

Mustafa Kamil *al-Shams al-Mushriqa* (*The Rising Sun*) (1904)



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Muṣṭafā Kāmil Pasha

Mustafa Kamil (Muṣṭafā Kāmil Pasha) was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1874. After graduating from a local law school, he studied at the University of Toulouse, France. In 1894, he returned to his homeland and founded the “National Party” (al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī) which aimed to achieve Egypt’s complete independence. Thereafter, he continued to visit France and other European countries on an annual basis, and associated with many politicians and journalists along the way. His friendship with the two French writers, Madame Juliette Adam and Pierre Loti, are particularly important. In 1900, he launched the newspaper *al-Liwā’* (*The Standard*), which reflected his nationalist ideals and was later published in English and French with great success. Once the Entente Cordiale (Anglo-French agreement) of 1904 had shattered the hopes he had for France’s role in the independence movement, he

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launched a vigorous anti-British and anti-French campaign through speeches and writings, and was at odds with both Lord Cromer, who was in charge of ruling Egypt, and his successor, Sir Eldon Gorst. In 1907, he convened the “National Assembly,” which consisted of representatives from all over Egypt, in order to position the “National Party” on a broader foundation, and was elected as the party’s representative for life at the assembly. However, in 1908, he died of illness at the young age of 34. His funeral was marked by a massive public demonstration. After his death, the idea of the “National Party” was taken over by Saad Zaghloul (Sa’d Zaghālūl) and the Wafd Party (Delegation Party).

Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War, in the modern era, drew the attention of Egypt and other Arab countries to Japan. The people of Egypt in particular, then under British rule, considered Russia to be a European country, as Britain is, and Japan an Oriental country, like theirs. Thus, they enthusiastically welcomed Japan’s victories in the early phases of the war. For the Arabs, who were burning with nationalist spirit, Japan became a symbol of the awakening of the Orient. Mustafa Kamil, an Egyptian nationalist political leader, was the first to pay attention to Japan and respond actively to it by publicizing Japan’s breakthrough in his speeches and writings.

Kamil had studied in France at a younger age, and had made many friends there. In particular, he had a close, almost brotherly relationship with Pierre Loti, the author of *Japoneries d’automne* (*Autumn Japoneries*). He was apparently hoping that France, the “land of liberty” since the success of the French Revolution, and also Britain’s rival, would help Egypt gain its independence. In the end, however, his hopes would be unfulfilled. The Russo-Japanese War led Loti to become pro-Russian and Kamil to become ardently pro-Japanese (*japonisant*), creating a rift between the two men. Kamil eventually came to realize that his people themselves needed to develop their own strength, rather than hoping for a foreign power to help them gain independence.

Thus, Japan was chosen instead as a model for transforming Egypt into a modern state and achieving independence from Great Britain. However, there was no literature on Japan written in Arabic at the time, and Kamil himself did not know the Japanese language and had never set foot on Japanese soil. Moreover, even the literary works of Lafcadio Hearn, for example, had not been translated into French at that time. Kamil therefore drew on French-language works by social scientists such as Henry Dumolard’s *Le Japon politique, économique et social* and Félix Martin’s *Le Japon vrai*, as well as newspaper and magazine articles of the time. As a result of “years of reading and close study” of those works, he was able to write the first thesis on Japan in the Arab world, namely, *The Rising Sun* (*al-Shams al-Mushriqa*), published in Cairo, Egypt, in June 1904, during the Russo-Japanese War.

While the title *The Rising Sun* was an Arabic translation of the phrase used in Europe to refer to Japan, “the land of the rising sun,” here it was also meant to symbolize the rebirth of Japan as a remarkable new power in Asia.

In the preface to the book, he first describes Japan as follows.

Who is this nation who have risen from the grave, who have moved armies on land and sea with the sound of cannon and bombs, who have made political demands, who have defeated a nation [China] that she herself and the world believed to be undefeatable, who have

stunned people's minds with a victory so almost unbelievable that it has shocked all living things? [...] How could the world have witnessed such an exuberant power, a great power that could not help but shake the seas and numerous nations, a rising sun that shines on the whole world? Now everyone is asking questions about this nation with wonder and admiration.

Kamil wrote *The Rising Sun* in response to the curiosity and intellectual needs of the Arab people at a time when their interest in Japan was at its peak, thus the book's historical significance. "I believe that the history of Japan is the most instructive lesson for the nations of the East," he claimed, emphasizing his choice of Japan as a model for his nation.

Accordingly, as he indicates in the first part of the text, "Japanese history, politics, and society" is the subject of the whole book which, in summary, includes such chapters as: "The Japanese Archipelago," "A Brief History of Japan," and "The Meiji Restoration," all of which give an overview of the geography and history of Japan. Then, the key figures in the Meiji government are covered: "The Emperor (Mikado)," "Close Aides of the Emperor (Mikado)," "Marquis Itō [Hirobumi]," "Count Ōkuma [Shigenobu]," "Count Itagaki [Taisuke]," "Count Inoue [Kaoru]," and "Baron Ōkubo Tojimichi [*sic*]" (titles are in the original text)—are introduced in succession with their backgrounds, personalities, achievements, and other information, along with photographs. Furthermore, the chapters "Constitution," "House of Representatives and Political Parties," "Administration and Judiciary," and "Finance" explain the details of the government system, while the chapters "Education" and "Journalism" describe the society, and the book ends with a chapter on "Army and Navy."

This orderly overall structure was devised to best convey Kamil's insight into the "secret of Japan's development." That secret was none other than the patriotism (the spirit of nationalism known as "waṭaniya" in Arabic) of the entire nation, from the emperor (Mikado) down to the senior statesmen and common people, and the modern educational, political, economic, and military systems that were supported by that patriotism. Therefore, most of the book's content naturally consists of the emperor's and senior statesmen's achievements as an expression of their patriotism and a commentary on the modern institutions that Egypt should emulate.

The comparison between Japan and Egypt—the rising nation and the falling nation, the advancer and the retreater, the ruler and the ruled, the winner and the loser, the rising sun and the setting sun—inevitably causes pain in the hearts of Egyptians, Kamil says. However, the people's integrity and confidence in their own country (waṭaniya) are not unique to a chosen nation, but are, so to speak, acquired traits. Since this is so, how can the Egyptians fail to acquire them? He encouraged his compatriots, citing Japan as an example, saying that if the people rallied to a nationalist spirit under a powerful authority, they could build in a day what the constitutional states of the West could not achieve in many years.

Kamil was essentially a natural orator with a gift for winning the hearts and minds of his audience with his eloquence and rhetoric. His writings, especially the preface of the book, are full of high-toned romantic style which would have appealed to his

readers' sensibilities. Such rhetoric of his was thrown into the tide of the nationalist movement of the time and kept it going, thus contributing to the its upsurge.

In response to Kamil's *The Rising Sun*, Hafez Ibrahim (Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm), Egypt's national poet, published the poems, "A Young Woman of Japan" and "The Russo-Japanese War," further fueling "Japanese fever." In particular, "A Young Woman of Japan," a narrative poem created in April 1904 featuring a Japanese military nurse, was a work that expressed the fervent patriotism of the Japanese people by stating, "I am a Japanese woman. My resolve will not diminish, even should I face death" (translated by Sumi Akiko¹). The emperor (Mikado) teaches the people to respect their homeland as their father and mother, and when he orders them to do their utmost for the honor of their homeland, the people respond and struggle to fulfill his command. This was nothing less than a poetic paraphrase of the basic composition of the emperor and the patriotism (waṭanīya) of the people loyal to him which made modern Japan "the rising sun," as put forward by Kamil in his book of that name.

Consequently, Kamil's *The Rising Sun*, along with Hafez Ibrahim's work, became the fundamental work that defined subsequent Arab perceptions of Japan. Inspired by these works, Egyptians began to visit Japan for military or religious purposes, and wrote travelogues.

Of course, the information contained in *The Rising Sun* itself came from Europe and would not have been particularly new or unique. Even when viewed as the author's thesis on Japan, there was a strong tendency to glorify the factors that contributed to making Japan a modern, powerful nation. Moreover, we cannot ignore the one-sidedness of this praise and idealization, as indicated by the phrase, "Those who support Japan are those who support truth, progress, and nationalism." At that time in Japan, a number of books were published that held up British rule in Egypt as a model for Japanese colonial ventures on the continent and in Korea, but Kamil had no way of knowing such circumstances.

Nevertheless, the historical role played by *The Rising Sun* in Egypt and in the Arab world was very significant. At the very least, we should pay more attention to the curious fact that this kind of Japanology was written in the Third World during the Meiji era.

¹Sumi Akiko and Nishio Tetsuo (ed.), *The Personal and the Public in Literary Works of the Arab Regions*; Resources for Modern Middle East Studies No. 5, Center for Modern Middle East Studies, 2021, p. 45 (<https://www.minpaku.ac.jp/nihu/cmmes/activities/pdf/arabpoem.pdf>).

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