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# Ţanţāwī Jawharī

mostly known for his lengthy interpretation (i.e., *tafsīr musalsal*) of the Qur'ān, *Al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm al-Mushtamil 'alā 'Ajā'ib Badā'i' al-Mukawwināt wa Gharā'ib al-Āyāt al-Bāhirāt* (1923–1935) (Jewels of the Interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān, containing the Marvel of the Beauties of the Creation and Wonderfully Luminous Divine Signs). Ṭanṭāwī was born in Kafr 'Awaḍallāh Ḥijāzī village in the southeast of al-Zaqāzīq (Zagazig) in al-Sharqiyyah Province of Egypt. He was a graduate of al-Azhar University and Dār al-'Ulūm, and taught several courses dealing with philosophy, Islamic studies, and Arabic in the Egyptian University, Dār al-'Ulūm, and many secondary schools until 1922 when he retired. He authored about thirty books, some of which were reviewed by Western contemporaries such as David Samuel Margoliouth. He was in close contact with the Italian scholar David Santillana, who was also teaching at Cairo University (National University: *al-Jāmi'ah al-Ahliyah*) at the same time with Ṭanṭāwī in 1912. Furthermore, the original copies of most of the correspondences between Ṭanṭāwī and famous European Islamic scholars such as Joseph Schacht (1902–1969) and H. A. R. Gibb (1895–1971) are found in the introduction of his book *Political Dreams* (Aḥlām fī'l-Siyāsah).

Țanțāwī was influenced not only by classical Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers such as Aristotle (d. 322 BC), Avicenna (d. 1037 AD), al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), and some Islamic jurists but was also impressed by modern European philosophers and thinkers including Immanuel

Kant (1724–1804), whose ideas Ṭanṭāwī used to describe educational issues like those mentioned in his reputed books entitled *Aḥlām fīʾl-Siyāsah* (which was explained in Margoliouth's review) and 'Ayn al-Insān (Where Is Man?). In Where Is Man? Immanuel Kant's view is also referred to by Ṭanṭāwī in using a translation by Annette Churton of Über Pädagogik (Education) to convey Kant's message about the influence of education on the development of humans' natural gifts. Also, Ṭanṭāwī translated the English version of Kant's book into Arabic. Among Ṭanṭāwī's admirers was Baron Carra de Vaux, who placed him in the rank with influential figures of the Islamic movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Egypt.

Țanțāwī was familiar with the English language and it is understood that his book *Jamāl al-ʿĀlam* (the Beauty of the Universe) in which the love for nature is apparent were stimulated by John Lubbock's book *The Beauties of Nature and the Wonders of the World* (1892); Ţanṭāwī and Lubbock corresponded for many years. Ṭanṭāwī's citations of prominent European works testify to his intention to discuss the achievements of non-Muslims to a Muslim audience, so that Muslims would rise in the ranks worldwide.

Thanks to his social and political efforts, for example, his membership in the Youth Association (*Jam'iyyat al-Shubbān al-Muslimīn*) and his contact with the Muslim Brotherhood party (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*), Ṭanṭāwī was named *al-Ustādh al-Ḥakīm* (the wise master) among other titles, and was also called *Filsūf al-Sharq wa'l-Islām* (philosopher of the orient and Islam)—a title often placed above his name on books. In addition, *al-'Ulūm al-Insāniyyah* magazine referred to Ṭanṭāwī as *Filsūf al-Kabīr*, or the "great philosopher" whose writings helped to revitalize Arab thought, culture, and science, and whose long Qur'anic interpretation was second only to Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905).

Țanțāwī interacted with numerous global Muslim leaders of his time. Apart from his correspondence with the famous Iranian clergy Āyatullāh Marʿashī Najafī (1897–1990) in 1938, some authentic archives belonging to Ṭanṭāwīʾs family under the supervision of his direct grandson, Professor Fatḥī Ṣāliḥ, indicate that Ṭanṭāwī sent his book *Aḥlām fīʾl-Siyāsah* to the king of Iran, Rezā Shāh Pahlavī (r. 1925–1941) in 1935. Rezā Shāh responded in Arabic, mentioning the significance of such writing in a critical part of the twentieth century when the world very much required a movement toward peace.

Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī is frequently acknowledged as a founder of scientific interpretation of the Qurʾān; some parts of his exegesis were written according to his dictations in class at Dār al-ʾUlūm, as well as his previous works published in Egyptian magazines. This *tafsīr* was written in twenty-six volumes between 1923 and 1935, and contains several images, drawings, and tables to elaborate the meanings of verses. He believed this exegesis was bestowed by God as a divine gift, and one of his goals was to encourage young Muslims to stand among their *ummah* (nation) and compete with Europeans in different fields of science. The initial pages of the first interpretation volume describe his main concern in the form of a question: Why should Westerners be pioneers in every domain of science, when the Qurʾān contains many

verses dealing with 'ilm (science)? Likewise, the first volume of al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān along with a letter signed by Ṭanṭāwī were sent to the king of Egypt; Muṣaṭafā K. Pāshā; the kings of Persia and Afghanistan; Sultan Ḥusayn bin 'Alī in Mecca; Imām Yaḥyā from Yemen and others; in the attached letter it was mentioned that Muslim progress will never be achieved unless they are acquainted with the Qur'ān.

Although Ṭanṭāwī emphasized peacemaking efforts between the East and West, he supported a more classical interpretation of the Qurʾān regarding non-Muslims (specifically Christians and Jews). For instance, the final verse of *sūrat al-Fatiḥah* (Q 1) maintains that God bestowed his blessing on the prophets, trusted friends, martyrs, and righteous people, which refers back to the Muslim *ummah*. On the other hand, Jews are those whom Allāh has cursed, and Christians are among the strayed groups of people.

But concerning Q 5: 48 and how Islam advocates religious pluralism, Ṭanṭāwī stated that the difference among religions is [only] about the ancillaries found in worship styles and some religious laws that were changed over time (fa-ʾammā al-ikhtilāf bayn hādhih al-diyānāt fa-fī al-furūʾ ka-ṭuruq al-ʿibādāt wa- baʾḍ al-aḥkām al-latī ta-taghayyar bi-taghayyur al-azminah).

In addition, Ṭanṭāwī assumed that legal (*fiqhī*) verses—fewer in number than cosmological and natural verses—were profoundly explained by classical thinkers who were pioneers in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as he asked why Muslims rarely touch numerous verses pertaining to natural wonders and the cosmos in contrast to their ancestors who used to interact enthusiastically with verses that dealt with this legacy? In his belief, knowing nature paves the way to reaching advancement.

Nonetheless, several scholars (Muslims and non-Muslims) critically hold that Ṭanṭāwī assembled an encyclopedia of science and he, in any way, tried to equalize Qur'anic phrases with scientific discoveries, and some Iranian thinkers labeled him a positivist due to his presentation of odd deductions and relationships he created between scientific stories and Qur'anic verses.

Based on biographical dictionaries, it has been noted that Ṭanṭāwī's strong belief in spiritualism and his different thoughts compared to many Muslims and Azharites caused some of his works to be banned in the Dutch East Indies for a specific period of time; but his *tafsīr* was banned from circulation in Arabia.

Furthermore, Ṭanṭāwī is well known as the founder of spiritualism in Egypt, and was the one who insisted on establishing the first society of spiritual advice (through mediums) in Cairo; mediumship was a completely Western creation that became popular following the spiritualism movement that swept through the UK and US in the early twentieth century. In the preface to *al-Arwāḥ* (The Souls), Ṭanṭāwī clearly contended that all Western discoveries and successes, even in spiritualism and mediumship, are mainly transmitted from eastern Arab lands (*al-sharq*) in general and Muslim thought in particular.

Ṭanṭāwī maintained a close relationship with the leader of the National Party (al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī), Muṣṭafā Kāmil (1874–1908), and published numerous articles in the party newspaper *al-Liwā*' (The Standard). One of his concerns was that Muslim communities and Arabs are scattered; he argued that, in this context, Europeans have learned from classical Muslim thought in order to improve their societies and advance in scientific endeavors. Muslims, he argued, had become inattentive to nature, the cosmos, and the environment, which is why he decided to compile his *tafsīr* and books dealing with Islamic civilization and sciences, Muslims identity, and their social status in the modern world.

In December 1939 several supportive remarks by Western scholars as well as Sheikh Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī's writings particularly 'Ayn al-Insān and Aḥlām fī'l Siyāsah led to his nomination—recommended by Egyptian academicians—as a candidate for the Nobel Prize.

Ṭanṭāwī died on 12 January 1940 at the age of seventy-eight in Egypt. Today there are streets in Cairo and Alexandria that carry the name "Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī."

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