

STEPHEN SHEEHI, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860–1910* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016). Pp. 221. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780691151328

REVIEWED BY MAX WEISS, Department of History, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.; e-mail: maxweiss@princeton.edu

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The *nahḍa* remains a cornerstone of the historiography of the modern Middle East. In recent years, scholars have deployed new methods of critical historical, literary, and cultural analysis in order to shed light on underappreciated aspects of how the *nahḍa*, unfolded. Historians are also increasingly interested in how the *nahḍa* was experienced, lived, and remembered by a broader range of people, including women, children, and subaltern classes. In *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860–1910*, Stephen Sheehi builds upon this collective endeavor—and his own earlier contributions to the field—by turning to what might be called the excavation of the material culture of the *nahḍa*.

The Arab Imago is an intellectual and cultural analysis of the *nahḍa* through the lens of portrait photography as it developed and was debated in the eastern Mediterranean during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sheehi presents a convincing argument that historians can do more to make use of visual material as a way of understanding and representing social relations. Rather than viewing photography as an empty vessel that records the trace of “real history,” Sheehi argues that photography is an “enactment,” one which “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” (p. xxxvii). Here Sheehi refers to a dialectical understanding of photography-as-ideology, a situation in which the image can be both the product and the producer of what he calls *Osmanlilik* and Nahdawi conceptions of the modern. Most simply put, photography for Sheehi “was the very instantiation of *nahḍah* discourse” (p. 31).

The book is composed of eight chapters in addition to an introduction and an epilogue. Part 1 is concerned with “Histories and Practice,” while Part 2 turns to “Case Studies and Theory.” By exploring the life and work of figures from the Nahda who have not been as closely studied as luminary writers and publishers such as Butrus al-Bustani, Jurji Zaydan, and others, Sheehi helps us to see the broader context of the *nahḍa*’s cultural and social field, while also attending to the different concerns of individuals, families, and communities around the Eastern Mediterranean. The lives and times of the Abdullah Frères, Ottoman court photographers during the mid-19th century, for example, reflect both administrative and aesthetic aspects of *Osmanlilik* ideology. At the same time, by situating the photography of Basili (Vassilaki) Kargopoulo, an ethnic Greek resident of Istanbul, within the same frame Sheehi calls attention to the social diversity of the Ottoman cultural and visual fields.

Not content to remain at the imperial center, Sheehi tracks the structure and function of photography in the Ottoman Arab world as well, identifying the family resemblances between specifically Ottoman conceptions of modernity (*Osmanlilik*) and Nahdawi reconceptualizations of Arab language and literature, culture and identity. Ottoman practices of photography are not understood here purely in terms of the emulation of a form of technological modernity that was diffused into the Middle Eastern context. Rather, Sheehi strikingly shows how Arab cultural producers adapted, mastered, and deployed the optics of modernity in the service of new conceptions of self, family, and society in a time of new challenges and unprecedented social change. Jurgi Saboungi, for example, a member of the Nahdawi circle around the foundational newspaper *al-Muqtataf*, moved from Mount Lebanon to Beirut in the 1860s and would set up studios in the area around the present-day Place de Riad el-Solh and the Suq Surssock. His work was inspired by early Arabic technical manuals on photography such as *al-Durr al-Maknun*

fi-l-Sina'a wa-l-Funun (The Unknown Feat in the Arts and Crafts) (1883) by Jirjis Tannus 'Awn, among others, and contributed to the emergent practice of sitting portraiture. By the same token, his analysis of the well-known portraits of Palestinian notable Wasif Jawhariyya by such photographers as Armenian-Palestinian Garabed Krikorian and one of his chief competitors Khalil Ra'd, who came from Bhamdoun, Sheehi opens up undiscovered pockets of Ottoman-Arab cultural, intellectual, and commercial life.

But such personal and family portraiture—primarily the province of elites, at least in this earlier period—was not the only expression of photographic modernity in the Ottoman and Ottoman-Arab worlds. Sheehi shows how the fascination with the *carte de visite*, a new medium that precipitated a kind of “Ottoman Arab *cartomania*” (perhaps this is a bit of purposeful hyperbole?), helped to bring portraiture out into the light, transforming the photograph into “an object with social currency and a social role” (p. 55), one that “maps the contours of growing class and social relations.” But if “the alleged absence of the *carte de visite* among peasants may attest to the fact that these social groups were outside of the social networks of exchange” (p. 60), one wonders how historians of the material culture of the *nahḍa* are capable of definitively tracking the impact of this *cartomania* in the rural Ottoman world. Sheehi has a plausible answer to this problem, which comes through in his discussion of treatises on the science and technical aspects of photography. In his view, “the photograph is not an icon like a painting but an *index*. . . . It is the signs, props, backgrounds, poses, clothes, demeanor, sharpness, and format” (p. 93). In other words, rather than getting bogged down in the difficult (and perhaps unanswerable question) of reception of and participation in the photographic medium in rural parts of the late-Ottoman and Ottoman-Arab worlds, historians may be left to read representation for its own silences and gaps that both obscure and reveal subaltern life worlds.

In this regard, however, it bears restating that the *nahḍa* was not a frictionless cultural development or intellectual space. Indeed, one of the persistent difficulties in making sense of the *nahḍa* concerns the dialectical tension between a discourse of authenticity and an impulse towards worldly cosmopolitanism. *Nahḍa* intellectuals were caught between the desire to celebrate and rejuvenate Arabic language, literature, and culture even as they articulated new modes of political, cultural, and intellectual engagement. Sheehi concludes with a critical analysis of how “the tribal,” “the sectarian,” or “the primitive” is captured by the photographic lens. The photographic archive or “image-screen” examined in *The Arab Imago* also contains traces of the *nahḍa*'s others. As one of the primary documentary sources in his study, Sheehi concludes, “the studio portrait is an imprint of the Arab *imago* that undergirds a variety of class, gender, sectarian, and national subject positions” (p. 199). Given his turn toward particularistic forms of identity near the conclusion of the book, at times Sheehi seems to run the risk of reinscribing this binary that opposes the provincial to the cosmopolitan. It would be worthwhile for historians to more fully flesh out the ways in which such tensions surrounding relations of class, gender, sectarian, and national difference inhere in both discursive and material aspects of the *nahḍa* as well as other projects of modernity around the Middle East.

LAURE GUIRGUIS, *Copts and the Security State: Violence, Coercion, and Sectarianism in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2017). Pp. 239. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9781503600782

REVIEWED BY RACHEL M. SCOTT, Department of Religion and Culture, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Va.; e-mail: rmh@vt.edu
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In *Copts and the Security State*, originally published in French, Laure Guirguis turns her attention away from Islam and religion as a source of intercommunal violence and focuses on the role of