practices. This study is not equipped to delve into the history of Armenian photography, a topic that sorely needs investigation through Armenian sources. However, pertinent to this study, Armenians’ ability to transplant to various parts of the eastern Mediterranean reveals the flows of sociability that informed the production, exchange, circulation, and social network of the *carte de visite* in the late Ottoman age.

## Overview

*The Arab Imago* is a social history of indigenous photography in the Ottoman Arab world. The book does not develop a theory around a kitschy subgenre of portraiture nor does it frequently “unpack” individual images as if each contained an indexical cipher that can be decrypted. To the contrary, the images in this book are consciously chosen for their formalism and, perhaps, even for their banality and accessibility. This is not coincidental or accidental, but rather, is intended to reflect the “nature of photography,” or, at least, the nature of portraiture itself. Whether a particular image or collection should or should not be included in this study is less important than the fact that many of these images are interchangeable with a plethora of similar photographs. With this in mind, this study travels between what I will call the “manifest content,” the surface, of the image that contains formalistic representation that “enacts” the ideals of *nahdah* ideology

and the photograph's "latent content," which references the alternative life-worlds displaced by the hegemony of the manifest.

In this regard, the terms "enact" or "enactment" are not meant to supplant the concept of "performance" and "performativity," as theorized in speech-act theory and later in the work of Judith Butler. I borrow enactment from contemporary Freudian and object relations psychoanalytic theory because it elicits a dynamic of performance that is not merely reproductive of, for example, certain subjective discourses and ego-ideals, which in turn produce, resist, or calibrate them into producing new discourses and subjectivities.<sup>52</sup> Rather, an "enactment," in the analytic dyad, creates, performs, or "enacts" the unconscious relationship that the patient has with the analyst. This enactment is not only an importation of overdetermined historical objects and events from the patient's past, it is a co-creation of the patient's transference and the analyst's own countertransference to that "fantasy" relationship. The enactment in therapy is a "re-living" of the past and the repetitious manifestation of the patient's relations to objects and others. I use this concept because it precisely draws the manifest and latent into a particular act of nonverbal representation, the portrait. "Enactment" allows us to understand the image as both an afterimage of ideology and one that participates in it. Contrary to the classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory, this book understands enactments as ideologically conditioned by social relations and history. The portrait therefore is an enactment of the conditions of its production, its intelligibility, its politics of representation, and the object relations within it and between which it circulates. In the case of the portrait, it is an *actualization* of modernity, but an actualization is different from an enactment, which seeks, simultaneously, to hide and make visible the latent history of the subject's history.<sup>53</sup> The Ottoman portrait as an enactment, in other words, might dissociate its subject from its material history in order to enact an ideological statement of who the sitter is (that is, a member of the new middle class that dissociates itself from its peasant origins). In doing so, an enactment demands legibility for its viewer. It demands production and knowledge of the photographer; it presumes a circuit of intelligibility, of reception, and of circulation in hopes of eliciting some social value. In thinking of the portrait as an enactment, I import the concept of enactment from the analytic dyad into the social setting in order to uncover the social relations that bind the portrait's history, ideology, and materiality together.

*The Arab Image* is organized into two parts and eight chapters, which commute between two distinct but interlocking poles: the empirical history of *indigenista* photography in the Ottoman Arab world and a complex theorization of the multivalent levels of photography as a social practice and ideological act. The structure of this book is composed in movements, alternating between an unpacking of previously unexamined written texts (journal articles, guides, autobiographies, and so forth) and a crescendo of "case studies."

In order to restore the history of Ottoman Arab photography, *The Arab Imago* asserts that the social character of the portrait made it a synapse of intersecting “manifest” and “latent” planes and vectors: materialist, social, discursive, semiotic, and historic. Photography’s truth-value, indexicality, its *studium* and intelligible references, and its expressed ideology remained in tension with the photographic image, its ambivalence, its alterity, and its *punctum*.<sup>54</sup> The exchange value, social value, and discursive effects work in tandem with photography as a social practice. Combined, these vectors synthesize into the image-screen that *reproduced* the social relations that they represented. The bipartite organization of this book is not meant to reify a binary between manifest and latent, surface and hidden, representation and history. It is intended, rather, to bring them together into the unity of the material object of the portrait.

Part 1 examines the histories of *indigenista* photographers and defines what the *nahdah* portrait looked like, its ideological content, its representation, its social relations, and the material history. Just as I locate *nahdah* within *Osmanlilik* modernity, I begin this examination of Arab photography with the work of the Ottoman Empire’s most renowned studio. Chapter 1 reveals how the repetitious formalism of portraiture, exemplified in the work of Abdullah Frères, represented, enacted, and reproduced Ottoman modernity, imprinting on the photograph’s surface the “optical unconscious” of *Osmanlilik* ideology. From this larger Ottoman framework, chapter 2 offers a discussion of pioneer *indigenista* “Arab” photographers Jurji Saboungi, Louis Saboungi, and the Kova Frères in order to understand how their work imprinted the “Arab imago,” a condensation of the ego-ideals of *nahdah* selfhood. Chapter 3’s exposition of the *carte de visite* shows us how the social currency and import of the portrait emerges from a new sense of sociability that accompanied these shifts and was essential to the naturalization of social and political reorganization in the Ottoman Arab world. More specifically, the visiting card was an interpellation of *nahdah* ideology but also interpolated its subject into a social vision of *al-nahdah al-‘arabiyah*. Chapter 4 focuses on the consolidation of a photographic discourse in the Arab print media, particularly the journal *al-Muqtataf*. “*Nahdah* photography writing” reveals an awareness of what Christopher Pinney terms the “technomateriality” of photography, recognizing how it is both a material object and a product of scientific knowledge and labor that also carries a keen ideological message. The photograph was seen by Arab writers as a *verum factum*, in Giambattista Vico’s words, of the *nahdah* “perspective,” that was at one time an objective and positivist representation of reality and at the same time an expression of experience of that reality.

In part 2, I offer a series of “case studies,” focusing on particular photographs and practices that allow us to theoretically unpack the histories and framework that were laid out in part 1. Chapter 5, for example, juxtaposes Wasif Jawhariyyeh’s unpublished photographic

albums against the production of the Krikorian and Raad studios of Jerusalem that fill their pages in order to map out how these circuits of sociability look. Jawhariyyeh's albums allow us to think beyond the exclusivity of "national" Palestinian identity to place it within the larger Ottoman context of reorganizing social relations in the Levant without abrogating or negating modern Palestinian subjectivity itself.

Chapter 6 begins to unpack how the portrait's "manifest" content, the hegemonic *nahdah* and *Osmanlilik* civilizational representation discussed in part 1, stabilized and mediated the profound social and economic transformations of the day. The carte de visite, then, offers "object constancy" for the "new men and women" of the era. It offers "jointness" to bind their new sociability and economic transformations to the representational set that gives them ideological meaning. Against this process of stabilization, chapter 7 is the only chapter to fully explore the latent content of the portrait. It examines Jurji Saboungi's portrait of Midhat Pasha to explore the alterity of the image, its latent content, that has been displaced by the representational, formalistic, and ideological hegemony of the manifest surface. Finally, chapter 8 veers from formal, metropolitan studio photography to examine a form of *indigenista* photography largely ignored, namely, the narratives of the first Egyptian officials, such as Muhammad Sadiq Bey, who photographed the Hajj between 1860 and 1902.

No doubt, *The Arab Imago* has embarked on a complicated endeavor. On the one hand, it is charged to excavate and map as much empirical information about the history of indigenously produced photography as possible. Such an enterprise is epic considering the dearth of research on the topic, let alone the weight of the Orientalist master narrative. On the other hand, this book is consigned to name what the "Arab portrait" looked like. What forms do this "imago" take when imprinted onto the surface of the photograph? The answer must be formalistic, yet it must engage what Zahid Chaudhary calls the "aesthetic imagination" in order to determine whether or why such photographs seem to derive from, mimic, or resemble the European master-image.<sup>55</sup> In the venture to grapple with photography and cultural theory, I run the risk of either sounding too abstract or vacating Arab photography of its own locality. Considering this minefield of dilemmas, I proceed intrepidly and start, not with a strict art history, but with a study of the social history of Arab photography. In offering a social history, this book hopes to engage the representational and formalistic content of the portrait in order to answer "what Arab portraiture looks like during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." But also, we seek together the history of the portrait's social life and probe the processes, social currency, ideological effect, and, indeed, anxieties and alterity of portraiture.