

Rashīd Riḍā in Europe

A monomythic reading of his travel narrative

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The present article deals with the travel narrative of the famous Muslim reformist thinker Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's only visit to Europe in 1921. The text was published in seven parts under the title *al-Riḥla al-'Urubīyya* ('The European Journey') between February and October 1922 in the journal *al-Manār* ('The Lighthouse'). The following paper is an attempt to show how the pattern coined as the "hero's journey"¹ or the "monomyth" may apply to Riḍā's seven-part account.² Thus, shedding light on the numerous monomythical elements in Riḍā's *European Journey* and showing their counterparts in the classical pattern of the hero's journey will constitute the main part of this paper. A monomythic reading may not only explain the lack of a coherent chronological structure in this travelogue but can also offer a deeper understanding of both the function of the text in its initial context and the interaction between the author and his readership. Before embarking on such a monomythical reading, I will briefly introduce the *European Journey* and try to point to some reasons for why travels beyond the cultural boundaries, as an adventure to an unknown world, could be seen as closely linked to a certain conception of heroism.

Rashīd Riḍā's European Journey, a brief sketch of a text and its context

The Syro-Egyptian journalist Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935) is considered to be one of the most significant figures of modern Islamic thought. Through his high profile journal *al-Manār*, Riḍā was both able to spread the ideas of the Muslim reformist movement in different parts of the Muslim world and to establish himself as a leading Muslim intellectual in the first three decades of the twentieth century.³ Along with many other reformists of his time, Rashīd Riḍā was

¹ The term was coined by James Joyce and scientifically popularized by Joseph Campbell. See Campbell (2004 [first published in 1949]).

² In the German-language research, Ralf Elger offers an example of a reading of travelogues as a hero's journey in his book *Glaube, Skepsis, Poesie. Arabische Istanbul-Reisende im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*. See Elger (2011: 64–69ff.).

³ For more about Rashīd Riḍā and the Muslim reformist movement, see for instance: Adams (2002); Hourani (1983); Kerr (1966); Ryad (2009).

deeply involved in the reflection about the future of Muslim societies. In his writings he engaged with various Western ideas that, from the beginning of the colonial encounter, had posed a serious challenge to the self-concept of the Islamic worldview. However, even if he was able to obtain a lot of second-hand information on the West, Riḍā's lack of European language skills always represented a great barrier between him and a first-hand understanding of the Western civilization.⁴

Unlike his forerunners al-Afghānī (1838–1897) and ʿAbduh (1849–1905),⁵ who visited different European countries and even lived in Paris for a while, Rashīd Riḍā travelled to Europe only once, at the advanced age of 56 in the year 1921, as a member of a Syrian political delegation to Geneva.⁶ The main goal of the journey was to participate in a Syro-Palestinian congress there in order to advocate the independence of Syria and Palestine at the second assembly of the League of Nations (1920–1946). After his political mission Rashīd Riḍā toured through Switzerland and Germany with his friend Shakīb Arslān (1869–1946),⁷ and had the opportunity to meet different important Western and Middle Eastern personalities.⁸ In the following year, Riḍā published the account of his political journey in his journal *al-Manār*, under the title *al-riḥla al-ʿūrubīyya* ('the European Journey') in seven instalments in the issues between February and November 1922.⁹ The timing of Riḍā's first and last trip to Europe coincides with when he started to demonstrate a very intransigent attitude toward European imperialism.¹⁰ This

⁴ Around the turn of the century many political, economic and social circumstances were favourable to introduce Western ideas to broad parts of the Middle Eastern population. The massive translation of European works into Arabic played an important role in the transmission of these ideas to a larger Arab readership. For more information on the Arab cultural and literary revival that occurred in the 19th and early 20th century (the so-called *nahḍa*), see for instance Sharabi (1970). Concerning Riḍā's image of the west, see Shahin (1989), Shahin (1993), and also Ryad (2010). For Riḍā's sources of knowledge of the West, see Ryad (2009: 23–66).

⁵ More about al-Afghānī and ʿAbduh, see Kedourie (1997); Keddie (1972); Adams (2002); Hourani (1983).

⁶ For more information on the Syrian delegation in Geneva, see Hoffmann (2007); Mouton (1979).

⁷ More about Shakīb Arslān, see Cleveland (1985).

⁸ Riḍā for example met Max von Oppenheim (1860–1946), the founder of the former German Intelligence Bureau for the East (Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient), which was responsible for the pro-German propaganda in the Middle East during WWI. Cf. Hoffmann (2007: 109f.). During his visit to Berlin, Riḍā also met a former Syro-Ottoman officer, Zakī Ḥishmat Kirām (1886–1946), who had settled down in Berlin. The latter became Riḍā's student and served many years as a very important source on Europe. About Zakī Kirām, see Ryad (2009: 49–53).

⁹ Yūsuf ʿĪbīsh has edited all the travelogues of Riḍā, including the *European Journey*, in one volume, see ʿĪbīsh (1979: 311–384).

¹⁰ Shahin (1989: 124–129). According to Shahin, "Riḍā recognized the failure of the conciliatory policy toward Britain and was disappointed in the British refusal to grant the Arabs an independent state." He states furthermore that "Riḍā appeared to rediscover the righteousness of Afghānī's policy toward Western Imperialism" (ibid.: 127).

very stage in Riḏā's intellectual life began after WWI and lasted till the end of his life. It was marked by both a certain distance from 'Abduh's willingness to compromise with the European presence in the Middle East and the reintegration of the more radical anti-colonial thought of al-Afghānī (cf. Shahin 1989: 127ff.). Therefore, as the only text fully dedicated to Riḏā's first-hand impressions of Europe, it turns out to be a very interesting source of information about his personality as well as his ambiguous attitude towards Europe, showing how the author processed his first encounter with the European civilization upon the European soil. In this sense Riḏā's *European Journey* can be seen as the attempt of a Muslim anti-colonial thinker to leave a trace of his visit to Europe, in a period where European imperialism reached its climax.

At first glance, the seven parts of Riḏā's *European Journey* don't seem to feature a "consistent" narrative structure. The *European Journey* is not only restricted to the description of the travel itself, i.e. the different stages of the course of the journey; it contains, amongst other things, different excursuses, anecdotes, diplomatic reports of the activities of the delegation, and numerous reflections on European colonial domination and the situation in the Middle East. The seven parts seem to be hardly connected to one another. Furthermore, the account of the journey itself neither follows a consistent chronological line, nor does it contain a description of the return journey (cf. Ṭīsh 1979: 311–384). However, the hybrid literary character of this text (if we can consider it as such) allows different possible readings on several levels of this source: as a diplomatic report of a member of the Syrian delegation in Geneva, a collection of essays on Europe, a travel account (travelogue) of one of the most influential figures of reform Islam, a slice of Rashīd Riḏā's autobiography, etc. But it is indeed much richer than even these possible readings would suggest. For example, despite the hybrid character of this travel account and its seemingly inconsistent narrative structure, the *European Journey* contains, as I will show below, all the different stages of Campbell's "hero's journey", with Riḏā himself as the hero. This narrative structure gives consistency to the text and allows us to derive a message from it. Thus, regardless of the factual claim of the author in his text, considering the *European Journey* from such a literary point of view can shed a new light on this hybrid text and could furthermore open up a new dimension in reading and dealing with travel literature. In order to do this, one of the premises of this paper will be to consider the seven parts of the *European Journey* as one single piece.

The traveller as a hero

With his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (first published in 1949), the American mythologist Joseph Campbell exposed the pattern that lies behind a lot of stories. The concept he coined the "hero's journey", or the "monomyth",

can indeed be found in a great number of “good stories”.¹¹ As developed by Campbell, the pattern of the hero’s journey has a cross-cultural claim: Even if it can occur in different ways, its basic form remains constant (Vogler 2007: 4). According to Christopher Vogler, a Hollywood development executive who was inspired by Joseph Campbell’s work, the hero’s journey is “not an invention, but an observation”, which “govern[s] the conduct of life and the world of storytelling the way physics and chemistry govern the physical world” (Vogler 2007: xiii). Hence, the monomythical structure, or rather many elements of it, can be recognized in a variety of narratives of both “Western” and “non-Western” societies, and this regardless of their cultural or historical context. However, each culture has its own specificities and ways of thinking, which can indeed challenge or even severely shake the concept of the “hero’s journey”.¹²

Adventure is intrinsically linked to the act of travelling; this becomes more obvious especially in those cases where the travel destination lies beyond one’s own cultural threshold. Every traveller who decides to cross the borders of his own culture could be seen as some sort of a hero, to the extent that it is a mark of courage and sacrifice to leave the comfortable home society in order to discover new places and unknown cultures. The encounter with the customs and culture of other societies, i.e. the Other, has always played a decisive role in shaping the identity of individuals and societies.¹³ While travels beyond the cultural boundaries are nowadays seen as an important part of the education of postmodern individuals, this has not always been the case in history. The philosopher Plato, for instance, was very sceptical about the necessity of such journeys and even considered them to be a possible threat to one’s own identity.¹⁴ For this very reason many travel-

¹¹ George Lucas’ movie *Star Wars* is maybe the most prominent example of the hero’s journey. The screenwriter has been indeed influenced by Joseph Campbell’s works. See, for instance, Rensma (2009: viii).

¹² Vogler (2007: xvi). Campbell’s theory has been discussed and criticized by different scholars. Danièle M. Klapproth, for instance, criticizes the westocentric aspect of Campbell’s hero’s journey and convincingly shows its limits (cf. Klapproth 2004: esp. 375ff.). Regarding the critical debate on Campbell’s theory, see for instance Segal (1999); Philips (1975). My aim in this article is not to re-open the discussion about the universality of Campbell’s theory, but rather to emphasize the fact that travel accounts are narrative constructions whose function is to enable the re-integration of the traveller in his home context. It was Bekim Agai who first made me aware of the concept of the hero’s journey as a framework which could also appear in travel literature. While reading Campbell’s work and especially Christopher Vogler’s, I immediately recognized many elements of the pattern of the hero in the text of Rashid Riḍā. My assumption was backed by the literary perspective or trend in the studies of travel literature, which considers travelogues as a “self-staging” of their authors, and this despite their factual claim. See, for instance, Harbsmeier (1995); Agai (2010). For an example of a reading of travelogues as a hero’s journey, see Elger (2011: 64–69ff.).

¹³ On the effect of travel literature on the extra-literary reality, see for instance Harbsmeier (1994); Nünning (2008).

¹⁴ Plato considered travel to foreign countries to be a dangerous threat to the Greek society. He recommended that only the “most trustworthy of men from fifty to sixty years of age should be allowed to go abroad to learn foreign rules and customs”. On returning these

ogues were not written “for fun” or in order to entertain a curious readership, but rather to fulfil the task of helping the traveller, who just came back from a culturally different world (sometimes after years of absence), to reintegrate into his home society. Therefore, the travel account, oral or written, is supposed to deliver the ultimate “proof” that the returning traveller has not been “corrupted” by the customs and culture of other nations, and could be considered as the “re-entrance card” to the home society. Through his travel narrative the author expects to gain respect and esteem from his readership in his society of origin. According to the devotees of Campbell’s theory, the motif of the narrated hero’s journey represents the ego’s search for identity and wholeness, a search with which the readership can also identify. Every person, in experiencing the process of becoming complete, during which he has to face his internal guardians, fight his own monsters, find his own masters and overcome his demons, is a sort of hero (cf. Vogler 2007: 30). One of the main purposes of heroes’ stories is to give the audience, or the readership, a window into the search for identity and wholeness. Each person hearing a tale, reading a story, or watching a play or movie is invited to identify with the hero (Vogler 2007: 30). This principle applies also to travelogues: through the narrative and the universal qualities the author has given to his main character, the reader is invited to share the thrill of the traveller and to identify with him through the story.

Before shedding light on the monomythic structure in the narrative of Riḏā’s *European Journey*, it is first of all necessary to summarize the archetypal hero’s journey. The pathway of the hero features a tripartite structure, namely Separation–Initiation–Return (Campbell 2004: 28). According to Campbell:

“The hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (ibid.).

Interesting in this regard is the fact that the chronological narrative frame of a great number of travelogues shows a very similar tripartite main structure, which can be labelled as “Departure–Sojourn–Return” and corresponds, more or less, to the main structure of the monomyth.¹⁵ In the standard chronological structure of a travelogue, the author describes first the preparation of his journey, during which the reader is informed about the reasons for the author’s decision to travel. Then he secondly gives an account of what he experienced after he left his “ordinary world.” Finally, the traveller recounts his return trip. Each of the three main stages is further divided into different recognizable steps or substages, which can vary

travellers should immediately give a formal report of their experiences before the Council of the Republic. The latter should both examine whether these travellers were “corrupted” by the customs and culture of other people and if their reintegration could represent a possible threat to their home society (cf. Harbsmeier 1995: 23).

¹⁵ This is considered as a formal cross-cultural feature of many texts of travel literature (cf. Agai 2010: 23).

from one travelogue to another. In comparison, the archetypal hero's journey – based on Christopher Vogler's revisited and relabelled version of the story structure suggested by Campbell – is comprised of twelve stages (as distinguished from Campbell's seventeen stages): 1. *ordinary world*, 2. *call to adventure*, 3. *refusal of the call*, 4. *meeting the mentor*, 5. *crossing the first threshold*, 6. *tests, allies, enemies*, 7. *approach to the inmost cave*, 8. *the ordeal*, 9. *reward*, 10. *the road back*, 11. *the resurrection*, 12. *return with the elixir*.¹⁶ In the following I will show how these different stages of the hero's journey occur in Rashīd Riḍā's *European Journey*.

The monomythic structure of the European Journey

Ordinary world

Riḍā's *European Journey* begins with an introduction, a sort of prologue containing a harsh critique of European colonization in its different forms: political, economic and cultural. The very first sentence reads as follows: "Europe has nearly succeeded in dominating the whole world and enslaving all human nations".¹⁷ Thus, from the very beginning the reader gets the impression that there is an "evil" power or a "villain", who wants to dominate and enslave the world. This anti-colonial tone precedes the body of the travel account and determines the setting of Riḍā's travel to Europe. At this opening moment one can easily recognize the kind of travel or diplomatic mission this is going to be; the construction of Europe as an imminent threat enforces the identification of the implied reader of *al-Manār* (in the colonial context) with the central character, who is none other than Rashīd Riḍā himself. Moreover, by marking what the Muslims are not, namely "unjust", "evil" and "colonizing", the author accentuates the otherness of Europe and consequently strengthens the cultural identity of the Muslim readership in relation to Europe. The unmasking of the "evil plan" of the European colonial powers within the story evokes the urgency that something has to be done in order to rescue the Muslim World. Even before the appearance of the central figure in the text, one already expects a hero who will shoulder this difficult mission, since we know from the title that this is the introduction of a travel narrative (*riḥla*) to Europe.

¹⁶ Cf. Vogler (2007: 81–228). In the following analysis, all the monomythical concepts in the main body and footnotes are in *italics*. – Joseph Campbell's framework contains different subsections. The first stage, that of the separation or departure, is subdivided in five subsections: 1.1 *the call to adventure*, 1.2 *refusal of the call*, 1.3 *supernatural aid*, 1.4 *the crossing of the first threshold*, 1.5 *belly of the whale*. The second stage, which he calls the initiation, is that of the trials and victories and contains six subsections: 2.1 *the road of trials*, 2.2 *the meeting with the goddess*, 2.3 *woman as the temptress*, 2.4 *atonement with the father*, 2.5 *apotheosis*, 2.6 *the ultimate boon*. The last stage, that of return, includes the following six subsections: 3.1 *refusal of the return*, 3.2 *the magic flight*, 3.3 *the rescue from without*, 3.4 *the crossing of the return threshold*, 3.5 *master of the two worlds*, 3.6 *freedom to live*. See Campbell (2004: 33–35).

¹⁷ ʿĪbīsh (1979: 311) – all English translations from this source are my own.

The introduction goes on to explain that the author was on a (diplomatic) mission to Europe and did not travel for his personal pleasure. This idea represents the main motif of Riḏā's travel account. According to Campbell, the *call to adventure* signifies that "destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (Campbell 2004: 53). This is exactly the case in Riḏā's account, in which one can notice that the centre of gravity has been transferred from within the pale of the Muslim world to the unknown realm of the colonial powers. This place is described by Campbell as full of "strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight" (ibid.), which corresponds to Riḏā's description of the European civilization: colonizing, enslaving all the non-European nations, militarily and technically superior etc. The text in fact contains no concrete description of the *ordinary world* of the author, as would be ideal for the monomyth, but the reason for this, one can only suppose, may lie in the fact that by publishing his travelogue in his own journal Rashīd Riḏā believed he had a sort of home field advantage. The readers of *al-Manār* at that time knew exactly who he was, and most of them were even part of his *ordinary world*.

The call to adventure

After criticizing the European powers the author moves on to enumerate the various reasons for which people generally travel to Europe, emphasizing the following: study purposes, medical treatment, pleasure etc. (cf. ʿĪbish 1979: 311–312). Riḏā criticizes all those who travel to Europe in order to satisfy their "worse instincts and desires" (ʿĪbish 1979: 312). Then the author concludes as follows: "Very few travellers [to Europe] have indeed the intention to broaden their minds and gain more experience and wisdom through what they see and hear. And I hope that I belong to this minority" (ʿĪbish 1979: 312). Apart from the title, this is the first explicit moment in the text where it becomes obvious that we are dealing with a travel narrative. This is followed by the explanation that the Party of Syrian Unity (*Ḥizb al-ʿIttiḥād al-Sūrī*),¹⁸ the vice-president of which is none other than the author himself, decided to organize a congress in Geneva, where the former League of Nations was based, in order to advocate for the independence of Syria and Palestine. As proof of his "real" travel intentions, and in order to emphasize the diplomatic aspect of his trip, Riḏā incorporated the wording of the invitation, with its original title, as issued by the Party of Syrian Unity. At this point one may

¹⁸ Also known as the Syrian Union Party (SUP) (cf. Choueiri 2000: 149). The party was formed by Syrians living in Egypt at the end of World War I. Its executive committee included different Syrian personalities like e.g. Mishīl Luṭf ʿAllāh, Rashīd Riḏā, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Shahbandar (cf. Gelvin 1998: 57).

ask why the author felt obliged to incorporate the invitation verbatim in his travel account. Which additional value or information would it add to his narrative, beyond accentuating his travel intentions? Seen from a monomythical perspective, the text of the invitation plays a major role in the story: The narrative flow is indeed temporarily interrupted by the incorporation of the invitation. This should firstly mark the transition to another important moment in the story, and secondly, it should take the reader to the next episode of the hero's journey, namely the *call to adventure*. The latter is the real beginning of every hero's journey and announces in most cases both a departure from the common world and a separation from community and entourage to travel to the *special world* (cf. Campbell 2004: 45–54; Vogler 2007: 99–104). In this sense, the invitation in Riḍā's text has the function of the spontaneous appearance of the *herald* archetype or the announcer of the adventure, which is the sign that the hero is now ripe for transformation.¹⁹ The main stage of initiation can now begin! The appearance of the *herald* bringing news of change breaks the status quo and motivates the hero to action, calling him to the adventure and marking, as mentioned above, a new stage, a new episode in his biography. In our case the latter corresponds to the imminent first-hand encounter with the European civilization on its own soil, which is indeed something very new in the biography of Riḍā, who although having challenged the domination of the European civilization for many years, in contrast to other Muslim reformists, had never travelled to Europe. Rashīd Riḍā in his narrative seems to attach great importance to being seen as someone who is ready (and potentially strong enough) to face the European colonial powers in their own arena. The staging of the author as a hero begins very clearly at this point.

The refusal of the call

After informing the reader of his travel destination and the importance of organizing a congress in Geneva for the future of Syria and Palestine, Riḍā encounters a situation in his family which makes his travel to Europe more than uncertain. After the delegation has appointed a date to leave for Geneva, some extraordinary circumstances begin to appear in the story:

“After this invitation was published all my children fell ill one by one. Shortly afterwards, I lost my youngest son, who died as a consequence of his illness. (...) And then we were informed that the second assembly of the League of Nations would be held about the end of August. The delegation decided that we would leave [for Europe] on

¹⁹ Cf. Campbell (2004: 50). There are many more character archetypes, but the most common ones are: the *mentor*, the *threshold guardian*, the *shapeshifter*, the *shadow*, the *ally* and the *trickster*, see Vogler (2007: 23–26). The *herald* – as well as the other characters – doesn't necessarily have to be represented by a person (see *ibid.*).

the 12th of August. But on the first of August my son Muḥammad Shafi‘ had a contagious fever, whose therapy demanded precision and knowledge. This is the reason why I nursed and fed him personally. His mother couldn’t have done this, because she wasn’t able at that time to recover after a birth and had childbed fever. For all these reasons I wasn’t sure about travelling with the delegation. So I decided to wait until my son would recover” (‘Ībish 1979: 314).

At this stage the reader probably wonders how the author is going to overcome all these obstacles. It seems that Riḏā will not make it and could therefore be obliged to stay in Cairo because of all of the handicaps in his family. This is also a situation where the reader, who identifies himself with the author, may ask himself: What would I have done if I were in his shoes? It is certainly not that easy to leave for Europe in a moment in which your family needs special attention. But expressing doubts about the mission and facing ethical dilemmas is actually an important component of every hero’s journey. After receiving the call, the hero often ignores it or even refuses to embark on the journey (cf. Vogler 2007: 107ff.). He begins to think of turning back (Vogler 2007: 11, 108). In our case, Riḏā has to choose between his family and his country, which needs him to advocate its independence in Geneva. This is the moment in the story in which something extraordinary should happen in order to help the hero overcome this difficult situation (Vogler 2007: 42). It is the moment in which a key character makes its appearance to help the hero surmount this difficulty.

Meeting with the mentor

Having expressed his doubts and fears related to his familial situation, which could prevent his mission in Europe, Riḏā now has to take a final decision. The text reads as follows:

“The deadline was approaching closer and closer, and I finally decided that the interests of the home country are more important than all the own family. And so I decided to travel with the delegation. And I fully relied on God” (‘Ībish 1979: 314).

The expression of his dedication for his home country and readiness to make sacrifices serves to emphasize the fact that the author is a noble person who does not hesitate to encounter dangers and even makes great sacrifices in order to serve his country and his fellow citizens. Furthermore this passage should remind the reader again that Rashīd Riḏā was obliged to travel to Europe because of his importance for the delegation and the decisive role he might play in the success of its diplomatic mission in Geneva. Entrusting his destiny to the hands of God is not surprising for a Muslim religious scholar, who is expected to serve as a teacher, as an example to follow for his fellow Muslims. Therefore, in his function as a spiritual leader, Riḏā reminds his readership that for a believer God is the only true source of strength and assurance in difficult moments. Only God can show him the right decision to make and give him the assurance that he is the “one” for this mis-

sion.²⁰ In this specific story, the character of the *mentor* is symbolized by the spirituality of the author. It is indeed his reliance on God at this moment of the story which prepares him to accept the challenge and face the unknown. Like the *herald*, the *mentor* does not necessarily have to be a person. The character can appear in different forms to perform a special function as a conscience for the hero, providing or reminding him of an important moral code. But regardless of the form in which the *mentor* appears in the story, his main function remains the same: getting the adventure going (cf. Vogler 2007: 42). In the *European Journey* the mentor takes an internal form, which represents a higher self, a sort of nobler, more godlike part of us (Vogler 2007: 40). He stands for the hero's highest aspirations – the mentor is “what the hero may become if (...) [he] persists on the road of heroes” (ibid.).

Crossing the first threshold

After surmounting his doubts, Riḍā finally embarks on the journey. In the travel account we are informed that he proceeded from Cairo to Alexandria by train along with “three other friends, who are very well-known and intelligent Muslim jurists” (ʿĪbish 1979: 314), with whom he had a discussion about the future of Muslim societies. Here again one can see that the author is focusing on the character of his travel: The train trip turns out to be in preparation for his mission beyond the cultural borders. His three friends could indeed be seen as a sort of second *mentor* in the story. Their main function could be to boost Riḍā's self-confidence on his way to face his first challenge.

In Alexandria our hero meets other members of the Syrian delegation. After crossing the passport control they embark on an Italian ship to Trieste (Italy) and thus officially leave the *ordinary world* behind. The real journey can now begin. Riḍā's description of the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea proves to be very interesting: Firstly, Riḍā begins to realize the difficulty of his journey. He understands, for instance, that his lack of foreign language skills is a big drawback for him onboard the ship, making him strongly dependent on his fellow travellers, even in the restaurant to decode the menu (ʿĪbish 1979: 316). Secondly, this passage gives the impression that the author is crossing more than just a geographical border: He speaks for instance about the bad weather and his loss of appetite as a physical reaction to the new circumstances. Furthermore, he informs us that it is very easy to recognize the *qibla*, the direction of Mecca, onboard the ship (ʿĪbish 1979: 317). This could be seen either as a reminder for other Muslim travellers to Europe to stick to their prayer, or the presence of his *mentor* – God in

²⁰ There are cases in which the hero doesn't initially refuse the call. But even in those instances we have the appearance of a protective figure (an old wise man) who gives the adventurer advice, guidance and provides him with supernatural equipment (such as for example amulets), which he will need in his battles against the dark forces (cf. Campbell 2004: 63; Vogler 2007: 12).

this case –protecting him during his journey. The Mediterranean Sea as a natural border between the Muslim World and Europe, or in monomythical terms the *ordinary world* and the *special world*, is a sort of in-between place in which the approach of the *special world* is being predicted.²¹ The delegation’s arrival in Trieste is the beginning of the initiation, but Riḏā first has to complete a final task before being allowed to enter Europe. At this moment of the story another typical character of the hero’s journey appears, namely the *threshold guardians*. The latter are often lieutenants of the villain and their main function is to test whether the hero is worthy of crossing the threshold and entering the *special world* (Vogler 2007: 49). The Italian customs officers in Trieste represent the *threshold guardians* in Riḏā’s account. The text passage in question reads as follows:

“The customs officers picked out a couple of bags and opened them. Concerning mine, they opened two out of five [bags], but they didn’t check them thoroughly. These officers have a sharp eye [*firāsa*]: they are able to see through people and their bags” (ʿĪbish 1979: 317).

One can see that the customs officers are accredited with “super powers,” which are described with the Islamic term *firāsa*, a gift given to Muslim saints, with which they can see through people (cf. Radtke – O’Kane 1996: 121f.). The Syrian delegation is stopped at the border for many hours because some of the members are transporting a significant quantity of cigarettes, which leads to problems with the Italian customs. The same problem will recur at the Swiss-Italian boarder, where the delegation will be stopped again by the Swiss customs because of the cigarettes they are transporting.²² The first of the seven parts of the *European Journey* closes with both a short description of the arrival to Trieste and an excursus about the importance of foreign languages.

Tests, allies, enemies

The second part is completely dedicated to the description of the trip from Trieste to Geneva. The train trip through Italy is the occasion for Riḏā to acclimatize to his new context. The acclimatization continues in the third part of the travelogue, in which the author, among other things, describes his impressions of the Swiss people and the city of Geneva. This stage of the story is important to both the traveller (the hero) and the readership: It gives both of them the oppor-

²¹ The Mediterranean region has been considered by many travellers as a cross-over region, a sort of in-between region (cf. Agai 2010: 24). In Trieste, Riḏā recognizes similarities with Jounieh, a Mediterranean coastal city in Lebanon.

²² See ʿĪbish (1979: 317). In the *European Journey* Riḏā condemns smoking very harshly. In the subsequent issue of *al-Manār* he published a Fatwa in which he argued that Muslims should avoid smoking because of the dangers of nicotine (see Riḏā 1922). We don’t know exactly if he recounted this episode with the Italian customs officers to have an excuse, a framework to condemn smoking. But even if this had been the case, the archetype of the *threshold guardian* is clearly recognizable.

tunity to understand the rules of the new world.²³ Through different tests the hero will acquire enough experience and self-confidence to face greater ordeals at a later point in time (cf. Vogler 2007: 136ff.).

Interesting in both the third and fourth part is the appearance of *allies* and the attempt to gain new ones, even from the opposite camp. Trying to forge a team with special skills or qualities to help the hero confront his destiny in the *special world* is one of the most important challenges for the hero in this stage of the story (Vogler 2007: 137). The character of the *ally* already appeared in the first part,²⁴ but its decisive role becomes much clearer as the story unfolds. The embodiment of the *ally*, or rather *allies*, is the members of the Syrian delegation who are travelling with Riḍā. From the beginning of the journey they proved to be very helpful for Riḍā: They had already assisted him in Alexandria in having his travel formalities taken care of, and once embarked on the ship, they translated for him and organized the travel formalities in Europe (train tickets, hotels, restaurants etc.) (ʿĪbish 1979: 314f., 318ff.). Mishīl Luṭf ʿAllāh (1880–1961),²⁵ the president of the Party of Syrian Unity, proved to be the most trustworthy ally. In comparison to other members of the delegation, Luṭf ʿAllāh is presented as someone who is “much more experienced and [who] has travelled in many countries” (ʿĪbish 1979: 328). In Geneva he calls Riḍā’s attention to the higher prices for foreign tourists on the menu. He is also the one who cancelled a reservation in a conventional hotel in order to change to a first-class hotel. The reason for this rebooking, according to the author, was to ensure that the delegation stays in the same hotel as the political VIPs, who can have an influence on the decisions of the assembly of the League of Nations, in order to meet them every day at the hotel and remind them of the Syrian nationalists’ expectations (ʿĪbish 1979: 327). Another example of the *ally*, or rather the attempt to gain one, is the meeting in Geneva between Riḍā and a Syrian gentleman named Aḥmad ʿIzzat Bāshā al-ʿĀbid,²⁶ described as “one of the most important notables and richest men of Syria” (ʿĪbish 1979: 337), who came from Paris. Riḍā tried to win his support for Syria’s struggle for independence and invited him to take part in the Syrian congress, but al-ʿĀbid apologized, giving the

²³ This applies to the audience of a movie, but could similarly be applied to a readership (cf. Vogler 2007: 139).

²⁴ For instance, Riḍā writes that Mishīl Luṭf ʿAllāh and Jūrj Afandi Yūsuf Sālim were waiting for him in Alexandria and that they sent someone to look after him and help him handle the travel formalities at the port, e.g. customs, passport control, medical check etc. Furthermore we are informed that Yūsuf Sālim was his cabin mate during the ship trip to Trieste. This was very advantageous for him: “Sharing my cabin is better for me, even if I would have preferred to be alone if I spoke the language of the ship crew. But my companion [Sālim] speaks both French and English” (ʿĪbish 1979: 315ff.).

²⁵ Mishīl Luṭf ʿAllāh was a wealthy Christian Syrian émigré who lived in Cairo. He was the president of the Party of Syrian Unity, see Cleveland (1985: 50).

²⁶ Aḥmad ʿIzzat Bāshā al-ʿĀbid (1849–1924) was a Syrian politician and adviser of the Ottoman sultan ʿAbd ul-Ḥamid (Turk. Abdülhamid) II. He is the father of Muḥammad ʿAlī al-ʿĀbid, the first president of the Syrian Republic (1932–1936) (cf. Moubayed 2006: 95–97).

excuse that he had to leave for Paris. Riḏā responded: “I know that you fear the French if you support our cause and take part in our congress. But you can avoid this [the revenge of the French] by telling them that you were trying to mediate between them and us” (ʿĪbish 1979: 338). The gentleman met Riḏā a second time before returning to Paris and the latter tried once again to convince him to join the Syrian delegation. Al-ʿĀbid promised to come back to Geneva and gave them his word that he would support the cause financially (ʿĪbish 1979: 338).

Even more interesting here is the fact that Riḏā tried to win allies even within the opposite camp. In this context he met a certain Mr. Rappard, “one of Switzerland’s richest and most prominent scholars, a fair-minded gentleman” (ʿĪbish 1979: 338), who was the director of the Mandates Section of the League of Nations.²⁷ Riḏā’s goal was to try to share with him the point of view of a Middle Easterner facing the reality of colonization and the consequences of the policies of the League of Nations. Thus he hoped to gain Mr. Rappard’s sympathy and make him supportive of the decision of the Second Assembly of the League of Nations in favour of Syria and Palestine (ʿĪbish 1979: 329f.).

These examples of the *ally* show the beginning of a transformation of the hero’s personality, which is necessary to succeed in his mission. The different *allies* in our text play different roles. However, they all help the hero Rashīd Riḏā adapt to his new environment, enabling him to solve the coming challenges. The quicker he learns the new rules, the better he will master his challenges.

Approach of the inmost cave

After arriving in Geneva, we are informed that Rashīd Riḏā and his team began to prepare for the *great battle* right away: “After we arrived in Geneva, we immediately started looking for a place where we can organize our congress” (ʿĪbish 1979: 330). This stage of the hero’s journey, referred to as the *approach of the inmost cave*, is indeed the part in which the final preparations for the *great battle* are made. The hero and his team make plans, do reconnaissance on the enemy, and reorganize or thin out the group (Vogler 2007: 144). In this sense, the main purpose of the congress was to prepare the defence of the Syrian position, which sought to make the League of Nations put an end to the French and British mandates in Syria and Palestine. It was also the last chance for the Syrians and Palestinians to work out a common defence. As we are informed in the text that other Syrian and Palestinian political groups were on the way to Geneva to join forces with their fellows there, the preparation for the *great battle* becomes indeed very obvious.²⁸ The concrete re-

²⁷ William E. Rappard (1883–1958) was an influential scholar and diplomat of Swiss origin. For a detailed biography of Rappard, see Monnier (1995).

²⁸ They received, for example, a telegram from Trieste from Riyāḏ as-Ṣulḥ – who later became prime minister after the independence of Lebanon (1943–1945) – informing them

sult of this meeting was an open letter to the president of the second assembly of the League of Nations, Herman Adriaan van Karnebeek,²⁹ in which the Syrian and Palestinian delegations tried to convince the League to grant Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine their independence in the name of justice and on the basis of the right of self-determination (see ʿĪbish 1979: 346–357).

The ordeal

The delegation members tried to make the best of their presence in Geneva. Thus, the fifth part of the travel narrative is dedicated to the description of the meetings with diplomats of different countries in order to convince them to support the cessation of European mandates in Syria and Palestine. By doing so, the Syrian delegation hoped to bring the countries in question to re-think their position concerning the colonial policy in the Arab region (see ʿĪbish 1979: 359f.). Among the diplomats who agreed to meet the delegation were the president of the council of the League, the Chinese delegate, the president of the Assembly, the Iranian delegate Arfa^ʿ al-Dawla³⁰, the British delegate of South Africa Lord Robert Cecil,³¹ the British delegate Herbert A. L. Fisher,³² as well as the delegates of Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Argentina.³³ We are informed that the French diplomats refused to meet the delegation, because in their eyes it did not have the authority to represent the Syrians. In the text we are given an account of only five meetings, namely those with Lord Cecil, Mr. Fisher, the Chinese and Iranian delegates, and finally the president of the Assembly himself.

These meetings, especially those with the European diplomats, are the most important regarding the success of the delegation's political mission. This part of the travelogue represents indeed the most crucial test for the author and his team: If

that he was on his way to Geneva and that he was carrying with him many letters of attorney from other Syrian parties (Cf. ʿĪbish 1979: 330).

²⁹ Herman A. van Karnebeek (1874–1942) was a Dutch politician and diplomat. From 1921 until 1922 he was president of the League of Nations. About Van Karnebeek's role in Dutch politics of the twentieth century, see Wielenga (2008) and Hellema (2006).

³⁰ Prince Mirzā Arfa^ʿ al-Dawla (1846–1937) was the representative of Persia to the League of Nations. He is the father of Hasan Arfa^ʿ, general and ambassador of the Pahlavi dynasty. See Arfa (1964).

³¹ Edgar Algernon Robert Gascoyne-Cecil (1864–1958), known as Lord Robert Cecil, was a British politician, diplomat, and one of the architects of the League of Nations. He represented the Dominion of South Africa in the League Assembly. More about Cecil, see Bachofen (1959).

³² Herbert Albert Laurens Fisher (1865–1940) was an English professor and British delegate to the League of Nations. More about Fisher, see Hazlehurst – Whitehead – Woodland (1996: 139f.). For his autobiography, see Fisher (1940).

³³ Fisher (1940: 360). For an exhaustive list of all the delegates who attended the second assembly of the League of Nations under the presidency of Van Karnebeek, see <http://indiana.edu/~league/2ndassemb.htm>.

they succeed in convincing the diplomats to reconsider their positions on the mandates in Syria and Palestine, the political outcome at the end of the second assembly could be very positive for all Syrians and Palestinians. As this is the biggest challenge of Riḏā's journey, this part of the travelogue corresponds to the stage labelled as the *ordeal* in the hero's journey, which constitutes the crucial test in which the hero faces his most fearsome opponents (cf. Vogler 2007: 155). According to Christopher Vogler, "the simple secret of the Ordeal is this: Heroes must die so that they can be reborn" (ibid.). This stage is full of dangers which threaten the hero's life and the success of his mission abroad. It will also shape the future personality of the hero, who experiences a great transformation here; the *ordeal* is the centre point of the journey, in which the hero encounters someone with an incredible power (cf. Campbell 2004: 119–121). In this sense, Rashid Riḏā, armed with his best anti-colonial arguments and supported by his most trustworthy friends, met all the personalities who agreed to meet the Syrian delegation and tried to affect their opinion on the mandate policy in Syria and Palestine. In his account, he enumerates the arguments of his opponents and his own counterarguments from a very subjective point of view. The whole part gives the impression that the author surmounted his inability to communicate in the relevant foreign languages; there is no mention whatsoever of a translator facilitating communication between Riḏā and the European diplomats. One of the most interesting aspects of this part is the obvious shaping of an "Oriental" identity in contrast to the Western/European one. Thus, in comparison to the Europeans, the Chinese, and the Iranians, regardless of their religious affiliation, are presented as members of a unified Oriental family: Like the Arabs, they are all struggling against the European colonial powers to obtain their independence (cf. Ṭibish 1979: 364–366).

The reward

In the sixth part of the *European Journey* the author recounts two discussions he had with Europeans of the kind he referred to in many other articles as *al-ʿaḥrār* ('the intellectually independent, the fair-minded') (Ṭibish 1979: 369). After having challenged the colonial powers and faced their ambassadors, it is time to celebrate. At this stage of the hero's journey, the hero enjoys glory and recognition for his achievements (cf. Vogler 2007: 175f.). The celebration is often a party, barbecue, or campfire during which the hero and his companions review the recent events (Vogler 2007: 177). In this sense it is striking that in our story, too, both celebratory discussions took place in a restaurant: The atmosphere is described as very positive and as is said above, the Europeans present around the table were all "fair-minded". All these elements suggest that it was more of a celebration than an encounter between the hero and yet another "villain". The reader doesn't get the impression that the hero is still exposed to danger or that

he is still struggling to counter the colonial arguments of the Europeans. The dialogue partners in question are presented as allies, pro-Islamic and anti-colonial. They are described as follows:

“These ‘fair-minded’ Europeans know the corruptness of their politicians very well. They are very afraid of the consequences of their policies and don’t believe the lies they are spreading concerning Orientals, especially Muslims” (ʿĪbish 1979: 370).

The reported discussions are portrayed in many ways as a monologue rather than a dialogue and are characterized by the intellectual capitulation of the dialogue partners in the light of Riḍā’s arguments. This strongly enforces the impression that the hero savours his success in the *special world* and that from now on he feels he is able to beat any challenger. The first dialogue partner is “Mūsyū Shūlr” (Monsieur Scholler),³⁴ the private secretary of the president of the League of Nations. He is described as a neutral and just young man, who knows the bitter truth of the European policy in the East (ʿĪbish 1979: 370). The most striking aspect of the dialogue between the author and Scholler is a long quotation in which the latter tells the story of an Armenian girl who was living in joy and happiness in the house of a Turkish Pasha until members of an American delegation decided to separate her against her will from her Turkish family (ʿĪbish 1979: 370f.). By doing so, the Americans wanted to free her from “Muslim injustice”. Before the girl left Istanbul, the wives of the Pasha insisted on giving her jewellery and clothes, which were kept for the day of her wedding. Scholler expresses his consternation toward this injustice as follows:

“So this should be an example of the injustice and the oppression of the Turkish Pashas and their wives toward the Armenian girls? The Armenians were definitely fooled by the British and the Russians. They raised their weapons against their own country and together with its enemies they took part in a conspiracy against it. This is why I think that the Turks will never forgive them” (ʿĪbish 1979: 371).

It is very interesting that the author quotes the private secretary of the president of the League to express his own opinion on the Armenian question. In this sense all accusations against the Ottoman Empire during WWI concerning the Armenian massacres are invalidated by the quote of one political authority, who supposedly knows the deep truth about the colonial policy in the Middle East.⁸⁹

The second European dialogue partner is a journalist of *La tribune de Genève*, “Monsieur Matile” (ʿĪbish 1979: 371). In the text, Riḍā discusses with Matile the – in Matile’s own words – “materialistic” and “corrupted” nature of the European

³⁴ Person unknown. It is very difficult to determine the right transcription of “Shūlr”. It could be Scholler, but also Schöler, Schöller, Schuler, Schüler, Schouler or Schäler etc. (ʿĪbish 1979: 370).

⁸⁹ In the same year Shakīb ʿArslān, who at that time was living in Berlin, published a book in German language about the Armenian question, in which he shared the same opinion as Riḍā. See Arslan (1921).

civilization. The author first lists his anti-colonial arguments and expresses a vehement critique of European imperialism. Monsieur Matile answers surprisingly and without any hesitation:

“Your civilization is truly based on virtues and noble character traits. So conserve it, because it is better for you than the corrupted materialistic civilization of the West. The latter is, as you can see, hypocritical and can only stimulate the craving for pleasure” (ʿĪbish 1979: 372).

The capitulation of Mr. Matile at the beginning of the debate gives the impression that he recognizes the arguments against his own culture, which is also a sort of recognition of his passive guilt, as a member of a “wicked” nation. The most important aspect of dialogues in general, which is the exchange of different ideas between two parties, has already disappeared in the beginning of the debate, which quickly turns into an echo-dialogue³⁵ in which the critique of the West is confirmed by a European himself on the European soil. Thus, the first expression of the *reward* in this part is the fact that even the intellectual “elite” of Europe cannot refute Riḏā’s arguments.

In a second step Riḏā quotes, in direct speech, a discussion between his master Muḥammad ʿAbduh and the English philosopher Herbert Spencer,³⁶ whom Riḏā refers to as the most important philosopher in Europe (ʿĪbish 1979: 373ff.). According to Vogler, “[a] campfire scene may also be a chance for a reminiscence or nostalgia (...) A loner hero might recall the events or people who influenced him” (Vogler 2007: 177). This is exactly what is happening here, as the author talks about ʿAbduh, the man who shaped his personality and made a hero out of him. The narrative of the encounter between ʿAbduh and Spencer enforces the staging of the author as someone who has a notion of European philosophy. This is another recurrent element in the hero’s journey: “Heroes may find that surviving death grants new powers or better perceptions” (Vogler 2007: 180). Rashīd Riḏā, who earlier admitted his helplessness without a translator and recognized that his ignorance of European languages was a significant obstacle between him and the European civilization, seems in this part to have forgotten what he wrote six months earlier.³⁷ Rather, he seems to behave on the European scene as an equal, sometimes superior actor. The hero has matured.

Riḏā next asks his dialogue partner if cooperation between the “fair-minded” Europeans and the Muslims could stop the injustice of Europe in the Middle East. His dialogue partner gives him the following advice:

³⁵ The term “echo-dialogue” is used to describe a dialogue situation in which we hear two voices, but when we listen carefully to what the dialogue partners are saying to each other, we realize that they are in fact expressing the same point of view. See Fishelov (2010: 8f.).

³⁶ Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was an English philosopher, biologist, and sociologist. For an intellectual biography of Spencer, see for instance Francis (2007). For Spencer’s thinking see also Taylor (2007).

³⁷ See his short excursus on the importance of foreign language skills: ʿĪbish (1979: 318).

“You [Orientals] have to stay united. Stick to your religion and noble virtues. Try to benefit from the coming war. Because if your people are ready to listen and follow such wise leaders as you, they will be able to benefit from the next war and get all the things you have lost back. And if they don’t show this readiness, allow me to tell you that you [Orientals] deserve neither freedom nor independence. You will need a long education” (ʿIbīsh 1979: 375).

It is very interesting that the author is staging himself as the only alternative to European tutelage, the European partner even recognizes him as a leader who is able to achieve the aims of his society. This is typical for this stage, in which the hero is supposed to take possession of a “treasure” or whatever was being sought in the *special world*.³⁸ Thus, Riḍā tries to convince the reader to have faith in him and his reform project. The characters of the “fair-minded” Europeans in the *European Journey* correspond to what the German Middle East scholar Rotraud Wielandt termed the “European certifier in charge”.³⁹ She noticed the repeated presence of this character in many works of Arabic fiction of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, including travel literature. The authors brought into play the character of a European, often an orientalist, who is fascinated by the Islamic civilization and whose main function in the story is to restore the cultural self-confidence of the Muslims by praising the genius of Islam and Muslims and bringing their historical contribution to European civilization into the foreground (Wielandt 1980: 57ff.). Not only in the *European Journey* but also in many other articles Riḍā makes use of this figure to enforce his argumentation. The principle is very simple: If Europeans themselves have certified his critique of Europe or his praise of Islam, his argumentation becomes more credible, because it is a member of the rival civilization itself who is certifying his reflection for him.⁴⁰

The road back

The seventh and last part of the travelogue is an article Riḍā originally intended to publish in a Swiss journal, written to inform the European public about the “real” situation in the Orient from the perspective of an Oriental who is experiencing the consequences and the injustices of European imperialism in his daily life. The article in question, which was instead published in *al-Manār*, is divided into four parts: 1. “Appeal from the East to the fair-minded Europeans”, 2. “What the Orient learned

³⁸ Campbell’s term for it is “the ultimate boon” (2004: 161).

³⁹ In German: „der europäische Bestätiger vom Dienst“ (Wielandt 1980: 57).

⁴⁰ One of the most striking examples of the role of the character of the “European certifier in charge” is a discussion between Riḍā and the British diplomat and economist Alfred Mitchell-Innes (1864–1950) about the greatness of the Arabic language, in which the British poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840–1922), who was a friend of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, certifies that “the Arabs were speaking wisdom in a time where the British people were living like animals, naked in the jungle” (Riḍā 1911: 911). For Blunt’s biography, see Longford (2007).

from war and peace”, 3. “The League of Nations’ ignorance of the allies’ craftiness”, 4. “The fundamentals of peace between East and West”.⁴¹ Although Riḍā’s travelogue does not contain an explicit description of the return journey, one can interpret this section as a sort of *road back*, the beginning of the end of every hero’s journey. After celebrating their victory, heroes often begin their journey back to the *ordinary world*. According to Vogler, “often heroes are motivated to hit the Road Back when the forces they have defied in the Ordeal now rally and strike back at them” (2007: 189). The reason the article couldn’t be published in a European journal is given in the text by a quote of one of Riḍā’s friends, who was supposed to translate the article into French. After reading it, he told Riḍā that he would “never find a newspaper in Geneva which will agree to publish it because of the harsh criticism of Great Britain and France” (ʿĪbish 1979: 377). Here we find the image that will be discussed in more detail below, namely the enemy trying to recover from his defeat in order to fight the hero one last time. The fact that Riḍā, who “defeated” the Europeans intellectually on their own soil (in Geneva) and with their own weapons (quotations of European philosophers), quotes the translator can indeed be seen as the re-appearance of another type of *herald* announcing that there will be a final battle between “good” and “evil”. The censorship of the European media concerning any critical position against the European colonial policy can be seen as a sign that the dark forces were not fully defeated in the *ordeal*, and that they are preparing for the last battle. Furthermore the quotation reinforces the image of Europe as a “villain”. This image has already been constructed in the first part of the travelogue, when Riḍā justified his travel to Europe as an effort to expose the “evil” plan of the European colonial powers. At this stage of the journey, after the traveller has gained first-hand information about Europe, he closes the circle of the adventure by reaffirming the supposition he expressed at the very beginning (European imperialism as the “villain”). But the difference this time is that the reader has travelled with him through the different stages of his journey, and thus has seen that the author has grown and become a more mature intellectual, able to save the Muslim world from the domination of Europe. At this stage the hero faces the decision to return home to implement the various lessons he has learned in the *special world* (Vogler 2007: 188). For Riḍā, the return home represents first and foremost the return to his journalistic activities, namely writing articles to “illuminate” the Muslims concerning the threat of European imperialism in order to stop the domination of Europe. In this sense, the incorporation of such an article in the last part of the *European Journey* is a sort of return of the author, or rather the decision to return to the *ordinary world*.⁴²

⁴¹ The Arabic subtitles are as follows: “Nidāʾ al-sharq li ʾahrār al-gharb”, “Mā taʾallamahu al-Sharq min al-ḥarb wa al-ṣulh”, “Jahlu jamʿiyyat al-ʿumam bi makr al-ḥulafāʾ bihā”, “Qawāʿidu al-silm bayna al-sharq wa al-gharb” (ʿĪbish 1979: 377–384).

⁴² Although the article seems to be separated from the travel narrative at first glance, it was published as the seventh part of the *European Journey*. The author herewith stresses that this article is a part of his travel account.

The resurrection

The seventh part of the *European Journey* – the article mentioned above – is rhetorically constructed as an appeal to the European conscience, symbolized by the “fair-minded” Europeans, whom the author addresses directly. However, one may wonder why the author published an article directed at a European public in his journal – read by an Arabic-speaking readership mostly in the Muslim world – where its first addressees will likely never read it. In this sense we can suppose that addressing the “fair-minded” Europeans in this article is just one of many rhetorical methods of reaching the Muslim readership and reinforcing its cultural self-esteem. Thus, addressing the Europeans and showing them the way out of the political crisis in the world is in reality addressing the Muslims, especially the Arabic-speaking communities in the Middle East. It is a staging of the author as someone who has the solution for the problem. In the article, he first gives a detailed analysis of the political situation in the East from his point of view as an “Easterner” (“Appeal from the East to the fair-minded Europeans”, “What the Orient learned from war and peace”, “The League of Nations’ ignorance of the allies’ craftiness”) and secondly suggests a concrete five-step solution for the problems related to European imperialism (“The fundamentals of peace between East and West”) (ʿĪbīsh 1979: 383f.). This serves as the ultimate proof that the author was able to transform the knowledge gained in Europe into practical advice for the future and a potential intellectual weapon.

From a monomythical perspective, the seventh part contains many elements of the *resurrection*, which is the penultimate stage in the hero’s journey. The main function of this stage is to determine whether the hero retained the lesson of the *ordeal*, or in other words: whether he is able to bring the knowledge back as applied wisdom (Vogler 2007: 199). After his European experience Riḍā, through his article, tried to convince his readership that he was now more than capable of giving practical advice on the matters of Europe and colonialism. In this sense, the author provides through his writing evidence that he experienced a transformation before re-entering the *ordinary world*. This final transformation should reflect the best parts of his old self and the lessons learned along the way (Vogler 2007: 198).

Return with the elixir or the significance of the “European Journey” for Rasbīd Riḍā

Having surmounted all the difficulties and survived all the *ordeals* of the adventure, the hero returns to his starting point. If he is a “true” hero, he returns with the *elixir*, i.e. “something with the power to heal a wounded land” (Vogler 2007: 215) and shares it with his fellows. The *return* is always a new start, or rather a new chapter in the life of the hero, who experienced deep transformations through his journey. This applies in the same way to the traveller, who has endured the experience of foreignness and is finally back home.

Dealing with Europe, its ideas and political decisions, was a major part of the intellectual work of different reformist thinkers in the Middle East in the colonial context of the 20th century. As mentioned above, in contrast to his mentors al-Afghānī and ‘Abduh (and also to other, more secular intellectuals), Rashīd Riḍā was in Europe for the first and only time at an advanced age (56 years). For any reformist and anti-colonial thinker, it was incredibly important to possess first-hand experience of and knowledge about Europe. In the case of Riḍā, who challenged Europe and its ideas from the beginning of his journalistic career in 1898 on, a lack of knowledge of European languages was certainly a significant drawback for his reception of European thought. Fortunately, he was able to benefit from the wave of translations of European works into the Arabic language. But nevertheless, neither the translated works nor his various contacts with Muslims living in Europe could replace a first-hand experience of Europe. The beginning of the twentieth century in the Middle East was characterized by rivalry between different ideologies and ideas seeking to shape the future, all claiming to hold the only solution to help the so-called “Muslim World” surmount its backwardness and enable it to challenge the European civilization in every domain.⁴³ In this context, possessing first-hand knowledge of Europe conferred credibility and authority to the person challenging or praising these approaches. In this sense, the *elixir* Riḍā brought back from his journey was his European experience and the authority of the traveller. In a society where the vast majority never travelled to Europe, he had obtained exclusive knowledge first-hand and gained authority regarding questions related to Europe. One of the *return*’s many functions is “restoring the balance of the world (...). Villains should earn their ultimate fate by their evil deeds and they should not get off too easily” (Vogler 2007: 220). The “punishment” for Europe in the *European Journey* is the unmasking of its “evil” colonial ambitions and plans to enslave the world – especially the Middle East. This very element, which is one of the constitutive elements of the *call to adventure*, is now reaffirmed by the article. Through reaffirmation, it has gained much more credibility than the statement made before embarking on the journey. As one of very few Middle Easterners who were able to travel to Europe in the early twenties, Riḍā was indeed very successful in staging himself as a hero in his travel narrative. Through his newly gained “authority” he provided himself a basis for a new “chapter” in his intellectual and political life as someone who had gained practical knowledge, i.e. deep insight in all matters related to Europe and its colonial policies in the Middle East.

⁴³ More about the political climate in the Arab World at the beginning of the twentieth century, see, for instance, Hourani (1983); Kayali (1997); Cleveland (2004).

Conclusion

At first glance, the seven parts of the *riḥla* published after Riḍā's return in his journal *al-Manār* in 1922, do not seem to feature a coherent chronological structure, or even a consistent text. But from a monomythical perspective, these different parts nevertheless form one consistent narration serving a particular purpose: staging the author as a hero who had the courage to face his worst "enemy" (European imperialism) in a totally unknown geographical and cultural context. This article has tried to show how the different stages of the hero's journey appear – even in their chronological sequence – in Riḍā's travel narrative. The narrative power of the monomyth as a literary technique can be indeed very helpful in understanding how travel writers stage themselves as heroes in their respective texts. Furthermore, it can give insight into the functions of this literary genre.

In the case of Rashīd Riḍā, the practice of the archetypal plot structure of the monomyth in his seven-part *European Journey* was very useful in reinforcing his vehement anti-colonial attitude and in presenting himself and the Muslim reformist movement directly and indirectly as the best alternative to stop the European domination in the Arabic Middle East. That he did this by offering all the characteristics of a good story to the reader may have made his arguments even more attractive and convincing. As any other hero's story, his travel narrative can be seen as an invitation to the Muslim reader to identify with him and to take part in all the transformations he underwent during his journey in Europe. At the end, the reader should also have gotten the impression that he – like the hero or the traveller – has grown and changed and his restored self-confidence empowers him to face the imperialist powers at home.

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