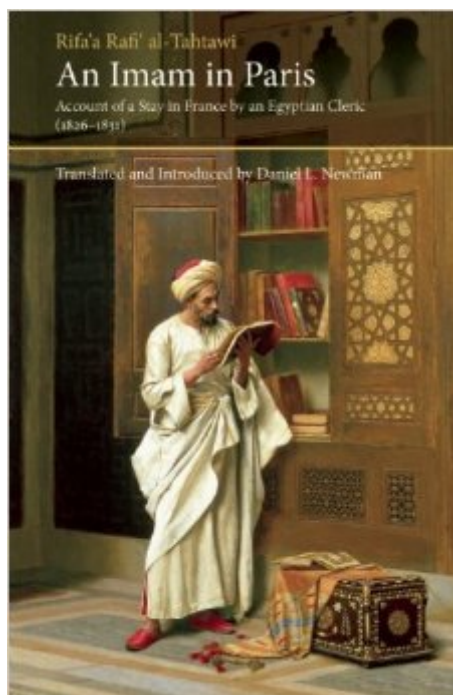


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# An Imam In Paris: Al-Tahtawi's Visit To France 1826-1831 (Saqi Essentials)



## Synopsis

"An Imam in Paris lets us share the responses of a highly intelligent scholar ... Daniel L. Newman is to be congratulated on making the first translation into English of this remarkable book, and on supporting the text with a first-class introduction and with footnotes that are as full as one could wish" – Times Literary Supplement "A touchstone for thinking about the tangled relations between Islam and modernity ... the most amazing and entertaining curiosity" – Matthew J. Reisz, Jewish Quarterly

In the 1820s, Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, a young Muslim cleric, travelled to Paris as a leading member of the first Egyptian educational mission, where, during a stay of five years, he documented his observations on European culture. His account, *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz* (The Quintessence of Paris), is one of the earliest and most influential records of the Muslim encounter with Enlightenment-era's European ideas, introducing ideas of modernity to his native land. Al-Tahtawi's work offers invaluable insight into early conceptions of Europe and the "Other". His observations are as vibrant and palpable today as they were over one hundred and fifty years ago; informative and often acute, to very humorous effect. An irrefutable classic, this new edition of the first English translation is of seminal value. It is introduced and carefully annotated by a scholar fluent in the life, times, and milieu of its narrator. Daniel L. Newman is professor of Arabic and course director of the master's program in Arabic-English Translation and Interpreting at the University of Durham. His other works include *Modern Arabic Short Stories: A Bilingual Reader* (with Ronak Husni, Saqi Books, 2008).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Too often Western visitors to the Mideast are portrayed as innocents lost in a morass of confusion. Here we find an Egyptian in much the same position in 19th century France. Al-Tahtawi finds much to admire in Paris (mechanical engineering and the hard sciences) and much to dislike (foodstuffs generally and the regrettable mode of dress). Above all, his reactions are framed by a kind of confusion that is the exact parallel of European experiences in Egypt (as Lane, Belzoni, and Wallis Budge, for example, can clearly attest). He may not provide the kind of analysis of society that De Tocqueville does for the United States, but his observations are nonetheless fascinating. The scholarly notes and introduction are also first-rate.

Eugene Rogan on this book: "Al-Tahtawi was sent by the ruler of Egypt as the chaplain of an educational mission to France. The aim of the mission was to train young Egyptians in the languages and the arts and the sciences that had made Europe so strong in that first quarter of the 19th century. And he was a very insightful observer, who presents us with a pretty unique example of an Arab or Muslim traveller describing the manners and customs of an exotic people: in this case the French. He was very curious and he wasn't particularly judgmental. So he went with an open mind and wide open eyes. He was fascinated by the relations between men and women, by how they dressed, by how they worked, by the way they decorated their homes and even how they set their tables. There are wonderfully vivid descriptions of all these things, which were so different from the way in which society worked in his native Egypt. He was also very interested in the way the politics of French society worked; he was fascinated by constitutional government, the idea that there could be rules that applied on rulers as well as on subjects. And he's the first person to introduce the idea of a newspaper to the Arab world. At the time, in the 1820s, there were no newspapers in Arabic. He's the first one to describe how they worked, how they allow accountability, how people's actions can be put under scrutiny, and how anybody, whatever their standing in life, was able to write for these things called newspapers. The book was a bestseller from the moment it was published in Arabic. It was instantly translated into Turkish, so it reached the Ottoman world at large, and really is more responsible than any other book, in the first half of the 19th century, for setting reformist debates in Ottoman and Arab society. But it's also just a great read - a fascinating, fantastic book, and there's a wonderful new translation of it [by Daniel Newman]."

I enjoyed the book very much.

Glad I found it, good price.

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