

*“An Egyptian Shaykh’s Literary World: Digitally Reconstructing Islamic Print Culture Through Mustafa Salama al-Naggari’s Books, Cairo 1870,” Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association 9, no. 2, 85-90.*

(Adam Mestyan, read by Malika Zeghal)

Thank you for allowing me to reflect on this article and the project Kathryn and I worked on.

When I arrived in the US in the fall of 2013 Roger Owen put me in touch with his student Kathryn Schwartz, who the following year also sent me her dissertation draft. I saw great promise in Kathryn’s enthusiasm and interest in Egypt’s book history. And so I was glad to share documents and ideas with her that I accumulated during my own research – for instance, my finding of the Castelli case that I sent her in 2014 and the list of Sheikh Mustafa Salama al-Naggari’s books, a project in which I involved her in 2017. Kathryn was enthusiastic about both findings and put them to good use. The first provided impetus to no less than two great articles, and the second I hoped to fuel the upgrading of her dissertation into a superb book.

Project Naggari is a digital reconstruction of an Islamic book collection in the estate of Mustafa Salama al-Naggari, an Egyptian poet, journalist, editor, and printer who died in 1870. He was a central figure in *Jam’iyyat al-Ma’arif*, the Society for Education, an important literary-political society in late Ottoman Egypt. The Society, whose one major pillar was Sheikh al-Naggari, started to compete in the printing market of Egypt by publishing books through subscription. Thus, when the sheikh died suddenly the inventory list of his books contained a number of titles which were on loan to him for editing and some which actually belonged to the Society. This is why Kathryn and I decided to call the project “literary world” and not a “library.”

Kathryn was excited because the inventory list is a unique clue to the Egyptian transition from manuscript to print culture, as about half of the list are manuscripts and half are printed titles. The inventory-maker also rendered a precise monetary value to each title in piasters. Kathryn easily took over the manual work from Sean Swanick, the Islamic and Middle East Studies Librarian at Duke University with whom I started this project. She enthusiastically reconstructed each title we could identify and enriched it with the available bibliographical data, so we achieved about fifty-two categories for each title, in addition to the values and other data in the inventory. Kathryn and I every month had a Zoom meeting during the pandemic and so we could accelerate the work. Indeed, by 2021 summer we completed the painstaking slow hand-gathering of the data and many rounds of cross-checking, which involved also an Egyptian colleague, Rizq Nuri.

Kathryn wanted to create a network analysis of commissioners, editors, and printers and, most importantly, to figure out a way to visualize the monetary values. This would have been her fantastic contribution to the economic aspect of the Egyptian printing market. I started to transform the XML data and build an HTML website with the help of Hugh Cayless, a Duke senior programmer, and Kathryn started to do the visualizations with the help of Jeff, her husband. When Violet was born she became also part of the project. In our last Zoom meeting in February 2022, despite being busy, Kathryn insisted that we publish a summary of this project in JOTSA’s special issue dedicated to digital humanities. After her passing, with the help of Hugh Cayless, I completed the website in the fall of 2022 (<https://projectnaggari.github.io/index.html>) but both the quantitative and proper qualitative analysis of the titles remain unfinished.