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# Biography as Cultural Diplomacy: Cold War Best Sellers in the Middle East

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## Abstract

Book diplomacy, as a form of cultural diplomacy, deserves more scholarly attention. The United States' Franklin Book Programs (1952–78) is a prime example of Cold War book diplomacy that aimed at indigenous publishing in developing countries and countering Soviet propaganda campaigns. This article examines the microhistory of two of Franklin's earliest and most successful publications in Cairo and Tehran: *This I Believe* and *Lives of Poor Boys Who Became Famous*. It aims to assess how these books achieved success amid the Middle East's tense environment and the then-low literacy rates in Egypt and Iran. The analysis includes examining the production and reception processes of these books, illustrating the crucial role of translation and adaptation in their success. By focusing on state and non-state actors and their public-private network, it demonstrates the value of microhistory in presenting a nuanced view of Cold War book diplomacy.

## Keywords

Cultural Cold War – translation and cultural diplomacy – book diplomacy – Franklin Book Programs – *This I Believe*

What can a man believe – in these days of cynicism, pessimism and doubting?<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

During the early Cold War years, defined by a climate of “cynicism, pessimism and doubting,” a notable Arabic book, partly translated from English and partly written in Arabic, surfaced in Cairo, Egypt, on October 5, 1953. Priced at eight piasters (about \$0.25) and boasting a 30,000-copy print run, *علمتي الحياة* (*Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh/Lessons Life Taught Me*) rapidly gained widespread popularity across the Arab world. The demand soared to such an extent that the publisher, Al-Hilal, had to purchase 250 copies from the market to meet its obligations for complimentary copies. In a parallel development in Iran in 1956, another book experienced a similar reception as well. The book, *مردان خود ساخته* (*Mardan-e Khodsakhteh/Self-Made Men*), a mix of translation and original, had a biography of Reza Shah, the founder of Pahlavi dynasty, penned by his son Mohammad Reza Shah.

What made these books resonate with Egyptians, the broader Arab world, and Iranians, despite not being religious texts? *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh* showcased the diverse life philosophies of both well-known and lesser-known Americans and Arabs. The Persian book, while not solely centered on the Persian King, had a common thread with the Arabic book: their American sponsor, Franklin Publications, Inc. (Franklin Book Programs from 1964; henceforth Franklin). Established during the Cold War, Franklin (1952–78) aimed at promoting Western, and particularly American, ideals and thought with the help of translated books in developing countries, particularly in the Middle East. Headquartered in New York, Franklin, not a publisher itself, collaborated with local publishers in 12 countries to produce approximately 3,000 translated books over 26 years, funding translations, printing paper, copyrights, etc.

The seed funding for Franklin itself was from the U.S. government and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) to spread American values overseas. Seeking autonomy from the USIA, primarily to distance itself from overt government ties but also from the existing USIA translation program as mentioned later in this section, Franklin also received funding from various sources, including foreign governments, U.S. foundations (e.g., Ford, Rockefeller), and USAID.<sup>2</sup> In the 1960s, it emerged that Franklin had received covert funding from the CIA

1 Morgan, E.P., ed. *This I Believe* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952).

2 Laugesen, A. “This Cold War-Era Publishing House Wanted to Share American Values with the World.” *Smithsonian*, July 13, 2018, <https://shorturl.at/qwCH4>.

through the Asia Foundation, a claim which Franklin countered by claiming unawareness of the CIA's involvement.<sup>3</sup> Given its complex funding sources and objectives, Franklin operated as a quasi-public actor within the field of diplomacy. Its close collaboration with agencies like the USIA and local entities in target countries, alongside covert CIA funding and public and private support, uniquely positioned Franklin to advance U.S. cultural diplomacy interests abroad, blurring the lines between public diplomacy and private initiative. With this unique positioning between public and private spheres, Franklin played a crucial role in translating and distributing books that aligned with American foreign policy objectives, thus serving as a cultural bridge between America, the West, and the Middle East. In this capacity, Franklin significantly contributed to the cultural diplomacy efforts during this era.

This era in the Middle East was marked by rising nationalism and decolonization sentiments, particularly in a world polarized post-WWII.<sup>4</sup> Countries like Egypt and Iran, though not central Cold War battlegrounds, were involved early on (Egypt through the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and Iran given the 1946 Azerbaijan crisis).<sup>5</sup> They adopted a stance of neutrality amid the Truman Doctrine and containment policy, leveraging the situation to pursue national goals.<sup>6</sup> Egypt, for instance, sought Soviet support for arms, while Iran positioned itself as an American ally after the 1953 coup. These tensions manifested in a cultural battleground, where books like *Allamatnū al-Hayāh* and *Mardan-e Khodsakhteh* were used not just for education but also as cultural diplomacy tools for subtly promoting American ideals, aligning with the U.S.'s broader strategy of countering Soviet influence.

American efforts to win "hearts and minds" relied heavily on books,<sup>7</sup> which played a pivotal role in fulfilling foreign policy aims. While using books, whether ideological or not, in U.S. cultural diplomacy was not a new concept, their strategic importance increased during this period.<sup>8</sup> The USIA sponsored

3 Ibid.

4 See Fraser, C. "Decolonization and the Cold War." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. R.H. Immerman and P. Goede (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Hourani, A. *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

5 See Fawcett, L. *Iran and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Boyle, S. "Egypt." In *Encyclopedia of the Cold War*, eds. R. van Dijk, et al. (London: Routledge, 2013).

6 Fraser, C. "Decolonization and the Cold War," 474.

7 Yaqub, S. "The Cold War and the Middle East." In *The Cold War in the Third World*, ed. R.J. McMahon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11–26.

8 See Barnhisel, G. "Cold Warriors of the Book: American Book Programs in the 1950s." *Book History* 13 (2010), 185–217; Lacy, D. "The Role of American Books Abroad." *Foreign Affairs* 34 (3) (1956), 405–17; Hench, J.B. *Books as Weapons: Propaganda, Publishing, and the Battle for Global Markets in the Era of World II* (Cornell University Press, 2010). On the role of books in the 1953 U.S. Doctrinal Program, see PSB D-33/2, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80R0173R003200050006-0.pdf>.

books in translation through its Book Translation Program, often obscuring their origins and primarily targeting “elites and intellectuals.”<sup>9</sup> When Franklin established its presence in Cairo (1953) and Tehran (1954), it sought to expand beyond the USIA’s modest publication record, aiming to reach a more diverse audience in the Middle East and developing countries. Franklin benefited from its first President Datus C. Smith’s publishing experience and the network he built at Princeton.<sup>10</sup>

Book diplomacy, defined here as using books in cultural diplomacy to achieve foreign policy goals, involves state and non-state cooperation in activities like book translation programs, book donations, book exchanges, and the like.<sup>11</sup> As a prominent example of Cold War book diplomacy, Franklin attracted limited scholarly attention until the 2010s,<sup>12</sup> with a significant breakthrough in 2007 following an article by Louise Robbins and subsequent works by Amanda Laugesen based on archival records.<sup>13</sup> Laugesen’s work situates Franklin within an imperialist framework, noting its tactful navigation between Cold War ideals and local needs. This perspective inspired further research on Franklin’s impact in Iran and the Arab world, highlighting local participation in Iran and

9 Barnhisel, G. “Cold Warriors of the Book.” 200. On cultural diplomacy, see Scott-Smith, G. “Transatlantic Cultural Relations, Soft Power, and the Role of US Cultural Diplomacy in Europe.” *European Foreign Affairs Review* 24 (2019), 21–42.

10 See Haddadian-Moghaddam, E. “The Cultural Cold War in the Middle East: William Faulkner and Franklin Book Programs.” *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 15 (3) (2020), 442.

11 For a full discussion, see Haddadian-Moghaddam, E., and G. Scott-Smith. “Book Diplomacy in the Cultural Cold War and Beyond: An Introduction.” *Book Diplomacy in the Cultural Cold War: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

12 Cf. Smith, D.C. “Franklin Book Program.” *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Vol. x, ed. E Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persia Press, 2000) 187–90; and Filstrup, J.M. “Franklin Book Program/Tehran.” *International Library Review* 8 (1976), 431–50. Despite limited public access to primary documents in Iran, there has been an active discourse on Franklin’s legacy. Since 2021, online access to some documents became available through the Elmi va Farhangi Museum and Document Center, although Elmi va Farhangi Publishing had continued this legacy without acknowledging Franklin. A similar situation exists in Egypt, with archival access remaining difficult; see the authors’ study of Franklin’s legacy: Khalifa, A., and E. Haddadian-Moghaddam. “Translation, Soft Power and Cold War Book Diplomacy: Franklin Book Programs’ Legacy in Words, Images and Memory.” *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* (forthcoming).

13 Robbins, L.S. “Publishing American Values: The Franklin Book Programs as Cold War Cultural Diplomacy.” *Library Trends* 55 (3) (2007), 638–50; Laugesen, A. *Taking Books to the World: American Publishers and the Cultural Cold War* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017); Laugesen, A. “Books for the World: American Book Programs in the Developing World, 1948–1968.” In *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda, and the Cold War*, eds. G. Barnhisel and C. Turner (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

Franklin's role in spreading American culture,<sup>14</sup> despite hegemonic critiques.<sup>15</sup> In the Arab world, Franklin is perceived as having contributed to creating a sanitized, positive American image through soft power.<sup>16</sup>

This article investigates the microhistory of two of Franklin's early and most successful books in Arabic: *This I Believe* (Morgan 1952) and *Lives of Poor Boys Who Became Famous* (Bolton 1885/1922) in Arabic and Persian. We argue for the importance of a microhistorical approach to better understand the complexities of book diplomacy, the interplay of various agendas, and the motivations of both state and non-state actors involved.

In contrast to broader, macrohistorical approaches, microhistory, a methodology in modern historiography that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s, emphasizes a thorough, detailed examination of specific subjects or events.<sup>17</sup> Unlike traditional historiographical methods that often focus on broad historical trends and large-scale events, microhistorical analysis explores the minutiae of history, offering deep insights into smaller, often overlooked aspects and their wider implications.<sup>18</sup> Akin to fractals,<sup>19</sup> microhistory uncovers "lost histories"<sup>20</sup> by intensely analyzing small-scale subjects, thereby seeking to understand larger phenomena through detailed examination of these specific instances. This method, focusing on synecdoche and social agency,<sup>21</sup> highlights individuals as active agents in history.<sup>22</sup> Through microhistory, this article uncovers the energy invested in each book project by the involved parties and highlights the empowering roles of local participants, often reaching beyond Cold

14 For propaganda, see Travis, H. "Books in the Cold War: Beyond 'Culture' and 'Information.'" In *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, eds. J. Auerbach and R. Castronovo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 180–200. For a counter-argument, see Haddadian-Moghaddam, E. "The Cultural Cold War and the Circulation of World Literature: Insights from Franklin Book Programs in Tehran." *Journal of World Literature* 3 (1), 371–90; see also Laugesen A. and M. Rahimi-Moghaddam. "Franklin Book Programs in Iran (ca 1953–1978) and the Politics of Translation during the Cold War." *Translation Studies* 15 (2) (2022), 155–72.

15 Ganji, M. *Education and the Cultural Cold War in the Middle East: The Franklin Book Programs in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2023).

16 Cf. Arrabai, A.M. *Translation and Image-building in the Cold War*. Ph.D. dissertation (Kent State University, 2019); and Assiri, A.M. *Translation and the Projection of the American Soft Power*. Ph.D. dissertation (State University of New York at Binghamton, 2021).

17 Peabody, S. "Microhistory, Biography, Fiction." *Transatlantica* 2 (2012), 1–19.

18 Ginzburg, C. "Microhistory." *Critical Theory* 20 (1) (1993), 10–35.

19 Magnússon, S.G., and I.M. Szijártó. *What is Microhistory?* (London: Routledge, 2013).

20 Peabody, S. "Microhistory, Biography, Fiction," 2.

21 Magnússon, S.G., and I.M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory?*

22 For a definition of "agents" and "agency," see Khalifa, A., ed. *Translators Have Their Say?* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2014), 9–17.

War imperatives. The detailed, archival-based<sup>23</sup> study of these books paints a nuanced picture of American cultural diplomacy in the Middle East, illustrating the collaborative efforts of Franklin's staff, state, non-state actors, and local partners in promoting American ideals and facilitating intercultural dialogue.

The study's significance lies in its thorough exploration of the subtle aspects of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. Utilizing a microhistorical approach, it assesses the production, distribution, and reception of these books, unveiling the various layers of cultural diplomacy efforts influenced by diverse elements, supported by archival sources, including the previously untapped Franklin/Cairo archives. This research provides a nuanced view of how book diplomacy initiatives like Franklin's shape cross-cultural perceptions and bridge cultural divides. It emphasizes the need to recognize the diverse contributions and interactions in cultural diplomacy, moving beyond conventional propaganda-focused narratives, and highlights the crucial, yet often unrecognized, roles of local actors. With this background and Franklin's overarching strategy as a context, the study proceeds to examine specific microhistorical instances of publishing the above-noted books, analyzing their outcomes and significance within this strategic framework.

### "The Best Answer"

The 1952 bestseller *This I Believe*, an anthology based on CBS journalist Edward Murrow's radio broadcasts and newspaper column, achieved widespread acclaim for its profound reflections. M. Lincoln Schuster, its publisher, encapsulated its essence, describing it as a collection of "the spiritual and moral signposts that have meaning in an age of tension and confusion when every man is searching for a key, a faith, and a road to happiness."<sup>24</sup> The concept for "This I Believe" originated from Ward Wheelock, an advertising executive and founder of Help Inc., along with Murrow and Raymond Swing. Targeting the material-spiritual imbalance of the time, the program highlighted personal beliefs of successful individuals, resonating with vast audiences in the U.S.

23 In this article, we utilized Franklin's archives from two main sources: the Franklin Book Programs Records at Princeton University Library and the Franklin/Cairo archives at the Egyptian Society for the Dissemination of World Culture and Knowledge. Our citation method is straightforward: "P2/1" signifies "P" for Princeton, "2" for box number, and "1" for folder number. For Cairo, "C" denotes Cairo, "TIB" is the *This I Believe* folder, "LPB" for the *Lives of Poor Boys* folder, and "LPG" for the *Lives of Poor Girls* folder. Archival sources are cited by date and location only for simplicity, unless multiple documents in the same folder share a date, or when referencing different archives not mentioned in this footnote.

24 November 12, 1952. P227/5.



and beyond. The book version, featuring one hundred scripts, was released by Simon and Schuster offering spiritual and moral guidance in a tumultuous era.

This book caught the attention of Smith, who, in 1952, left Princeton University Press to lead Franklin's operation of sponsoring primarily American books in translation. Franklin's role in this endeavor was part of a broader strategy in Cold War cultural diplomacy, aimed at influencing perceptions and reducing misunderstandings between the U.S. and other nations. Smith's field trip in the fall of 1952 to the Middle East revealed an Arab dilemma about American intentions, underscoring a notable cultural and political divide. He, along with Franklin's board directors and, crucially, the American government, recognized that the issues *This I Believe* addressed within the American context might similarly resonate in addressing one of Franklin's less publicized goals; that is, the "Arab problem" – a complex mixture of deep-rooted "resentment," "suspicion," and "ignorance" towards the West, especially the U.S.<sup>25</sup>

This belief emerged from the post-WWII climate, where *This I Believe* was celebrated as a "storehouse of new strength and courage," embodying "the essential dignity of all human beings, the existence of moral values, and the freedoms which made [America] great,"<sup>26</sup> thereby addressing the "American problem." Concurrently, in the Arab world and the broader Middle East, profound skepticism towards Western, primarily American, intentions was exacerbated by interventions in the affairs of countries like Egypt and Iran, and by American support for the partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel.<sup>27</sup> In response, Franklin's strategy aimed to address the need for effective American cultural diplomacy initiatives overseas and the pervasive "Arab problem," and *This I Believe* seemed to be a perfect step towards a solution. This response promoted a nuanced approach, fostering mutual respect between the Arab world and the U.S., challenging Arab views of Western and American exploitation, and paving the way for Arab-Western collaboration.

### *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh: This I Believe in Arabic*

On April 7, 1953, Smith wrote to Ahmad Lutfi Al-Sayyid, a prominent Egyptian academic and politician, seeking his views on Franklin's overall plans, especially the suitability of the Arabic *This I Believe* project. Al-Sayyid recommended

25 Lacy, D. October 27, 1952, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB78/propaganda%20078.pdf>.

26 Murrow, E. *This I Believe*, blurb.

27 Lacy, D. October 27, 1952.



Ahmad Amin, a leading Egyptian historian, writer and then Head of the Cultural Division of the Arab League to spearhead the project. Amin, initially hesitant due to Franklin's connections to the American government, was persuaded by Al-Sayyid's argument about the value of spreading universal knowledge, saying he was "willing to cooperate even with Satan if it means spreading knowledge."<sup>28</sup>

Smith, alongside Hassan Galal Aroussy, a former diplomat and lawyer who was selected to manage Franklin's Cairo office, met with Amin to discuss the project. After reading the book, Amin expressed delight with the project because of "the possibility for good" he hoped it could do and "even offered to sponsor the translation."<sup>29</sup> When Aroussy suggested an adapted edition with new Arabic contributions and selected chapters from the original book, Amin was even more "pleased."<sup>30</sup> In his preface to *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, Amin expressed that a motive for accepting was that "knowledge is universal for all" and that "the notions expressed in the book fit my personal mood."<sup>31</sup> Amin also saw the book as a means to enhance Arab understanding of American perspectives and vice versa.<sup>32</sup>

The initial plan for publishing *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh* involved joint editorship by an American and an Arab editor.<sup>33</sup> John Badeau, the former president of the American University in Cairo, selected 25 core statements for translation, along with a few supplementary ones, while Amin was responsible for soliciting an equal number of statements from prominent Arab figures. Amin was also tasked with writing the preface for the Arabic edition. However, the final book credited Amin solely with the editorial work, with only a brief mention of Badeau in the preface.<sup>34</sup> This decision was likely influenced by concerns from both Franklin and Al-Hilal, the publisher, that featuring an American name on the cover would adversely affect the book's reception in the Arab world, given the strained relations at that time. This echoes Aroussy's observation to Smith that many Arab publishers were wary of projects that "might smell of propaganda or politics."<sup>35</sup>

Amin's initial preface did not satisfy Aroussy, who objected to some passages "from a policy" viewpoint.<sup>36</sup> Aroussy did not detail his concerns, but

28 Amin, H. *Fī Bayt Aḥmad Amīn* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbulī, 1989), 8.

29 Undated. P227/6.

30 Ibid.

31 Amin, A. "Preface." In *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, ed. A. Amin (Cairo: Al-Hilal, 1953), 12.

32 Ibid.

33 April 20, 1953. C/TIB.

34 Amin, A. "Preface," 11.

35 February 3, 1954. P194/2.

36 July 29, 1953. C/TIB.

we deduce the reasons later in the article. He informed Smith that Amin was “generous and reasonable enough” to incorporate the proposed modifications, making the preface “satisfactory” and ensuring “a good and fair reading.”<sup>37</sup> Smith endorsed these changes and expressed his appreciation for how Amin portrayed the book in the preface, commending him for capturing its essence effectively and for presenting it as “such a splendid vehicle for Arab-American cooperation.”<sup>38</sup> Emphasizing local involvement in the project was pivotal to Franklin’s diplomacy efforts. Sharing the revised preface with Parker May of the International Information Administration, Smith remarked, “I hope you fellows are as excited as I am about this example of the impressive benefits that come to us through this kind of local sponsorship in our diplomatic initiatives,”<sup>39</sup> underscoring the significance of such collaborations in cultural diplomacy.

As Amin could “not read English easily,”<sup>40</sup> Mohamed Beeker Khalil, an employee at the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and Mokhtar Al-Wakeel, an employee at the Cultural Division of the Arab League, were assigned the translations, which Amin reviewed for style and accuracy. Amin also decided to change the title, explaining, “When I read the book, I found the title misleading, as it would be interpreted as a book that explores religions, and I saw that the best title for this book in Arabic is *‘Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh.*”<sup>41</sup> This concern was shared by Aroussy, who had already suggested a title change to Amin to “avoid the specifically religious connotation of ‘Believe,’” mindful of potential resistance from conservative Muslims to “join with Christians in a book with the idea of ‘belief’ in it.”<sup>42</sup>

### In Search of a Publisher

After surveying Egypt’s book market, Franklin chose to publish with Dar Al-Hilal as part of its then-successful *Kitab Al-Hilal* series. This monthly pocket-size series had wide distribution using newsstands and street peddlers.<sup>43</sup> Given Al-Hilal’s extensive distribution network both inside and outside Egypt, it could publish at low costs – eight Egyptian piasters per book (Fig. 1) – aligning with

37 Ibid.

38 August 6, 1953. C/TIB.

39 August 4, 1953. C/TIB.

40 February 26, 1954. P227/6.

41 Amin, A. “Preface,” 10.

42 April 2, 1953. P157/9.

43 August 4, 1953. P227/6.



FIGURE 1 Covers of Franklin's first Arabic books and an earlier book from the Kitab Al-Hilal series, each priced at 8 piasters.

its philosophy of “providing free culture to all.”<sup>44</sup> This resonated with Franklin’s mission of offering its sponsored books affordably, in an effort to counter Soviet book diplomacy strategies like those of Mir and Progress Publishers.<sup>45</sup> One of Franklin’s key objectives was to support publishing materials that countered and clarified Soviet “tyranny and imperialism, especially as it affects the Middle East, Islam, and the opportunity for freedom and national self-development in nations under its control.”<sup>46</sup>

Franklin negotiated a special agreement with Al-Hilal’s owner, Albert Ancona, to publish their first two books in Cairo.<sup>47</sup> Initially, Al-Hilal was “scared stiff”<sup>48</sup> about the project’s success given Franklin’s American connections. Smith reassured Ancona, stating, “Nothing is ever certain in book-publishing, but I myself believe these books will go well ... there will be a possibility of future cooperation on other books in your monthly series.”<sup>49</sup> Concerned about potential backlash, Al-Hilal set special conditions, including the removal of “published in cooperation with Franklin Publications” from the books, a standard Franklin requirement.<sup>50</sup> The copyright notice was instead worded as, “the rights of publishing this book in Arabic are reserved to Al-Hilal by special arrangement through Franklin.”<sup>51</sup> Al-Hilal also demanded control over any paid publicity in Egypt and the right to make adjustments to align with the Kitab Al-Hilal series’s format and local standards. Additionally, Taher Tanahi, the series’s general editor, would evaluate new Arabic chapters for appropriateness and publishing suitability. Eventually, Franklin “went a really long distance” and acquiesced to these terms, recognizing the importance of partnering with Al-Hilal for their mission’s success.<sup>52</sup> Considering the publicity condition, Smith urged Ancona to make extra efforts to promote the books. While agreeing to the altered copyright notice, Franklin stipulated that the

44 Atiyah, R. *Humūm Miṣrī* (Cairo: Al-Maktab al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth, 2015), 42.

45 There is little research on Mir Publishers. Insights on Soviet book diplomacy are available in Barghoorn, F.C. *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Walker, G. *Soviet Book Publishing Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and Dobrenko, E. *Late Stalinism: The Aesthetics of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020). Thanks are due to Alexander Erokhin for providing this information.

46 Lacy, D. October 27, 1952.

47 April 26, 1953. C/LPG.

48 August 12, 1953. P227/6.

49 April 26, 1953. C/LPG.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

books' back covers highlight their popularity with American audiences to attract Arab readers and entice them to purchase the book.<sup>53</sup>

The initial plan was to produce 10,000 Arabic copies of *This I Believe*, but the first print run was eventually expanded to 30,000 copies. Al-Hilal was responsible for the printing, publishing, and promotion of the book. Franklin was responsible for managing all other aspects from coordinating with editors to securing new statements until the manuscript was finalized. Franklin also assumed the financial responsibilities for translation rights, editors' fees, payments to authors of new material, and translators. While granting Al-Hilal exclusive rights to publish the book in Arabic for three years, Franklin remained proprietor of other forms beyond the printed book. Additionally, Franklin exclusively held the Arabic-language rights, maintaining the sole authority to publish and permit others to publish any part of the book.<sup>54</sup>

*Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh* was published on October 5, 1953 and its sales were extraordinary, with reports indicating that all 30,000 copies were sold within just one day – a remarkable achievement that distinguished it in the Kitab Al-Hilal series and the Arab publishing industry.<sup>55</sup> The book received acclaim even from critics and conservative groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, for its promotion of local values.<sup>56</sup> The blend of Eastern and Western perspectives was praised for enriching socio-political discourse, with *Akher Saa* newspaper calling it “a sort of complete university in which one learns how to widen the horizons of one's life and to make one's outlook on the world deeper and one's ideas sharper.”<sup>57</sup> Amin's choice of title quickly gained widespread recognition in the Arab world, validating his and Franklin's initial concerns, mentioned earlier herein, and underscoring the success of Franklin's Arabic adaptation of *This I Believe*. Reflecting on this success, Aroussy wrote to Smith that “the title is being now used unsparingly in magazine heading accounts by different people,” a testament to its influence.<sup>58</sup> The book's success and, in turn, the efficacy of Franklin's diplomacy efforts, evident in their careful choice of content, publisher, and emphasis on promoting local values in collaboration with locals, were so significant that, as Aroussy noted, “it is being used as a reading book in some – or at least one that I know of – secondary schools in Cairo.”<sup>59</sup>

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53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 October 7, 1953, P227/8.

56 October 13, 1953. C/*TIB*.

57 *Akher Saa*, November 3, 1953.

58 February 3, 1954. P194/2.

59 Ibid.

### *ʿIṣāmiyūn ʿUẓamāʾ: Lives of Poor Boys in Arabic*

Following the successful partnership with Al-Hilal for the publication of *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, Franklin's next venture involved the adaptation of another influential work: Sara Bolton's *Lives of Poor Boys Who Became Famous* (1885/1922). The book, which offers inspirational stories of mainly Western figures who achieved fame through hard "work and will,"<sup>60</sup> had sustained popularity, selling 2,000–4,000 copies annually well into the 1960s.<sup>61</sup> Writing to Farid Abu-Hadid – a prominent Egyptian historian and the editor selected by Franklin for the Arabic edition – Smith mentioned that Bolton's book was among the "most strongly recommended by various [Franklin] advisers."<sup>62</sup> Choosing Abu-Hadid as the editor seemed unassailable, as it aligned with Franklin's vision of having the volume preceded by an introduction by "an Egyptian of distinction" to underscore the motivational value of these stories.<sup>63</sup>

The original text comprised 22 chapters, each focusing on inspirational figures from various countries, but none from the Arab world. Following the successful model of *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, Franklin aimed to blend new Arabic biographies with English translations. Abu-Hadid's responsibilities included selecting and commissioning Arabic chapters, contributing one on an Arab personality, and penning a brief introduction.<sup>64</sup> This approach, absorbing insights from *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, acknowledged that Arab readers were keen on narratives where Americans and Arabs jointly embody ideals of justice, wisdom, and ethical values. Abu-Hadid, like Amin before him, appreciated the project's potential for cultural exchange and readily committed to it, recognizing the value in introducing Western audiences to Arab personalities by potentially translating their biographies and sharing Western biographies with Arab readers.<sup>65</sup>

Franklin's proposal to Abu-Hadid suggested removing eight of the 22 original chapters from Bolton's book on personalities of less global appeal; that is, those not aligning with Franklin's underlying diplomacy objectives. It also proposed adding five to six new chapters on inspirational Arab figures, with provisions to cut more original chapters for suitable length. Smith recommended 15 personalities from Bolton's book for potential inclusion in the Arabic edition.

60 Bolton, S. *Lives of Poor Boys Who Became Famous* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1885), iv.

61 *Publishers Weekly*, November 14, 1960, 10.

62 April 3, 1953. C/LPB.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Abu-Hadid, F. "Introduction." In *ʿIṣāmiyūn ʿUẓamāʾ*, ed. F. Abu-Hadid (Cairo: Al-Hilal, 1954), 13.



Of these, nine were ultimately selected for the final version, excluding the biographies of Samuel Johnson, Mozart, William Garrison, Ezra Cornell, Edward Bok, and Henry Ford. Franklin recommended further exclusions – David Farragut, Ole Bull, John Rockefeller, Pope Pius, Calvin Coolidge, Will Rogers, and George Washington Carver – deeming them less “interest[ing] to non-American audiences.”<sup>66</sup> However, Carver’s biography, which Smith highlighted as the story of an “American Negro scientist,”<sup>67</sup> was included, arguably due to his inspiring story being more relatable and resonating with Arab readers.

While existing sources and archival materials do not explicitly state the reasons for excluding figures like Coolidge and Pope Pius, insights can be drawn from similar decisions in related projects. In a handwritten note, Smith advised against including Eleanor Roosevelt’s biography in the Arabic edition of Bolton’s *Lives of Poor Girls*, citing her name’s “unfortunate overtones” in the Arab world.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Charles Taft’s contribution was excluded from *Allamānī al-Ḥayāh* due to its pronounced “missionary slant,”<sup>69</sup> deemed unfit for the Arab context. Therefore, it can be inferred that the exclusion of figures like Coolidge and Pope Pius was based on similar reasoning. Coolidge’s sympathy for a Jewish National Homeland in Palestine and the potential religious implications of Pope Pius’s inclusion likely influenced their exclusion, aligning with Franklin’s earlier goals to make a “special effort” to “emphasize U.S. neutrality between Israel and the Arabs, an awareness of Arab rights in the controversy, and a determination to help the whole area achieve stability and prosperity.”<sup>70</sup> Such decisions were integral to Franklin’s diplomacy strategy, ensuring balanced content and sensitivity to local context and expectations while avoiding religious connotations, as evidenced by their earlier decision to modify the title of *This I Believe*.

The final agreement between Abu-Hadid and Franklin/Cairo stated that the book would include 20 chapters, with an equal split between original chapters on well-known characters and new chapters on notable Arabo-Islamic figures. Abu-Hadid suggested prominent figures like Taha Hussein and Ahmad Amin for writing the new biographies, also indicating that close friends of the chosen figures could be better suited for writing some of the biographies. Abu-Hadid and Saad El-Ghazzali, an English graduate, undertook the translations. Abu-Hadid noted in the introduction that El-Ghazzali completed the translations

66 February 11, 1953. P194/2.

67 April 3, 1953. C/LPB.

68 Undated. C/LPG.

69 July 29, 1953. C/TIB.

70 Lacy, D. October 27, 1952.



while serving in the Egyptian Army,<sup>71</sup> a point underscoring patriotism and countering potential criticism about Franklin's American ties. Logistically, Al-Hilal provided the paper for the project, while Franklin covered printing and publication costs, retaining the rights to reprint further editions in the first three years without additional payments to authors or translators.<sup>72</sup> Franklin also committed to promoting some new Arabic chapters in English,<sup>73</sup> handling related royalties and fees.<sup>74</sup>

The book featured prominent Arabs like Saad Zaghloul, Egyptian revolutionary and statesman; Jurji Zaydan, Lebanese novelist; and Kahlil Gibran, Lebanese-American writer, with their biographies written by renowned authors. Alongside Carver, the book also featured Thomas Edison, Charles Dickens, the Wright Brothers, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, James Watt, Michael Faraday, and Giuseppe Garibaldi. An intriguing aspect from the archives is that the biography of Egyptian economic leader Talaat Harb, purportedly written by his son-in-law Mohamed Rushdy, then-president of Bank Misr, was ghostwritten by Taher Tanahi. The biography of renowned Egyptian poet Hafez Ibrahim, although uncredited, was also written by Tanahi.<sup>75</sup> Writing to Smith, Aroussy expressed frustration over how the Arabic version of Bolton's book turned out to be somewhat monopolized by Tanahi, the general editor of the *Kitab Al-Hilal* series. As with *Allamatinī al-Hayāh*, Tanahi was responsible for evaluating Arabic chapters intended for Al-Hilal's edition of Bolton's book to determine their suitability for publication. Under his supervision, Tanahi was "too smart" in pressuring Franklin/Cairo to rush the manuscript's completion and insisted on including numerous original articles.<sup>76</sup> This tactic impeded the hiring of other authors and enabled him to offer his services last minute, seemingly helping Franklin/Cairo out of its predicament.<sup>77</sup>

As with *Allamatinī al-Hayāh*, Al-Hilal handled the book's publicity and marketing, with Franklin providing input.<sup>78</sup> On February 5, 1954, Franklin

71 Abu-Hadid, F. "Introduction," 15.

72 April 26, 1953. C/LPG.

73 Although promised, Franklin-sponsored Arabic (and Persian) contributions were not published in translation. Archival evidence indicates some steps were taken, like plans for an international *This I Believe* edition with Arabic content in 1956 (June 3, 1953; C/TIB). However, those plans ceased when the "This I Believe" program abruptly ended in 1955 following Wheelock's unexpected disappearance and declared death.

74 April 30, 1953. P194/2.

75 December 14, 1953. C/LPG. See also October 28, 1953. P194/2.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 April 26, 1953. C/LPG.

became “the parents of a new book.”<sup>79</sup> At Abu-Hadid’s suggestion, it was published under the title *ʿIṣāmīyūn ʿUẓamāʾ* (*Great Self-Made Men*), as he felt this title better reflected the book’s theme and content.<sup>80</sup> The subtitle “from the East and West” was arguably added to draw a parallel to and capitalize on the success of Amin’s book, given its substantial reception in Egyptian and Arab markets.

*ʿIṣāmīyūn ʿUẓamāʾ* also achieved notable success and acclaim, with an estimated 25,000–30,000 copies printed.<sup>81</sup> For instance, the Baghdad-based newspaper *Al-Bilad* highly praised the book, lauding its inspirational impact and stressing the importance of biographies in enticing readers to adopt the featured individuals as role models.<sup>82</sup> Reporting the book’s success to Franklin/New York, Franklin/Cairo shared the overwhelming public response, indicating rapid sales at newsstands.<sup>83</sup> The resounding success of *ʿIṣāmīyūn ʿUẓamāʾ*, alongside *ʿAllamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, highlights Franklin’s – and translation’s – significant role and enduring legacy in its initiatives to promote cultural diplomacy.

### *Hādhā Madhhabī: The Second Arabic Volume of This I Believe*

Building on the momentum generated by *ʿAllamatnī al-Ḥayāh* and *ʿIṣāmīyūn ʿUẓamāʾ*, Franklin focused on expanding the *This I Believe* series in Arabic. With the ongoing contributions to the American radio program and the success of *ʿAllamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, the attention shifted to developing a second Arabic volume of *This I Believe*. A letter from Donald Cameron of Franklin/New York to Kenneth Cragg, editor of *The Muslim World*, indicated Franklin’s interest in creating “a second volume of the same nature” as *ʿAllamatnī al-Ḥayāh*.<sup>84</sup> This stemmed from Al-Hilal’s reluctance to reprint the first volume to capitalize on its success, “a new [concept for Arab] publishers,” coupled with Franklin’s concern that a reprint “would not receive adequate distribution.”<sup>85</sup> The concept for the “next Murrow” project began to materialize in February 1954 when Aroussy and Smith discussed the possibility of a “sequel with fresh contributions.”<sup>86</sup>

79 February 4, 1954. C/LPB.

80 Abu-Hadid, F. “Introduction,” 16.

81 February 8, 1954. P194/2.

82 *Al-Bilad*, March 11, 1954.

83 February 8, 1954. P194/2.

84 December 9, 1953. P194/2.

85 Ibid.

86 February 3, 1954. P194/2.

Franklin/Cairo had “every reason to expect” that a second volume would be equally successful.<sup>87</sup> Aroussy informed Smith that he had approached Taha Hussein to edit the new volume, and Hussein expressed interest. Smith saw great potential in the project, believing that “the Middle Eastern reader is interested in Americans and Arabs jointly espousing principles of justice, wisdom, and moral values,” thereby enhancing cross-cultural understanding.<sup>88</sup>

Two factors necessitated the change of editor from Amin to Hussein. Firstly, Amin’s health was deteriorating,<sup>89</sup> and secondly, Amin had a financial disagreement with the American Council of Learned Societies over the publishing of his manuscript, *Leaders of Reform*.<sup>90</sup> Feeling offended, Amin decided to cease collaboration with any American institution. Hussein, a highly influential Arab writer and intellectual, was fluent in both French and English, making him an ideal choice for the job.<sup>91</sup>

Regarding the new volume’s structure, the project required the editor to both select contributions from existing English sources and commission new Arabic entries. Hussein was also tasked with overseeing the translations.<sup>92</sup> Arabic contributors were encouraged to share their “inmost desires, ideals, fundamental faith, and intimate living philosophies.”<sup>93</sup> Following Aroussy’s advice, the volume included a section on the philosophies of “immortal” historical figures<sup>94</sup> known for their enduring legacies, such as Al-Ghazzali, a prominent Islamic philosopher and theologian, and Al-Afghani, a well-known activist and mystic philosopher. Despite initial plans, the new volume did not include a contribution from the first Egyptian President Mohamed Naguib, which was an updated version of his earlier contribution published in *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*. Although the archives provide limited details about this editorial decision, it appears that Naguib’s exclusion was related to the political transition to Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954. Nasser’s statement, now as president of Egypt, replaced Naguib’s as the opening statement of the new volume, with promotional materials prominently highlighting Nasser’s contribution,<sup>95</sup> possibly signaling the state’s endorsement of the book and, by extension, Franklin’s efforts.

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87 Ibid.

88 March 8, 1954. P194/2.

89 ‘Uwaydah, K. *Aḥmad Amīn* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 1995) 140–41.

90 August 16, 1953. P194/2.

91 Ibid.

92 March 8, 1954. P194/2.

93 November 12, 1952. P227/5.

94 February 3, 1954. P194/2.

95 Cf. *Al-Akhbar*, November 5, 1954.

To distinguish this volume from *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh* while maintaining the essence of *This I Believe*, Aroussy proposed the title *Hādhā Madhhabī* (*This is My Philosophy*), considering it “more representative of the subject matter and yet void of the prejudice of relation to religion.”<sup>96</sup> This title was adopted, and Hussein’s volume was published on March 5, 1955. *Hādhā Madhhabī* received a positive reception, with early reports from Franklin/Cairo suggesting that “its reception has been even stronger” than that of *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*. Feedback regarding the book’s subject matter, contributions, and the quality of translation were “most favourable and complimentary.”<sup>97</sup> Much like *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*, *Hādhā Madhhabī* appealed to a diverse Arab readership from “almost all walks of life.”<sup>98</sup> The successful continuation of the *This I Believe* series in Arabic cemented Franklin’s reputation in the Arab world, showcasing its effective cultural diplomacy and reinforcing its legacy as a catalyst for intellectual and cross-cultural understanding.

### New Editions of Arabic Bestsellers

Following the success of the initial Arabic editions, Franklin agreed to Al-Hilal republishing *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh* and *Hādhā Madhhabī* outside the Kitāb Al-Hilal series to keep the books in circulation rather than out of print. The reprints, now part of Al-Hilal’s new serial publication, were priced significantly higher at 25 piasters compared to the original eight, indicating their enhanced stature. Discussions started with Aroussy’s late 1957 letter outlining Al-Hilal’s revised reprint plans,<sup>99</sup> which Smith welcomed. Emil Zeidan, Al-Hilal’s owner, confirmed a new agreement where Franklin would receive 100 rather than the initially contracted 250 free copies of each title, with the difference offset by free advertising space in *Al-Hilal* magazine.<sup>100</sup> Aroussy accepted this arrangement on Franklin’s behalf.<sup>101</sup>

These editions were distinct in format and design, reflecting their evolving nature and adaptation over time (Fig. 2). The 1958 edition of *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh* was particularly notable for merging content from both Amin’s first and Hussein’s second Arabic volumes. Interestingly, this edition exclusively credited Amin as the sole editor, despite including content from Hussein’s

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 August 2, 1955. C/TIB.

99 October 30, 1957. C/TIB.

100 November 6, 1957. C/TIB.

101 November 10, 1957. C/TIB.



FIGURE 2  
A sample cover of Al-Hilal's reprints:  
*Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*.

volume. This decision, made by Aroussy following Amin's death in 1954, was supported by Smith. It was influenced by a disagreement between Franklin/Cairo and the then-living, but “sensitive,” editor Hussein over a proposed series of translations of classical texts into Arabic.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, despite the popularity of Hussein's edition, Amin's version had achieved greater acclaim, justifying Franklin's choice to leverage its success.

Building on the established reputation of Amin's first edition, Franklin used its title and editorship to boost the appeal of the 1958 edition of *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*. Amin's preface was strategically revised to address earlier concerns raised by Aroussy regarding policy implications and the changing geopolitical landscape in Egypt, including suspicions of Franklin being a covert U.S. propaganda tool. Though not explicitly stated, Aroussy's policy concerns appeared to involve sensitively navigating U.S.-Egypt/Arab relations, curating seemingly apolitical content that does not appear biased to support Franklin's cultural diplomacy goals, ensuring a wide appeal of Franklin's publications while fostering a positive U.S. image abroad. For instance, removing the descriptor “correct” from references to American “democracy” likely aimed to prevent claims of American superiority, reflecting Franklin's strategy to maintain a non-provocative tone and present its efforts as cultural exchange rather than political advocacy or propaganda. The edition also avoided political references, excluding political figures like Naguib and Nasser, focusing instead

<sup>102</sup> April 30, 1958. C/TIB.

on ordinary individuals, in line with the original *This I Believe*. Additionally, it excluded criticisms of American culture or references to Franklin's unfulfilled commitments, such as the failure to translate Arabic entries, which could have been perceived as Franklin not fulfilling its cultural promises, impacting cultural diplomacy efforts. In contrast, *Hādhā Madhhabī* saw only minor paratextual changes like cover design, print size, and a new index, being reprinted without substantial textual alterations.

The 1958 editions showcased Franklin's adaptability and commitment to book diplomacy, updating publications to suit changing political contexts. These books served as effective cultural diplomacy tools in the mid-twentieth century Middle East, crucial for spreading American values and fostering U.S.-Arab cultural connections. Their enduring bestseller status highlights their role in bridging cultural divides and enhancing diplomatic relations, as evidenced by Franklin, despite its association with the U.S. government, continuing its operations in Egypt amid political tensions between the two nations. The success of these book projects served as a model for similar initiatives in other Franklin offices across the Middle East, prompting, for example, a new project in Iran inspired by the achievements of the *This I Believe* translations in the Arab world, as we discuss later.

### The Missing "Message of Good Will" for Iran

Given the success of *Allamtnī al-Ḥayāh* in Arabic, Smith proposed a similar project in February 1954 to Homayoun Sanati, then-Director of Franklin/Tehran. Sanati's task was to identify prominent Iranians, including a cleric, a novelist, and the head of a religious sect,<sup>103</sup> for statements alongside those of American figures. Franklin/New York supplied him with 66 "statements" from *This I Believe* (1952) and its broadcasts, focusing on Americans significant in Iran, such as Arthur Millspaugh, Samuel Jordan, William O. Douglas, and John Steinbeck. A statement from Millspaugh and another extracted from Jordan's papers by an associate were procured,<sup>104</sup> but attempts by Help Inc. to get one from Steinbeck for Franklin/New York were unsuccessful.<sup>105</sup> Building on these efforts, Sanati's ambitious plan included enlisting popular author and Senator Ebrahim Khajinoori as editor and securing a preface statement from President

<sup>103</sup> April 19, 1954. P227/7.

<sup>104</sup> May 5, 1954. P227/7.

<sup>105</sup> June 9, 1954. P227/6. Steinbeck was popular in Iran and his name could have possibly boosted sales.

Eisenhower. The project moved forward in March 1956, when obtaining Eisenhower's statement proved futile.

Franklin's struggle to obtain a personal statement by Eisenhower is illustrative of Franklin tapping into its state network to maximize its success. Smith's first reaction to the idea was positive: "It seems ... an exceptional opportunity for the President to convey a message of goodwill directly to the people of Iran,"<sup>106</sup> seeing it as an "exciting but possibly impractical special angle." However, he warned that the White House rules might not allow it. Writing a request for a statement and delivering it to the president is yet another interesting chapter. At the request of Franklin/Tehran, Smith drafted a letter to be signed by the Persian senator. In part of the letter, the senator argues, "No one will feel this book is complete ... unless we can be privileged to have a statement from you also. This would be of intrinsic interest in any event, but would also serve as a kind of greeting from you to the Persian people."<sup>107</sup>

The letter Smith sent was lost in transit, with the details unclear, but it appears he intended to route it through Charles Griffith, a member of Franklin's Board of Directors.<sup>108</sup> There is evidence suggesting the original letter may have reached the Information Center Service (ICS, later USIA) in Washington in May 1956. In June, Harold Munger of Franklin/New York re-sent copies to ICS's Franklin Burdette, cautioning that a duplicate of the senator's original letter might cause "real problems of protocol."<sup>109</sup> Munger even requested Burdette to have the mailing room search thoroughly for the original.<sup>110</sup> Amid this, Smith, attributing delays to Eisenhower's illness, stayed silent. On October 25, 1956, both the White House and Howard Penniman of the USIA sent a number of excerpts from Eisenhower's speeches to be used as the president's "contribution." About two weeks later, Smith asked the ICS if a line he added to the excerpt from "Eisenhower's Boston speech" (September 21, 1953) required White House approval: "I know that these principles are cherished by the people of Iran as those of all free countries." Despite his efforts, Smith felt his adaptation was insufficient and pressed further, suggesting the importance of a personalized response for Senator Khajinoori, citing its urgency for "America's national interest."<sup>111</sup>

<sup>106</sup> April 7, 1954. P227/7.

<sup>107</sup> April 27, 1956. P227/5.

<sup>108</sup> April 6, 1956. P227/7.

<sup>109</sup> We can only infer that White House protocols did not allow "duplicates."

<sup>110</sup> June 4, 1956. P227/7.

<sup>111</sup> November 6, 1956. P227/7. Address at the New England "Forward to '54" Dinner, Boston, Massachusetts, <https://shorturl.at/EJV49>.



Smith informed Franklin/Tehran of his “failure,”<sup>112</sup> to secure the president’s statement leading Sanati to reluctantly agree to use Smith’s selected excerpts from Eisenhower’s speech at Mount Rushmore (June 11, 1953). Despite this, Smith remained hopeful and approached Claude Hawley, ICS’s deputy director, highlighting the Persian senator’s status and proposing a brief presidential letter to accompany the Mount Rushmore statement with good wishes.<sup>113</sup> Smith even drafted a letter emphasizing the book’s role in enhancing Iranian understanding of “American ideas and ideals.”<sup>114</sup> Next, he contacted William Spaulding of Houghton Mifflin Company, revealing that the idea for the president’s statement came from “a USIA dim-wit (Burdette),” emphasizing the urgency, and noting that the Persian editor was “a big shot in Iran” and that the Shah had been criticized for “demean[ing] himself” by contributing to one of Franklin’s books (i.e., the biography of Reza Shah, see the next section).<sup>115</sup> Smith also mentioned Munger’s “brainstorm” idea to encourage Spaulding to involve Arthur Larson, a White House writer, as their “Deus ex machina.”<sup>116</sup> In a letter drafted for Spaulding, Smith described the Persian editor as “formerly anti-American” and stated they had received a response not from the president himself but from a White House official, “in terms which a Persian would regard a rebuke.”<sup>117</sup>

Smith had to give up.<sup>118</sup> What is clear is that the letter was “phrased in such a way that it would do no good at all and might even do harm.” Smith, who preferred not to send the letter to Sanati, described how the matter got “into wrong channel” and that it was “impossible to back up and start along a more promising path.” He was ready to pass on his apology to the Persian senator, offering his apology for “letting him down.”<sup>119</sup> The book, which was supposed to be first serialized in the daily *Ettelaat*, never saw the light of day.<sup>120</sup>

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112 January 15, 1957. P227/7.

113 November 26, 1956. P227/7.

114 Ibid.

115 January 16, 1958. P227/7.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 July 17, 1959. P227/7.

119 January 15, 1957. P227/7.

120 For a comparison of Eisenhower’s and Kennedy’s Iran policies, see Schayegh, C. “Foreign Gifts and U.S. Imperial Ambiguities: The Kennedy Years.” In *Globalizing the U.S. Presidency: Postcolonial Views of John F. Kennedy*, ed. C. Schayegh (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

### *Lives of Poor Boys in Persian*

The success of *‘Iṣāmiyūn ‘Uzamā’* led Smith to consider a Persian version, requiring an “Iranian of skill and eminence” as editor.<sup>121</sup> Sanati subtly and through the good offices of Prime Minister Hossein Ala influenced Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to write a biography of his father, Reza Shah, founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. Initially, Smith found the idea “unusual” but agreed, recognizing Reza Shah “really was a poor boy as well as the most important reformer in the Middle East after Atatürk.”<sup>122</sup> Ala also preferred the book to be edited by Mohammad Hejazi, a popular author, in an edition of 50,000 using high-quality paper. Sanati was cautious about the print run and the use of high-quality paper, arguing that it reduced sales chances and was, therefore, an “unwise” decision from a “psychological” viewpoint. The popular *Keyhan* newspaper expressed interest in publishing the book. Meanwhile, Franklin/Tehran preferred the title “The Hard Way to Success.” The initial list of Iranians featured two clergymen, a cook who “became Prime Minister and started numerous reforms,” and “a butcher who became a newspaper man,” running his own newspaper.<sup>123</sup>

By August 1954, the book’s format was finalized: Franklin was to receive 20 percent royalty from the publisher out of the retail price (30 rials, about \$0.39) of an edition of 20,000 copies. Franklin also earmarked 100,000 rials for “propaganda,” of which *Keyhan* contributed 70,000 rials (Fig. 3).<sup>124</sup> Seven original biographies of non-Western figures were commissioned, alongside translations of biographies of Benjamin Franklin, James Watt, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, George Carver, Henry Ford, and Charles Dickens.

There is evidence that the book’s opening chapter, attributed to the Shah, was ghostwritten. Sanati had it penned secretly, though Smith was suspicious, perhaps curious.<sup>125</sup> Obtaining the draft from the Shah – or, more accurately, his approval of the ghostwritten text – was not immediate, and it is believed the approved text reached Sanati early in 1955. Sanati also secured the Shah’s signature on the last page of the typeset chapter, using it as a frontispiece, and sent a signed copy to New York in April 1956. Smith was impressed, saying: “The double association makes it a momento [sic] of high value,” highlighting his

121 February 26, 1954. P194/4.

122 April 22, 1954. P194/4.

123 June 7, 1954. P194/4.

124 August 30, 1954. P194/4.

125 See Alinejad, S., ed. *Az Franklin ta Lal-e zar* (Tehran: Qoqnoos, 1395/2016), 71. The writer could be Mohammad Hejazi, mirroring Sanati’s tactic of crediting the translation of *Dr. Spock’s Baby Care* to the Shah’s sister, Ashraf Pahlavi.

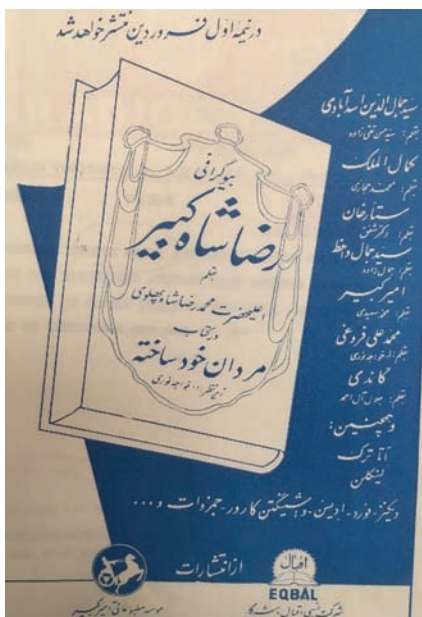


FIGURE 3  
*Mardan-e Khodsakhteh's advertisement.*

intention to present it to the Library of Congress.<sup>126</sup> Plans to publish an English translation in “an American magazine of wide circulation” were considered but never realized.<sup>127</sup> Sanati’s most ingenious strategy might have been the cover design, where the wording and typography suggested the entire book was authored by the Shah, likely a marketing tactic (Fig. 3). The back translation of the title reads:

The Biography of the Great Reza Shah,  
Penned by,  
His Excellency Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi  
In  
Self-made Men<sup>128</sup>

The book was published during the Persian New Year holiday, and on March 28, 1956, Sanati reported its rapid sales at Tehran newspaper stands and his efforts to print a second edition using four different presses.<sup>129</sup> He added that the “real market for the book is in the Provinces [sic.]”<sup>130</sup> and discussed appointing six

126 April 23, 1956. P194/4.

127 August 19, 1955. P194/4.

128 May 1, 1956. P194/4.

129 March 28, 1956. P1944/4.

130 Ibid.

representatives to oversee the distribution and publicity, ensuring the book reached a wide audience. Smith and his colleagues were “tremendously proud” of Sanati’s accomplishment, viewing the book’s success as having “a salutary effect on the [Iranian book] industry.”<sup>131</sup> However, the book also sparked controversy, described as “the uproar” that was “too long and complicated” to detail in writing.<sup>132</sup> Decades later, Sanati revealed that the Shah’s mother was furious upon learning that her son had exposed his father’s illiteracy in the book.<sup>133</sup>

## Discussion

Franklin’s book diplomacy projects in countries like Egypt and Iran, which had comparable literacy rates of around 15 percent in the 1950s, achieved much of their objectives, notably in developing a robust translation and publishing infrastructure.<sup>134</sup> However, given Franklin’s global operations, it is crucial to emphasize the need for more extensive research beyond current studies<sup>135</sup> to fully grasp Franklin’s role in the broader objective of winning hearts and minds.

Regarding the legacy of Franklin’s book projects discussed here, their relevance continues to this day, as evidenced by reviews on Goodreads and reprints by various publishers. In the Arab world, the latest reprint of *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh* in 2021 and *ʿIṣāmīyūn ʿUṣamāʾ* in 2020 exemplify their enduring appeal. Notably, the 2020 reprint by the Arab Writers Union in Damascus, was reviewed and promoted in *Al-Baath*, the official newspaper of the ruling Syrian Baath Party,<sup>136</sup> which underscores the book’s ongoing relevance. The widespread use of *Allamatnī al-Ḥayāh*’s title and quotes attests to its pervasive influence across the Arab world, transcending its original cultural diplomacy purposes.

In Iran, *Mardan-e Khodsakhteh* saw two editions selling a total of 45,000 copies by 1970.<sup>137</sup> Although the book has not been reprinted in the post-Revolution era, it has not been forgotten. Second-hand copies are valued and

131 Ibid.

132 April 14, 1956. P194/4.

133 Alinejad, S., ed. *Az Franklin ta Lal-e zar*, 72.

134 For Iran’s rates, see Alaedini, P., ed. *Social Policy in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2022), 9. For Egypt’s, see Hopwood, D., ed. *Arab Nation, Arab Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000), 162.

135 See Haddadian-Moghaddam, E. “The Cultural Cold War,” 387; Laugesen, A., and M. Rahimi-Moghaddam, “Franklin Book Programs,” 169.

136 *Al-Baath*, January 30, 2020.

137 June 8, 1970. P121/1.

sought-after and the chapter on Reza Shah has gained political significance. Social media is full of footage that shows Iranians chanting Reza Shah's name in defiance of the Islamic regime in Iran.

From a broader perspective, Franklin's impact on the publishing sector should not be underestimated. Insights from our 2022 Cairo research visit, including informal conversations with booksellers and interviews with former Franklin/Cairo staff, revealed that Franklin's entry into the Arab publishing arena marked a notable shift in publishing standards, creating a clear demarcation between pre- and post-Franklin phases in the industry.<sup>138</sup> This sentiment was echoed by Arab publishers during the years of Franklin's operations. For example, Aroussy recounts in a letter to Smith how a Lebanese publisher was "genuinely impressed by the subject matter [and] physical appearance" of Franklin's books. Aroussy optimistically added that if Franklin continued in the same vein, "we will have made history in Arabic publishing."<sup>139</sup> Additionally, Franklin's books had educational, cultural, and political impacts. By juxtaposing American and local philosophies, they served as effective tools of cultural diplomacy, reshaping cultural perceptions of America in Egypt, the Arab world, and Iran, and fostering essential cross-cultural dialogue in an era of political mistrust and misunderstandings.

Educationally, the books discussed here expanded intellectual horizons and introduced new thought paradigms. This broadened the intellectual community, promoting critical thinking and open-mindedness towards diverse cultures and ideologies. Politically, these books promoted religious and spiritual values while also serving to combat "Communist influence."<sup>140</sup> Their effective distribution also subtly advanced U.S. foreign policy by engaging locals in the presentation of American ideals, thus helping to mitigate anti-American sentiments. This subliminal book diplomacy strategy paved the way for more cooperative international relations.

Moreover, the impact and legacy of these books, coupled with Franklin's initiatives, transcended the mere content and reach of the publications. They were enriched by personal relationships formed through direct correspondence between Arab and Iranian intellectuals and Franklin administrators, such as Smith.<sup>141</sup> The extensive network and personable communication style of Franklin's staff played a pivotal role in this regard. These relationships,

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138 These interviews are not used further here, but they inform the authors' forthcoming article on Franklin's legacy in Egypt and Iran (see footnote 12).

139 February 3, 1954. P194/2.

140 Laugesen, A. *Taking Books to the World*, 65.

141 Arrabai, A.M. *Translation and Image-building*, 160.

enhanced by gestures like sending books as gifts,<sup>142</sup> strategically influenced the recipients' thoughts and choices and effectively promoted specific narratives.

### Conclusion

This article has provided a microhistorical analysis of Franklin's early ventures into book diplomacy in Egypt and Iran, focusing on *This I Believe* and *Lives of Poor Boys*. It examined how Franklin skillfully navigated the complex realm of cultural diplomacy using biographies. By adapting content to align with local contexts and audiences, while subtly promoting American ideals, Franklin effectively utilized biographies – non-political in appearance but politically influential<sup>143</sup> – to exert political influence via seemingly apolitical narratives. This approach significantly impacted public opinion during a period marked by a global quest for meaning and direction. The success of these book projects laid the groundwork for Franklin's expansive global operations and its book diplomacy program, demonstrating how Franklin adeptly managed the complexities of cultural diplomacy.

The article also revealed how Franklin shaped cultural diplomacy through the content, strategies, and interactions of their book projects. The productions and receptions of the noted books underscored the success of Franklin's cultural diplomacy strategy collaborating with locals and forging successful collaborations between American, Arab, and Iranian state and non-state actors, despite their diverse geographical regions and varying degrees of belief in American propaganda.<sup>144</sup> The diverse backgrounds of local staff and contributors, encompassing private and public sectors, were instrumental in propelling Franklin's success, culminating in a unique global network that significantly advanced American book diplomacy. The books' successes helped Franklin gain a foothold in publishing and served as models for other U.S. cultural diplomacy programs. The profound influence of these book projects and Franklin's overall operations extended to other programs like the USIA Book Translation Program, which adopted Franklin's publishing and distribution strategies,<sup>145</sup> and Al-Hilal's book selection policy, increasingly

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Renders, H. "Different Lives in a Global World." In *Global Perspectives on Biography in Public Cultures and Societies*, eds. H. Renders and D. Veltman (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 7.

<sup>144</sup> Lucas, W.S. "Mobilizing Culture." In *War and Cold War in American Foreign Policy 1942–62*, eds. D. Carter and R. Clifton (London: Palgrave, 2002), 85–86.

<sup>145</sup> October 30, 1954. P194/2.

featuring translated works post-Franklin's success,<sup>146</sup> thereby transforming the publishing landscapes in Egypt and Iran.

While the core strategy came from Franklin/New York, and each title required USIA clearance, local staff (e.g., Aroussy and Sanati) exercised considerable agency in selecting and adapting materials,<sup>147</sup> thereby shaping production decisions to fit local political, religious, and cultural norms. Franklin's strategy was not just about translation but also the adaptation of materials to suit local contexts and expectations, avoiding potential sectarianism and ensuring relevance and appeal.<sup>148</sup> Three primary translation and adaptation strategies were utilized: intersemiotic translation, exemplified by converting *This I Believe* scripts into audio and vice versa; interlingual translation between languages, such as translating content and titles from English to Arabic and Persian; and back translation, which enabled Franklin/New York staff and other local offices to review the adapted content.<sup>149</sup> While the reception of Franklin's books remains to be fully studied, a good number of them were reviewed and discussed in, for example, Persian and Arabic journals. Opinions ranged from appreciation for the choice of books and the quality of translation to attacks that targeted Franklin's American roots.<sup>150</sup>

In conclusion, this article reaffirms the complex yet influential role of book diplomacy during the early Cold War years, a time when alternative media like radio and television were less prevalent. Our microhistorical analysis of Franklin's book diplomacy initiatives, as demonstrated in our case studies, reveals the multifaceted and intricate dynamics of cultural exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and international relations, moving beyond simplistic propaganda narratives. This study thus contributes to a broader understanding of the efficacy of diplomacy in the Middle East and globally, emphasizing the enduring power of books in cultural diplomacy and the importance of human connections in these exchanges. While the modalities of diplomacy evolve, the fundamental role of books as subtle yet powerful tools for cross-cultural dialogue and diplomacy remains as pertinent today as it was decades ago.

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146 October 13, 1953. C/TIB.

147 Cf. July 29, 1953. P227/6.

148 Undated. P227/7.

149 For more on these terms, see Munday, J., et al. *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (London: Routledge, 2012), 9.

150 For examples of these varying opinions, see Al-Hashimi, B. *Ḥarb al-Kutub* (Tripoli: al-Munsha'ah al-Āmmah lil-Nashr, 1984), 85–116.



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