

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AND THE ARAB EAST

SHFIK FIADH

I believe the whole British Empire will adopt a reformed Mahometism before the end of the century. The character of Mahomet is congenial to me. I admire him and share his views of life to a considerable extent.

Getting Married

Abstract

The paper focuses attention on the Islamic themes in Shaw's writings, and on the vast reputation the Irish dramatist enjoys in the Arab world. This treatment from an Arab perspective is designed to fill the gap created by the utter neglect of any scholarly considerations of Shaw's interest in Islam and the Arabs.

The paper emphasises that much of the attraction for Shaw has been initiated by the political and tragic events of the Dinshwai incident of 1906. It was the stormy protest and rebellious defiance of Cromer's rule in Egypt registered in the lengthy preface to John Bull's *Other Island* that brought Shaw so very close to the hearts and minds of the Arabs everywhere.

Futhermore, the paper points to the dynamic role played by Salama Mussa, a progressive Arab writer, in championing and popularizing Shaw in the Arab East.

The paper also stresses that Shaw's historic encounter with the legendary figure of Lawrence of Arabia in 1922 and the years of productive literary cooperation that followed, must have intensified

Shaw's understanding of Islam and the Arabs. Perhaps it was no coincidence that in *Saint Joan* (1923) and the *Adventures of the Black in Her Search for God* (1932), Shaw devotes much more space to Islam and the Arabs than anywhere else in his works.

The paper concludes with a witty and satirical playlet in which Shaw voices his views on an extremely vital Arab issue, that is, the question of Palestine. Pointing to the Balfour Declaration at the end of the playlet, Shaw makes this memorable observation :

"Another Ulster! As if one were not enough!" Being extremely short the playlet is reproduced in full.

In this paper an attempt is made to fill in part of the gap created by the utter neglect of any scholarly consideration of Shaw's interest in Islam and the Arab world, and of the enormous admiration the Arabs have for the Irish dramatist and thinker. It is my main concern in this study to show the impact of Shaw's stormy and dramatic entrance on the political and social scene of the Arab East, how his ideas began gradually but effectively to filter into the mainspring of Arab ideology, how the frame work of his ideas invaded the Egyptian stage, and how it was whole-heartedly received by the intelligentsia in Egypt and throughout the Arab East.

Shaw's involvement and interest in the Arab East, however begin with the horror of Dinshwai. But why did the Dinshwai incident cause so much uproar in Egypt and the rest of the world and why was Shaw's name linked with it? The Dinshwai incident took place on 13th June 1906; the earliest date at which Shaw's name is linked with the Arab world. The incident itself was of immense importance for various reasons: firstly the trial of the helpless Egyptian peasants was given worldwide presse coverage and the harshness and magnitude of the injustice involved shook the conscience of humanity. Shaw and Scawen Blunt were among those progressive and humanitarian writers who took the issue to heart and covered the trial in great detail. Secondly, the Dinshwai incident around which a national mythology accumulated in the course of time awakened the mind and feelings of the Egyptians to the realities of the foreign occupation. And the last, but perhaps not the least reason, was that Egypt in particular and the Arab East in general, gained a great socialist ally and pundit in the person of Bernard Shaw.

Ever since 1906 Shaw's name has struck a favourable response in the minds and hearts of the Arabs. His name and that of

Shakespeare are known and admired by all. A little examination of current written and spoken Arabic will reveal that the English bard and the Irish dramatist are more quoted than any other foreign writers. This is due to the fact that the works of Shakespeare and have been translated into Arabic on such an extensive scale that very few of their works are unknown to Arab readers. The widespread circulation of Shakespeare's works in the Arab East is due to the breathtaking beauty of his language and to the noble and immortal human passions he expressed in his plays. But as for Shaw and his reputation in Egypt, it all began at Dinshwai. The man had the fearless courage to defy Cromer's misrule in Egypt and to call on the Egyptians to throw off their oppressive foreign yoke in these words :

. . . any man cradled by the Nile who, after the Dinshwai incident, will ever voluntarily submit to British rule, or accept any bond with us except the bond of a Federation of free and equal states, will deserve the worst that Lord Cromer can equal states, will deserve the worst that Lord Cromer can consider 'just and necessary' for him. (Shaw, John Bull's. . . , 1965, p. 469).

Such a man was bound to enjoy popularity and a warm reception in the Arab world. But this reputation was further enhanced when he made these observations which were of considerable significance to the Arab nationalists who were desperately struggling to achieve liberation and independence :

A conquered nation is like a man with cancer: he can think of nothing . . . a healthy nation is as unconscious of its nationality as a healthy man of his bones. But if you break a nation's nationality it will think of nothing else but getting it set again. It will listen to no reformer, to no philosopher, to no preacher, until the demand of the nationalists is granted. It will attend to no business, however vital, except the business of unification and liberation. (Shaw, John Bull's . . . , 1965, p. 457)

I have already given a very brief account of the Dinshwai incident but at this juncture of my study I think a fuller account is justifiable. "Dinshwai is a poor village — a heap of cinder — like earth hidden amongst seeds beneath the shade of a few palm trees. At the corners of all its dilapidated huts rise cones of unbaked brick several meters high, the homes of those famous pigeons supposed to be wild — of which not a single one remains away any longer

Shaw made some memorable and biting statements in defence of these desperate and unfortunate people :

Hassan Mahfouz, an Egyptian pigeon farmer who objects to British sport, threatens British officers and gentlemen when they shoot his pigeons; and actually hits those officers with a substantial stick, is clearly a ruffian to be made an example of. Penal servitude was not enough for a man of 60 who looked 70, and might not have lived to suffer five years of it. So Hassan was hanged; but as a special mark of consideration for his family, he was hanged in full view of his own house, with his wife and children and grandchildren enjoying the spectacle from the roof. (Shaw, *John Bull's . . .*, 1965, p. 464.

Proceeding with the same vein of irony and aversion Shaw goes on to describe the horror of Dinshwai :

Hanging, however, is the least sensational form of public execution: it lacks those elements of blood and torture for which the military and bureaucratic imagination lusts. So, as they had room for only one man at the gallows, and had to leave him hanging half an hour to make sure work and give his family plenty of time to watch him swinging ("slowly turning round and round on himself"), thus having two hours to kill as well as four men, they kept the entertainment going by flogging eight men with fifty lashes; each eleven more than the utmost permitted by the law of Moses in times which our Army of Occupation no doubt considers barbarous. (Shaw, *John Bull's . . .*, 1965, p. 464.)

From this macabre scene of torture Shaw goes on to point out Lord Cromer's idea of the trial :

Lord Cromer certifies that the Englishman in charge of the proceedings is a singularly humane man, and is very popular amongst the natives of Egypt by reason of the great sympathy he has always shown for them. It will be seen that Parliamentary Papers Nos. 3 and 4, Egypt, 1906, are not lacking in unconscious humour. (Shaw, *John Bull's . . .*, 1965, p. 465)

Turning once more to the public hanging Shaw describes this time Darweesh's last moment :

On the scaffold, Darweesh turned to his house as he stood on the trap, and exclaimed "May God compensate us well for this world of manners, for this world of injustice, for this world of cruelty'. If he had dared in court thus to compare God with the tribunal to the disadvantage of the latter, he would no doubt have had fifty lashes before his hanging, to teach him the greatness of the Empire. As it was, he kept his views to himself until it was too late to do anything worse to him than hang him. (Shaw, John Bull's. . . , 1965, p. 467)

Shaw interrupts his detailed description of the execution and of the proceedings of the trial to turn to Lord Cromer, the supreme ruler of Egypt, and make the following remark :

In 1883 Lord Dufferin was abolishing the bastinado as 'a horrible and infamous punishment'. In 1906 Lord Cromer guarantees ferocious sentences of flogging as 'just and necessary' and can see 'nothing reprehensible in the manner in which they were carried out'. 'I have', he says, "passed nearly thirty years of my life in an earnest endeavour to raise the moral and material condition of the people of Egypt. I have been assisted by a number of very capable officials, all of whom, I may say, have been animated by the same spirit as myself'. Egypt may well shudder as she reads those words. If the first thirty years have been crowned by the Dinshwai incident, what will Egypt be like at the end of another thirty years of moral elevation 'animated by the same spirit'? (Shaw, John Bull's . . . 1965, p. 467)

Shaw's satirical attack on Mr. Findlay, Lord Cromer's deputy, who took over the supervision of the proceedings of the trial and execution while Lord Cromer was on holiday in England, is summed up in these words :

Mr. Findlay is a bit of a philosopher. The Egyptian being a fatalist, he says, 'does not greatly fear death, and there is therefore much to be said for flogging as a judicial punishment in Egypt.' Logically, then, the four hanged men ought

than half a day from the roof under which it was hatched". (Blunt, atrocities. . . , 1906, p. 34). This is how one Englishman describes the Dinshwai village — a man whose refinement of feeling and of literary taste earned him the epithet 'poet', and whose knowledge of the Arabs, and whose career in the Arab world earned him the title of 'diplomat', in other words a man surely qualified as an artist and a politician to take full account of the humanitarian aspect of the trial as well as the political repercussions of the incident and to report the incident in its entirety to the outside world. Shaw acknowledges in the preface to **John Bull's Other Island** his full indebtedness to Blunt's coverage of the incident. He also borrowed certain facts from the **British Parliamentary Paper** on the subject. (Shaw, **John Bull's** . . . , 1965, p. 464).

The facts of the Dinshwai incident run as follows : On June 13th, 1906, a group of five British officers, invited by the local landlord, went shooting at the village of Dinshwai. To go shooting, it was necessary to obtain permission of the Omdeh, the village headman. As the Omdeh was absent that day, they sought permission from his deputy who told them that they had to go well outside the village to shoot. But instead of doing so the officers decided to move only a few hundred yards off and started shooting at the domestic pigeons raised by the peasants as a means of livelihood. Some of their shots caused one of the threshing floors in the village to catch fire. Angered by the pigeon shooting and the fire, the villagers rushed out with their wooden staves in an attempt to disarm the officers. In the scuffle a gun went off and wounded three men, and also a woman who fell and was taken for dead. Seeing their relatives wounded, and the woman dead, the villagers were in such a passion that they attacked the officers with stones as well as sticks. One of the officers, Captain Bull, rushed in the noonday heat to get help from his camp, but died on the way from concussion and sunstroke. An Egyptian peasant who saw him dying and came to help him was later found by a group of officers who, assuming he was the murderer, beat him to death.

There was an almost immediate outcry by the British authorities for an exemplary punishment. A special tribunal was therefore hastily set up to try the fellaheen of Dinshwai on a charge of murder. The hearings in the court and the proceedings were conducted in such a way that the villagers expected very little justice, if any. Salama Musa writes that the journal **al-Muqattem** reported that orders had been issued to send a number of sets of gallows to

Dinshwai several days before the end of the trial. And according to Judge Marshall, "The case was conducted with such a want of method that when minutes of the proceedings were called for by Parliament in London, they had to be compiled from reports made by native journalists for their papers" (Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 1923, p. 286).

On 27th June the court established premeditation and concerted action and of the fifty-two accused twenty-one were sentenced. Four, including Hassan Mahfouz, were sentenced to death; two including the husband of the wounded woman, to penal servitude for life; six were sentenced to seven years in prison and the rest to fifty lashes. The sentences of hanging and flogging were carried out on the site of the incident and the villagers were compelled to watch the execution.

The emotional impact of Dinshwai was so profound that the Egyptian press and writers were quick to take up the challenge of Dinshwai. Scores of articles were written about it, poets wrote odes on the tragic incident and even the fellaheen composed a folk-ballad, recounting the cruelty and injustice of the Occupation forces, which they sang throughout the country-side. Ahmad Amin, a great writer who in later years became Dean of the Faculty of Letters at Cairo University, had this to say about Dinshwai: "I will never forget as long as I live the night of the 27th June 1906. As we were enjoying the hospitality of a friend, the newspapers were brought in with such prominent headlines "Four Dinshwai peasants sentenced to be hanged, two others received life-imprisonment, six sentenced to seven-year imprisonment, five to be flogged fifty lashes. This shocking news turned our festivities into a funeral-like atmosphere with tears in everyone's eyes and lumps in every throat". Sir Wilfred Scawen Blunt registered the strongest protest at the severity of the punishment in these words :

Here we see the Middle Age punishment as the order of the day; gallows, pillory, iron collar, judge, executioner, torturer — nothing wanting but the wheel, the pale, and the stake for burning — nor indeed are we by any means sure that in the modern spirit certain persons do not regret the abolition of torture, and of the sanctions of inquisitorial tribunal to strike terror into these unfortunate fellaheen not dispensing pity but rather gibbet. (Blunt, *atrocities . . .*, 1906, p. 34)

for those he accuses of mental stagnation and the suppression of intellectual freedom." (Al-Aqqad, Bernard Shaw 1950 p. 147-148)

Shaw's actual physical contact with the Arab World was in 1931. He was on a world tour with his wife and decided to stop in Egypt for a while. The editor of **Majallat Al-Jamia** tells us that as soon as Shaw set foot on Egyptian soil he went to see the Pyramids and the ruins at 'Al-Aqsar'. Hearing of his arrival, the University Council seized this golden opportunity of Shaw's presence in Egypt to send him a warmly worded cable welcoming him to Egypt. They also authorized a delegation to meet him and ask him to address the students at the University, and, if he could spare the time, to attend a reception to be held in his honour. The wording of the cable runs as follows: "The Egyptian University Council wish the great writer a happy stay in Egypt, and extend a heartfelt thanks for his sincere defence of the fatherland" (2) (The Editor, **Majallat Al-Jamia**, 1931, p. 116) A delegation went to the hotel where Shaw was staying and left him the invitation. Shaw later answered the invitation from Palestine in which he said:

Kindly extend my sincerest apologies to the Egyptian Council. I was deeply moved by the words of the cable, and had it not been for the fact that my stay in Cairo was restricted to 33 hours only, I would have definitely accepted the invitation. But owing to a strict time table I was forced to leave Cairo on Tuesday at 6 p.m. (The Editor, **Majallat Al-Jamia**, 1931, p. 116)

Arabic and Islamic Themes in Shaw's Works

I would like to come back to a subject which is of exceptional interest to an Arab, that is Shaw's great admiration of Islam and the Prophet Mohammad. Shaw in general hardly ever lavishes praise on anybody, so when we come across a statement such as the following " . . . the character of Mohamet is congenial to me. I admire and share his views of life to a considerable extent" (Shaw, **Getting Married**, 1965, p. 587) we become fully convinced that the Prophet must have had a tremendous impact on him. There are two sources which emphasize the Islamic themes in Shaw's works, one in Arabic and the other in English. Hesketh Pearson, an authorized biographer

of Shaw, has given prominence to this subject in the following passage :

For many years Shaw had been meditating a play on a prophet. The militant saint was a type more congenial to his nature than any other, a type he thoroughly sympathized with and could therefore portray with unfailing insight. In all history the one person who exactly answered his requirements, who would have made the perfect Shavian hero, was Mahomet. In 1913 he wanted to write a play on the subject for Forbest-Robertson. Four years earlier he had informed the parliamentary committee on the censorship that he had long desired to dramatise the life of Mahomet. But the possibility of a protest from the Turkish Ambassador or the fear of it — causing the Lord Chamberlain to refuse to license such a play — had prevented him from doing it. Nevertheless his fancy continued to play around the prophet, who is described by the Eldely Gentleman in **Back to Methuselah** as a 'truly wise man, for he founded a religion without a Church.' He makes a personal appearance in the **Adventures of the Black Girl in Search of God**, and is discussed by Cauchon in **Saint Joan**. But as the censor's objection to the exhibition of Christ on the stage applied in the East to the exhibition of Mahomet, . . . Shaw wrote **St. Joan** instead. (Pearson, *Bernard Shaw* . . ., 1961, pp. 336-367)

In July 1947, Ahmad Khaki, an Egyptian writer who made an interesting study of Shaw's life and works, wrote a personal letter to Shaw, enclosing Pearson's quotation, and enquiring as to the whereabouts of the draft play of Mohammad, and asking whether he could meet him and discuss certain points raised in Pearson's biography. Khaki received a reply on a postcard (a souvenir from Shaw that he still treasures) on which he said that the material quoted from Hesketh Pearson's book about the Prophet was correct and that he was too old to enter into discussions at that stage of his life; he wished only to be read. But in fact Ahmad Khaki need not have sought verification of Pearson's material about the Prophet, for Shaw himself expresses the strong desire to write a play on the Prophet in the preface to **The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet** in words which are almost identical with those quoted in Pearson's book :

to have been flogged instead. But Mr. Findlay does not draw that conclusion. Logic is not his strong point; he is a man of feeling, and a very nervous one at that. (Shaw, John Bull's . . . 1965, p. 468)

Shaw winds up his humanistic defence of the victims of Dinshwai by issuing this pronouncement :

I must resolutely shut this rich parliamentary paper. I have extracted enough to paint the picture, and enforce my warning to England that if her Empire means ruling the world, as Dinshwai has been ruled in 1906 — and that, I am afraid, is what the Empire does mean to the main body of our aristocratic-military caste and to our jingo plutocrats — then there can be no sacred and urgent political duty on earth than the disruption, defeat, and suppression of the Empire, and, incidently, the humanization of its supporters by the sternest lessons of that adversity which make themselves abhorred by the aspiring will of humanity towards divinity. (Shaw, John Bull's . . . , 1965, p. 469)

In a postscript to this fairly long preface, Shaw writes :

These sheets had passed through the press when the news came of Lord Cromer's resignation. As he accuses himself of failing health, he will perhaps forgive me for accusing him of failing judgment, and for suggesting that his retirement from office might well be celebrated in Egypt by the retirement, at this intercession, of Abd-el-Nebi and the rest from penal servitude. (Shaw, John Bull's . . . , 1965, p. 470)

A year later Shaw reports : "It may be a relief to some of my readers to learn that very shortly after the publication of the above account of the Dinshwai atrocity, I received a private assurance that Abd-el-Nebi and his fellow prisoners would be released on the following New Year's Day."

From this preface more clearly than anywhere else, Shaw's ideas of the Empire and colonialism can be outlined as follows : firstly, the conquered people should never accept subjugation, nor give up the struggle until their country is liberated. Secondly, those who champion war and toy with domination and conquest are pro-

fessional politicians with no sense of honour. After such a strongly-worded defence of the rights and cause of the Egyptian underdogs, and after the tremendous fight he put up against Cromber and the Occupation Forces no little wonder, therefore, that Shaw has become, in the eyes of the Arabs, an ally and a liberator, not unlike Byron to the Greeks. Shaw has in fact immortalized the humble Egyptian village of Dinshwai, and the names of those fellaheen who fell victims to oppression and injustice. And for many generations to come the term "Denshavian", coined by Shaw to refer to the Dinshwai fellaheen, will remind the Egyptians or Shaw's noble and active role in their fight for liberation.

Salama Musa as Intermediary Between Shaw and the Arab East

Three years after the Dinshwai incident, a twenty-year-old Egyptian student by the name of Salama Musa arrived in London. He later joined the Fabian Society, met Shaw and ever since until his death in 1958, made it one of his most cherished tasks in life to introduce and publicize Shaw and Fabian ideals in Egypt and throughout the Arab East.

Salama Musa's life-long admiration for Shaw is not however, my object at this juncture as a later paper will be devoted to the study of the impact of Shaw on Musa's life and work. I would therefore like to state briefly Salama Musa's role in popularizing Shaw's socialist ideas and works in Egypt.

Salama Musa's ambitious undertaking was not exactly plain sailing: for it was one thing for an Egyptian to think highly of Shaw's defiant and heroic stand against those who prosecuted his countrymen, but for him to accept Shaw's, or Western, advanced views on God, man and society, was simply asking for the impossible. Musa from the outset knew only too well that to introduce novel ideas into a conservative society, such as that of Egypt in the early part of the twentieth century, required great courage and boundless effort. He was also aware that in addition to the daunting task of driving home modern ideas to a people plagued with ignorance, poverty, superstitions, traditions, and backwardness, he had to confront a united front of Palace, Pashas, Landowners and colonialism. For it was definitely not in the interest of these colonial and reactionary forces to enlighten the Egyptian people and risk the outcome of uprising and revolutions in their midst. Along with a number of inspired and intellectual writers, Salama Musa started on the ardu-

ous path of educating his fellow countrymen. Among those outstanding Egyptian pioneers who started to propogate modern ideas were Qasim Amin, and Lulfi-Al-Sayyid. Amin, a graduate of the Sorbonne, wrote two books defending the liberation of women in Egypt, who for hundreds of years had been secluded from their society. The books, as expected, caused a great deal of controversy and an intellectual revolution among the middle classes. As sometimes happens, subject matter conditions style, and the new ideas expressed in these two books introduced a new trend in writing. Furthermore, Amin, who was much influenced by French literature, wrote in a clear, almost French style, and he stimulated the new generation of writers to think independently and to express themselves simply and clearly.

Al-Sayyid, the editor of the daily paper **Al-Jarida** from 1907 to 1915, taught the younger generation that independence alone is not enough, that an independent nation which is reactionary both in government and social structure is not healthy. Bad traditions and injurious social habits are to be resisted as much as the domination of a foreign rule. Sayyid defended the liberation of women; he was a factor in instituting Cairo University. He gathered around him a galaxy of progressive new writers, among them Taha Husayn and Salama Musa.

Musa's contribution towards the enlightenment of his country began while he was studying in London in 1906. He came to know socialism at close quarters, its thought patterns offering him a framework within which to crystallize his thinking on the modernization and reorganization of his own society. While still in London he started his journalistic career by dispatching articles to the Egyptian intellectual journal **Al-Muqtataf** in which he propounded Fabian Socialism as represented by the writings of George Bernard Shaw, Musa's loyalty to Shaw and zeal for his works, long after he himself returned to Egypt, played a vital role in introducing the Irish dramatist and his works to his fellow Arabs.

Shaw and Egypt

From **Shaw and Egypt** I now intend to turn to Abbas Mahmud Al-Aqqad's short Arabic study of Shaw in which he relates this delightful anecdote. (1)

In the academic year 1927-28 Shaw's **St. Joan** was prescribed as a set text at the Egyptian University. The decision evoked strong protests from those who had heard about the play but had not read it. They said that the Prophet, Mohammad, was referred to, among other things, as "a camel driver" in the play. The campaign against the play finally reached a point where the whole incident was taken to Parliament to be resolved. Four of the M.P.s challenged the Government to explain the whole matter. The writer of this account, Al-Aqqad, being an M.P. himself, took part in the discussion and set out to clear up the misunderstanding. First of all he reminded the Government of the man and of his noble stand in connection with Dinshwai incident. He then went on to argue that the term 'camel driver' was used by one of the characters in the play and not by the author, and that on the contrary, the author, through the mouth of another character, had put forward a very convincing counter argument against using the term to describe Mohammad. Warwick, for instance, says, "I know that the followers of Mahomet profess great respect for our Lord, and are ready to forgive St. Peter for being a fisherman". (Shaw, *Sain Joan*, 1965, p. 983) Al-Aqqad goes on to say that the incident was reported to Shaw by one of the **News Chronicle** correspondents and it seems that it had been misunderstood and therefore wrongly reported, for Shaw was told that both the University professors and the students objected to the play. Shaw's reply was quick and sharp: "The reported words in the play constitute the view of the Church in the Middle Ages, and not my own. However", he added, "the Egyptian students must have overlooked the fact that I am not the one who said this objectionable phrase', it is spoken by Cauchon who lived in the 15th century. I can well understand it, that such a phrase or its like, can be misunderstood by illiterate people, but I find it difficult to understand how it can be misinterpreted by individuals of high academic standing. Couldn't those University professors see the full significance of the praise and compliments lavished on the Prophet and Islam in other instances in the play, and elsewhere, and at times, even at the expense of Christianity?" And Shaw here cited Cauchon as one instance. He then concluded with a typical Shavian remark: "The last word I would like to say on this subject is that the professors concerned should be fired without further delay. As for the students, well, they should be forgiven". Al-Aqqad's final remark about this incident is this: "The only consolation the professors concerned could derive from this 'penalty' is that it is Shaw's lightest penalty

One author — the writer of these lines, in fact — has long desired to dramatize the life of Mahomet. But the possibility of a protest from the Turkish Ambassador — or fear of it — causing the Lord Chamberlain to refuse to license such a play has prevented the play from being written. Now if the censorship were abolished, nobody but the author could be held responsible for the play. The Turkish Ambassador does not now protest against the publication of Carlyle's essay on the Prophet, or of the English translations of the Koran in prefaces to which Mahomet is criticized. . . . This restriction of the historical drama is an unmixed evil. Great religious leaders are more interesting and more important subjects for the dramatist than great conquerors. (Shaw, *The Shewing-up*. . . , 1965, p. 418)

Moreover, neither was it necessary to enquire into the whereabouts of the draft play on Mohammad, for neither in Pearson's quotation nor in Shaw's words do we learn that Shaw had actually written a draft play.

Ahmad Khaki, the only Arab author to stress the importance of the Islamic theme in Shaw's works, points out, in his biographical study of Shaw, that Shaw's admiration for the Prophet is understandable for many reasons. Firstly, the Arab Prophet's spiritual zeal and unflinching struggle to establish a new faith and to break loose from the oppressive pagan authority of his day, were endearing factors which haunted Shaw's mind. To Shaw, Mohammad was the heroic saint who could ideally represent his doctrine of the 'Life Force'. Secondly, Mohammad as a supreme religious leader, had never exploited religious authority for secular ends. Thirdly, he never assumed the role of an intermediary between God and the true believer. In the history of Islam, therefore, Khaki adds, the prophet left no religious authority comparable to that created by the Christian Church. Ahmad Khaki concludes that it was only after writing **Saint Joan** that Shaw felt that his strong desire to portray a great religious leader had subsided. (Khaki, *Bernard Shaw*, 1967, p. 205)

A close study of **Saint Joan** indeed reveals the validity of Ahmad Khaki's interpretation and analysis. For one of the themes in **Saint Joan** is the revolt against the powerful authority of the Church as wielded by the priests. Again there is the theme of religious tolerance. Furthermore, there is the idea of a fight, even by the sword, to defend a faith. Lastly, there is the theme of revelation: in

the case of Joan, divine voices speak to her and tell her what to do. Through the mouth of Cauchon, Shaw draws a comparison between the Prophet and Saint Joan, He says :

He had his voices from the Angel Gabriel, she has her voices from St. Catherine and St. Margaret and Blessed Michael. He declared himself the messenger of God, and wrote in God's name to the kings of the earth. Her letters to them are going forth daily. (Shaw, Saint Joan, 1065, p. 982)

All these themes can be applied to the life and struggle of the Arab Prophet. Firstly, Mohammad revolted against the tribe of Quraysh, and rejected the religious authority of the day, smashing the existing idols, and calling for a new religion. For this new faith he exercised his rhetoric, a persuasive tongue and even the edge of the sword. He accomplished all these feats through revelation (wahy).

Reading Shaw's works, in particular his Prefaces, one is surprised at the number of times Mohammad and Islam are favourably discussed; but one is equally surprised to see the Islamic themes so overlooked and neglected by Shavian scholars and biographers. One thing that emerges from my reading of the remarks about Mohammad, Islam and the Arabs, strewn in plenty through such works as **Saint Joan, Back to Methuselah, the Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God, The Millionairess, Captain Brassbound's Conversion, The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet, Androcles and the Lion, The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Imprisonment, Too Good to be True** and many others is the fact that to Shaw, the Arab Prophet was a towering religious leader, an uncompromising iconoclast. Moreover, Mohammad was too much of a 'militant saint' to preach the submissiveness of Christianity. Shaw's admiration for Mohammad also stems from the fact that he expressly disclaimed any unusual powers, whereas it is clear from Matthew's stories that Jesus had some powers of healing. (Shaw, *Androcles* . . . , 1965, p. 560) And again unlike Jesus who chose to go 'like a lamb to the slaughter', Mohammad "chose to save himself" and fight his way through. (Shaw, *Imprisonment*, 1965, p. 290)

His attitude towards Islam is again clearly indicated in a letter from the Holy Land addressed to Dame Laurentia **McLachian** Abbess of Stambrook, dated St. Patrick's Day in Damascus, 1931. The letter is perfectly sincere, and as Shaw seems in no way to be striving after effect, the comments in it are highly revealing. And

here once more, against the background of the birthplace of the three major religions of the world, Shaw turns to the theme of the Prophet and Islam and says :

Next day I discovered Jerusalem. I went to the great plain of stone on which the temple stood, and on which the Mosque of Omar (who didn't build it) stands. And there I found the charm and sanctity of Jerusalem. Christ had been worshipped in both the Mosques; Omar was a man after God's own heart; and Mahomet's horse sprang to heaven with him from the great rock which the mosque of Omar enshrines, and which is a nobly beautiful building in spite of the utterly anachronistic Corinthian capitals of the red pillars of granite which bother one all over the Holy Land, and which are so Roman and common. The Kaiser gilded the Corinthian capitals heavily so that they might hit you harder in the eye, Mahomet respected Christ and taught his followers to do the same; and it is perhaps the failure of the Christians to respect Mahomet equally that makes Islam more impressive in the East than Christendom. (Stambrooke, *The Great Tradition*, . . . , 1956, p. 249)

Perhaps in the story of **The Adventures of the Black Girl in Search of God**, Shaw's admiration for the Prophet is seen more clearly than anywhere else, in the following words: "Six hundred years after Jesus, Mahomet founded Islam and made a colossal stride ahead from mere stick and stone idolatry to very enlightened Unitarianism." Later in the 'story', Shaw through the mouth of the Arab, who is obviously intended to be the Prophet, makes this statement :

I also have a message to deliver, My people, if left to themselves, would fall down and worship all the images in that booth. If there were no images they would worship stones. Allah the glorious, the great, the one and only. Of him no mortal has ever dare to make an image. (Shaw, *The Adventures*. . . , 1932, p. 42)

It is evident from Shaw's numerous references to the Prophet and Islamic ideas in his works that he must have read the Koran in the English translation, and most probably the one by George Sale. (3) But there must have also been other sources of his interest in Islam and the Arab World. However, as I stated earlier, it is to be regretted that Shawian scholars completely gloss over the

whole question of Islamic themes in Shaw's writings, except for the passage I have already quoted from Pearson's study of Shaw. Moreover, Arab critics and biographers, such as Salama Msa, Al-Aqqad, Abdul Latif Sharara, Ahmad Al-Khaki, and others, do not attempt to explore the Islamic sources of Shaw's writings; they are mainly interested in interpreting his life and works on more or less the same lines as their Western counterparts.

To make the problem more difficult for the researcher, Shaw himself provides us with hardly any information about his Oriental sources or those who had inspired him with this interest. The only place where Shaw acknowledges his debt to any source is in the following characteristically Shavian statement when referring to his play **Captain Brassbound's Conversion** :

I claim as a notable merit in the Authorship of this play that I have been intelligent enough to steal its scenery, its surroundings, its atmosphere, its geography, its knowledge of the East. . . from an excellent book of philosophic travel and vivid adventure entitled 'Mogreb-el-Acksa' (Morocco the most Holy) by Cunninghame Graham. (Purdom, A Guide. . . , 1963, p. 188)

However, despite the lack of information on the Islamic or Arabic aspect of his writing, I am convinced that Thomas Carlyle is one of his main sources. My conviction is based on the fact that Shaw borrows Carlyle's Turkish spelling of the Prophet, "Mahomet". Again, the substance of Carlyle's rather sympathetic study of the Prophet and Islam (Carlyle, On Heroes . . . , 1888, p. 61) is very much reflected in Shaw's writings. For example, Carlyle's insistence on theme that Mohammad never claimed to work miracles (Carlyle on Heroes. . . , 1888, p. 62) and again his conviction of the Arab's close adherence to their religion. He says :

These Arabs believe their religion, and try to live by it! No Christians, since the early ages, or only perhaps the English Puritans in modern times, have ever stood by their Faith as the Moslems do by theirs — believing it wholly, confronting time with it, and Eternity with it. (Carlyle, on Heroes. . . , 1888, p. 70)

Other themes which may very well have been inspired by Carlyle were the Moslem's concept of Paradise, the Prophet as a military saint, equality in Islam, submissiveness and forgiveness in Christianity compared with "revenging oneself but it is to be in

measure, not overmuch, or beyond justice". (Calyle, on Heroes. . . , 1888, p. 67) Another source of Shaw's interest in the Arab East may well have been the poet Shelley. For in Shaw's own words: "I had read much poetry, but only one poet was sacred to me: Shelley. I had read his works piously from end to end. (Shaw, *Immortality*, 1965, p. 664)

This is rather significant, for Shelley himself, as we knew from his works, and according to the great Arabist, A. J. Arberry, was most probably familiar with the works of the Orientalist Sir William Jones, as many of Shelley's poems have an Eastern background. Moreover, Arberry points out that the subject of Shelley's romantic poem, **From the Arabie**, was taken from the Romance of *Antar*, translated from Arabic by the Orientalist Trick Hamilton with a new English title, **Antar, a Bedoween Romance**. (Arberry, *Athar Al-Adab*. . . , 1944, p. 7)

Shaw's interest in the Arab world, however, could go as far back as when he was a child of twelve. Henderson tells us: "At home he loved to read; and major events in his childhood life were the discovery of great literature in **Pigrim's Progress** and the **Arabian Nights**". (Henderson, *Bernard Shaw*, 1911, p. 12). Shaw's interest in his childhood books does not seem to have grown fainter with the lapse of years. On the contrary, in his preface to **Three Plays for Puritans** the mature Shaw still thinks highly of the Arabian short-story tellers; he says :

In the Arabian Nights we have a series of stories, some of them very good ones, in which no sort of decorum is observed. The result is that they are infinitely more instructive and enjoyable than our romances, because love is treated in them as naturally as any other passion. There is no cast iron convention as to its effects; no false association of general depravity of character with its corporealities or of general elevation with its sentimentalities; no pretence that a man or a woman cannot be courageous and kind and friendly unless infatuated in love with somebody: rather, indeed, an insistence on the blinding and narrowing powers of lovesickness to make princely heroes unhappy and unfortunate. These tales expose further the delusion that the interest of this most capricious, most transient, most easily baffled of all instincts, is inexhaustible, and that the field of the English romancer has been cruelly narrowed by the restrictions under which he is

permitted to deal with it. The Arabian storyteller, relieved of all such restrictions, heaps character on character, adventure on adventure, marvel on marvel; whilst the English novelist, like the starving tramp who can think of nothing but his hunger, seems to be unable to escape from the obsession of sex. (Shaw, *Complete Prefaces*, 1965, p. 742)

Later in life, in 1922, when Shaw was 66, he and his wife met the legendary figure, Lawrence of Arabia, and from then on the Shaws and Lawrence became very close friends. Reading **Private Shaw and Public Shaw** one sees the friendship of two great men extending from 1922 until 1935. During those thirteen years the Shaws and Colonel Lawrence met quite frequently; Bernard Shaw undertook the task of proof-reading **Seven Pillars of Wisdom**, and later Shaw agreed to write the preface to the catalogue for the exhibition of portraits illustrating **Seven Pillars of Wisdom**. Once more on April 16, 1927, Shaw wrote another very interesting introduction to Lawrence's **Revolt in the Desert**. While proof-reading or revising **Seven Pillars** with Lawrence, Weintraub tells us that Shaw consulted Doughty's (4) **Arabia Deserta**. (Weintraub, *Private Shaw . . .*, 1963, p. 55) On 12th April 1923, Lawrence who discovered Shaw's reading of Doughty, wrote excitedly to a friend: "Good news of Shaw and Doughty. What guts the man has to read a great part of my book and at once to go to Doughty: Magnificent". (Weintraub, *Private Shaw . . .*, 1963, p. 55)

It is rather interesting to note how involved Shaw became in Lawrence's works and world from the time they met until the latter died in a motor cycle accident. We are told by Stanley Weintraub that "Shaw had Lawrence's chronicle at his elbow as he researched and drafted his play. It may have been a coincidence crucial to the play that he was involved simultaneously with two chronicles about unconventional military leaders, mulling over the bulky Oxford recension of **Seven Pillars**, (and writing letters of advice about it to Lawrence) while working on his Joan play". (Weintraub, *Private Shaw . . .*, 1963, p. 122)

In his review of the **Revolt in the Desert**, Shaw captures the romantic and colourful life of the Arabs and their desert landscape; one finds:

. . . the sense of the track underfoot the mountains ahead and around, the vicissitudes of the weather, the night, the dawn, the sunset and the meridian. You feel too, the charac-

ters of the men about you: you hear the inflections of their voices, the changes in the expressions, all without an instant of reader's drudgery. There is a magical brilliance about it; so that you see it at once with the conviction of reality and with the enchantment of an opera. (Weintraub, *Private Shaw* . . . , 1963, pp. 43-44.)

The impressive description of Feisal's legion; how an Arab mounts a camel and arranges his outlandish clothes for riding; the roaring camel charge — Shaw's final words on Lawrence's outstanding gift is: "The description has the quality of orchestration". (Weintraub, *Private Shaw*, 1963, p.123). Lawrence's eye for detail and his incredible knowledge of the Arabs are utilized by Shaw when he comes to write the **Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God**. To start with, Shaw for the first time uses drawings to illustrate his work. This may well have been the influence of Lawrence's celebrated illustrated work, **The Seven Pillars of Wisdom**. Secondly, when the woodcuts for the **Black Girl** were completed, Shaw sent a letter to the designer, John Farleigh, informing him of a certain flaw in one of the proofs :

One fearful mistake has been discovered. Aircraftman Shaw Alias Colonel Lawrence, Prince of Damascus, etc. etc., who is among other things a keen book fancier, say yesterday the set of proofs you sent me (many thanks) and highly approved of them, but made the devastating remark that no Arab ever sat with his legs crossed. We shall have to assume that Mahomet was an exception to all rules. (Weintraub, *Private Shaw*. . . , 1963, p. 236)

These points are of interest to our study because they provide another link in a series of links between Shaw and the Arab East. Lawrence must have enhanced and intensified Shaw's knowledge and interest in that part of the world.

In a concluding paragraph of his book, Stanley Weintraub refers to small tokens of friendship which still stand at Ayot St. Lawrence, which bear witness to the association of these two great men. "In the sitting-room there is a copy (one of thirty printed) of **Two Arabic Folk Tales** translated by Lawrence and privately printed by Carlow at the Corvinus Press and presented to G.B.S." (Weintraub, *Private Shaw* . . . , 1963, p. 280)

Shaw's interest in Arab issues does not stop at Dinshwai, or at his admiration for the Prophet or his association with the legendary figure of Lawrence of Arabia, or even at his immense love as a child for the **Arabian Nights**: he takes the interest further by giving us his verdict on the policy of establishing a Jewish Home in Palestine, a question which, needless to say, is of vital importance to the Arab East. Shaw's view on this question is quoted by Fenner Brockway in his book **Outside the Right**, the only place where the political question of Palestine is mentioned by Shaw. The author, we are told, writes to Shaw, asking him about his opinion on a policy statement on Palestine. Brockway receives a startling reply. First of all, referring to the historical validity of the Jewish claim for Palestine, Shaw says: "This is all nonsense, the historical past", adding that he could only comment adequately in the form of a three-act playlet. The author adds that Bernard Shaw enclosed it and granted him the right to publish. The theme was that Arthur Balfour gave Dr. Weitzmann Palestine, in return for a chemical device for killing Germans. As the playlet is very short it is reproduced here in full. (Brockway, *Outside the Right*, 1965, pp. 97-99)

ACT I

1917. Scene : The Foreign Secretary's room at the Foreign Office. Arthur is contemplating with dismay a document which has been handed to him by an attache.

Arthur : Boy, this is awful. Are you sure your figures are correct?

Attache : They have been checked three times over, sir.

Arthur : This is really what the war is costing us?

Attache : Under the mark, if anything, sir.

Arthur : Young man, do you realize — but no. Only a Scot can feel as I feel about it. Look at this one item alone. £5,038 15s 9½d for cordite enough to kill a single German. How can any country stand such a strain?

Attache : It's not the cordite, sir, It's the acetone that is so expensive. Cordite cannot be made without acetone.

Arthur : I don't know what acetone is; and I don't care. All I know is that if we go on like this we shall have to give an order to cease killing Germans. Dead Germans cost too much. . . Are our chemists trying to find something cheaper?

Attache : They are doing their best; but nothing has come of it so far. There's is a chemist in Manchester who has a microbe that makes acetone for next to nothing.

Arthur : Send him here instantly. Why hasn't he been sent here before?

Attache : Impossible, sir, unfortunately.

Arthur : Nothing is impossible when we are at war. Why is it impossible?

Attache : He is a Jew, sir.

Arthur : Is his microbe a Jew?

Attache : I suppose not, sir.

Arthur : Is Sir Herbert Samuel a Jew or is he not? Is he in the Cabinet or is he not?

Attache : But it is a coalition Government, sir. All sorts of people are let in.

Arthur : Any other objection? .

Attache : Well, Manchester, you know, sir, Provincial. And Owens College! If it were Cambridge now, we might stretch a point.

Arthur : If this Jewish gentleman is not in this room in three hours, you go to the trenches.

Attache : Oh, if you make a point of it, of course. But we shall lose tone.

Arthur : (Roaring) : Get out!

. . . (The attache shrugs his shoulders and goes out.)

Arthur : (Clutching his temples as he again pores over the sheet of figures): Five thousand and thirty-eight golden pounds to put one Boche out of action! And we have to exterminate the lot of them!

ACT II

(As before, three hours later, but with Dr. Chaim Weitzmann instead of the attaché).

Arthur : Dr. Weitzmann, we must have the microbe at your own price.

Dr. W. : I do not ask for money.

Arthur : There must be some misunderstanding. I was informed that you are a Jew.

Dr. W. : You were informed correctly. I am a Jew.

Arthur : But pardon me — you said you did not ask for money.

Dr. W. : Precisely. I do not want money.

Arthur : A title, perhaps? Baron? Viscount? Do not hesitate.

Dr. W. : Nothing would induce me to accept a title. I should have to pay for everything.

Arthur : Then may I ask, without offence, since you want none of the things that everybody wants, what the devil do you want?

Dr. D. : I want Jerusalem.

Arthur : It's yours. I only regret that we cannot throw in Madagascar as well. Unfortunately it belongs to the French Government. The Holy Land belongs naturally to the Church of England; and to it you are most welcome. And now will you be so good as to hand over the microbe.

ACT III

...

Mr. Bernard Shaw in his sumptuously furnished study reading the announcement of the Balfour Declaration.

Mr. B. S. : Another Ulster! As if one were not enough!

It is probably sufficient to make one brief comment and that is: How prophetic Shaw's concluding words proved to be! For the stormy events in these two turbulent spots seem to run concurrently and to compete for headlines in the world press.

Finally, I would like to conclude this paper on Shaw's reception in Egypt by quoting a passage from Mahmud Saber's lengthy introduction to his translation of Shaw's **Androcles and the Lion**. After evaluating the various qualities of the play, and after assessing the role of the protagonist, the translator then gives use his own interpretation of Shavianism. Saber's interpretation may sound characteristically Arabic, i.e. flowery and poetic, but one thing remains certain, it richly demonstrates, along with many other quotations in this paper that Shaw's place in the Arab East is unchallenged by any other foreign writer, except perhaps Shakespeare.

Saber's passage reads as follows :

If you want to appreciate the true meaning of Shavianism and the real worth of Shaw all you have to do is to wander in the lush gardens of literature, East and West, and like the bee, select the most beautiful and fragrant flowers and arrange them in the form of a bouquet so that the blending of the

frangrance will have the delicacy of Oscar Wilde, the precision of Sheridan, the genius of Shakespeare, the originality of Ibsen, the satire of de Maupassant, the rebellion of Luther, the depth of Darwin, the revolution of Nietzsche, the godlessness of Voltaire, the philosophy of Bergson, and the encyclopaedic knowledge of Tolstoy. If you are to ask now what is this remarkably peculiar bouquet? The answer is bound to be Shavianism. (Saber, tr., *Androcles*. . . , 1966, p. 9)

FOOTNOTES

- (1) All quotations and material in Arabic were translated into English by the writer of this paper.
- (2) Both cables are translated from Arabic as they were reported in *Majallat Al-Jami'a*.
- (3) My assumption is based on the fact that the new 1825 edition of George Sale's translation of the Koran with the Introductory Discourse seems quite well known. Carlyle, for example, says: "We also can read the Koran, our translation of it by Sale is known to be a fair one" (Carlyle, *Hero*. . . , 1888, p. 59)
4. Charles Doughty (1843-1926) is principally remembered for his remarkable record of *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, first published in 1920. It is notable for its style, in which Chaucerian and Elizabethan English is mixed with Arabic.