



Printing Press building, 1956.

Photo courtesy of Nabil Mansour.

Middle East Press for Printing and Publishing

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The Middle East Press (MEP), operated by the Middle East Union Mission (MEUM) in Beirut, Lebanon, was a publishing house with printing facilities that published in six languages. It was founded in 1947 but was forced to discontinue its operations in 1984 due to financial difficulties and the civil war in Lebanon. MEP subsequently merged with the publishing department of MEUM and all materials were sent to an outside printing house. This practice has continued up to the present (2020).

History of the Publishing Work Before Middle East Press

The publishing work in the Middle East area had its origins in 1891 when Z. G. Baharian, the first Adventist convert in Turkey, began publishing tracts in Istanbul by multi-graphing (an office printing machine). A regular publishing program employing colporteurs was begun in Istanbul and continued for several years, printing literature in Greek, Armenian, and Turkish. They were forced to discontinue operations with disruptions of World War I.¹

In other parts of the Middle East the publishing work was also beginning to be established. In Egypt, several books were translated into Arabic. Between 1902 and 1906, a book on the *Prophecies of Daniel* was published there, and by 1912, an additional 10 Arabic tracts were issued. *The Sure Word of Prophecy*, a 25-page health book by M. H. Brown, ran through at least two editions (one edition was 7,500 copies), and in 1924, *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy*, by W. A. Spicer, was selected for translation.²

The denomination did not own their own printing facilities at that time, so the books were outsourced to presses in Brookfield, Illinois, and Hamburg, Germany. The latter printed in the Arabic, Greek, Turkish, and Armenian languages.

In 1928, the Arabic Union Mission decided to establish its own printing facilities. As a result, The Arabic Literature Society was established at Matariah, near Cairo, Egypt. C. H. C. Rieckmann, who was sent to Egypt earlier to learn Arabic, was called to lead the publishing program. Just a few years later in the early 1930s, the organization (Erich Maier, manager), moved to Haifa, Palestine, and later to Jerusalem in 1938. A. G. Rodgers was named manager in 1941. The headquarters moved back to Egypt in 1943, this time to Alexandria (M. C. Grin, manager), where the then Middle East Union Mission (MEUM) had its headquarters.

Three years later, in 1946, The Arabic Literature Society was absorbed by The Eastern Publishing Association, which was newly organized by the MEUM. This house also absorbed at its founding the Turkish Depository (F. Backer, A. Barlas, and F. F. Oster served as managers of the depository in Istanbul) and the Iran Literature Society (a publishing house established in Tabriz, Iran, which moved to Tehran in 1938). A. E. Ashod, Alb. Hessel, and H. E. Hargreaves served as managers.³

Within months, the MEUM headquarters moved to Beirut, Lebanon and the publishing association moved with it. In 1947 it was renamed the Middle East Press for Printing and Publishing, and all Turkish and Farsi

publications were placed under its control, with the Union President, E. L. Branson as director.⁴

Construction and Early Development of Middle East Press

For a few years after moving to Beirut, Lebanon, all publishing materials were outsourced while plans were being made to select a location for the publishing house, erect a press building, and secure equipment, in addition to other aspects of the publishing work.

Dr. Edmond Haddad, in an interview, recalls the story of the beginning of the publishing work in Lebanon: “In the summer of 1952 (until 1954) while we were living in Beit Mery, I would go down by bus to Achrafieh where the Union building was. There we had an office where the publishing department had a storage [space] for all the printing that was done. At that time all printing was outsourced to Saikly Printing Establishment.”⁵

After considering numerous sites around Beirut, it was voted at the 1952 Annual Council Meetings at the General Conference in Tacoma Park, Maryland, to erect the press building on land owned by Middle East College. Funds were provided by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to the Middle East Division, and manager R. C. Dinning was authorized to go forward with plans for establishing the press.⁶

Construction on the new building proceeded rapidly. By the beginning of 1953, the first floor of the plant was built. As the demand for literature increased, a second story was added in 1958 to make room for book-binding equipment and the photo-engraving department.⁷ By mid-July 1962, the construction of the press was finally completed with an attractive entrance and reception room, additional storage space for paper stock and completed books, and additional space for a more efficient flow of work through the factory.⁸

Equipment over the years included the following: an Intertype machine for typesetting, a Cleveland folder, a saddle gang stitchery for the magazines, a Kolbus case-making machine for the cloth cover books, and a Sulby Minabinda for binding paperback books.⁹ Due to increasing sales, in 1962 a Bradma embossing machine was purchased to be used in the circulation department of the press. This machine was used to address the magazines that were sent out each month and made the department more efficient in regards to filing names and addresses and entering new subscriptions.¹⁰ A plate-making machine was installed in 1963, which enabled books to be reprinted at a very low cost,¹¹ and in 1965 a new \$10,000 Heidelberg cylinder press (the first of its kind in Lebanon) was installed, making it possible to double production.¹² The institution was finally complete and self-contained as far as the offset process was concerned, when in 1969 and 1971 the Roland and Ryobi offset machines were added, along with the addition of camera equipment.¹³

Initial Publications

In December 1952, Milton J. McCullouch, former superintendent of the printing department of the Voice of Prophecy, replaced Dinning as manager.¹⁴ The press became operational by the beginning of 1953, and by that

summer, a few months after its opening, 44 student colporteurs sold LBP 13,000.00 (USD 5,600) worth of literature. This number doubled to 80 student colporteurs the following summer, meaning that one out of 16 Seventh-day Adventists in the Arabic speaking countries were selling books the summer of 1954. This was the highest ratio anywhere in the world at that time.¹⁵

Literature that was in preparation at that time included magazines such as *Life and Health*, and books such as *Modern Medical Counselor*, *Prophecy Speaks*, *The Cigarette and You*, and *Steps to Christ*, all translated into Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi.¹⁶

The Middle East Division (MED) held its first publishing department convention in Beirut, May 31 to June 5, 1955. Attending were the officers of the division, other division staff, representatives from the publishing house, and delegates from all the fields. The amount of literature available so far had been limited, and there was a need to better organize and coordinate the publishing work of the division. Plans were made to reach one hundred million people in the Middle East with the Advent message, and it was recommended to request all mission workers to actively recruit a full-time colporteur for every church in the division, who would make the literature ministry their life-time work. Wadie Farag, publishing department secretary, suggested a delivery goal for 1955 that would triple the sales of 1954.¹⁷

Growth and Development of Publications in the 1960s.

Under the leadership of R. E. Anderson (press manager 1958-1969) and his team of many personnel in the different phases of its operation, the literature ministry experienced significant growth. In the early 1960s a *Spirit of Prophecy* course was prepared by the editorial department, editor-in-chief R. C. Darnell, Arabic editor Naim Awais, and Armenian editor A. E. Ashod. In every Arab section of the Middle East Division believers were meeting once each week to study this *Spirit of Prophecy* course.¹⁸

All About the Baby was distributed to medical institutions and health centers,¹⁹ and by the end of 1961, *Patriarchs and Prophets* was published. This was the first of Mrs. White's big books to be published in Arabic. It was a beautiful 600-page book containing 16 full-page illustrations, of which four were in full color.²⁰

In the mid-1960s, a series of four quarterlies covering the Bible stories in one year was published in Armenian. There were picture rolls and Sabbath School lessons for children, which were also used in Branch Sabbath Schools.²¹

A strong seller of the mid-1960s was a magazine entitled *Nida' al Si?at* (*Call to Health*). In the span of a year, 47 temperance pledges were sent to the editors. Readers wrote to tell about their victories over smoking habits, and applications for the health course in that same period totaled 247. Goals for subscriptions set by the Press Board of Trustees for the magazine totaled 10,200, with goals for the following countries as follows: Egypt 1,200, Iraq 1500, Jordan 2500, Lebanon 2500, Libya 1000, Syria 1500.²²

In 1965 *Your Way to Health and Happiness* was the first large book published in Farsi.²³ *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White's second Conflict of the Ages book was published in Arabic and Farsi. Egypt received 2000 copies and the government authorities in Jordan granted the book full circulation.²⁴

During the first two months of 1965, sales increased by 106 percent. The publishing director for the Middle East Division, D. L. Chappell attributed this to three reasons: First, Brother Issa in Iraq was able to successfully obtain a permit to sell books and magazines to schools in Baghdad, after an absence of all books for three years. Second, Milad Abdelkarim, full-time publishing secretary for the Lebanon section was able to recruit two full-time colporteurs to assist the part-time students on Sundays. This increased sales by 32 percent. Third, the publishing leader in Egypt, Fouad Guirguis, recruited a new colporteur to help the four existing ones, and sales were increased by 77 percent.²⁵

Up until this time, all books and magazines had been translated from English into Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi. In 1966, the book *Miracle Girl*, the story in which Nellie Hadadd was saved by open-heart surgery, written by her husband Elder A. A. Haddad, was the first subscription book to be written expressly for Middle East Press as an original manuscript by a national worker.²⁶

In 1967, publishing news was made, both in Seventh-day Adventist circles and in the Middle East, with the publication of *Your Ideal Diet as a Physician Sees It* by Dr. Herschel Lamp, Medical Department Secretary of the Middle East Division. This was the third book that originated in the Middle East. It was a major work in Arabic devoted to the subject of nutrition based on research done in the Middle East.²⁷

In 1968 Middle East Press received a commendation from Mr. Daher, a high government official responsible to the Lebanese government, for the content of all the books and magazines published in Lebanon. All literature had to carry his official stamp of approval before circulation. Highly regarding *Bedtime Stories*, Mr. Daher requested 300 copies and subsequently gave them to the students of Mercy Society School during the June graduation.²⁸

Challenges During the Civil War

During the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), Middle East Press suffered tremendously. On September 1, 1977 Wajih Faddoul (Arabic press translator) was hit by shrapnel from a shell that fell near him. He was killed along with four other people in front of the Registry Office of Civil Status in Hasbaiyya, southeast Lebanon.²⁹ Faddoul was replaced by Nabil Mansour from Egypt.³⁰

The *Arab Deterrent Force* (ADF) entered Lebanon in 1976 shortly after the Lebanese civil war broke out. Their control over Lebanon continued even after the civil war ended. These troops were stationed in strategic locations in Lebanon including the northern hills surrounding Middle East College.

Escalated tension was on the rise in Beirut between the Christian militias and the ADF. On October 25, 1978, the ADF fired their huge anti-aircraft gun at the gate area of Middle East College, hitting the electric wires above the gate. A broken high-tension wire struck the gateman, Khalil Abbas and “thrust him to the ground, incinerating his shoulders, burning off his feet, and shrinking his body. Abbas died in front of the press workers.³¹ Middle East press was also targeted, and shrapnel penetrated the walls of the building. The editor, Fouad Ashkar had to leave and travel abroad with his family. His work of editing and publishing the two monthly Arabic magazines *The Hope* and *Call to Health* was carried on by the translator/editor Mansour. However, these two Arabic periodicals, which had a wide circulation all over the Middle East, were discontinued a few months later.³²

Howard Scoggins was called in July 1979 to be the circulation manager for the two monthly Arabic magazines, as well as assistant publishing director for Middle East Union under Youssif Farag. Despite difficulties due to the war, the books continued to sell. In an interview with Scoggins, he described the press activity around Lebanon and the rest of MEUM during his time:

In Lebanon things were falling apart. People were frightened to open their doors, so husband-wife teams were encouraged. Adel Kamal and his wife Najwa were the main sellers. Adel Kamal would come to the press, load his little [green] VW car to the full, and sell books such as *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories 1 & 2*, *How to Feed your Baby*, *The Desire of Ages*, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, *The Great Controversy*, and *Education*.

The East Mediterranean Field (EMF) publishing director Milad Abdelkarim ran a program for the students at Middle East College. He would drive them up daily into the mountains in the [orange] VW literature evangelist bus to sell books, and the sales reports showed three of the highest figures on record. Hosni Kolta served as book depository manager as well as treasurer for EMF.³³

The two Arabic subscription magazines, *A Call to Health* and *Hope*, were being sent all over the union and beyond. During 1970, *Hope* was sent to a “mailing list of 16,500 names, the highest in its 22-year history” according to the editor Maurice Katrib.³⁴ On a daily basis, mail would be received from Saudi Arabia, the envelopes containing Riyals (Saudi money) to pay for subscriptions.

There was a strong student program in Cairo and Alexandria, as well as in Khartoum and Juba. MEP would send containers of books into Khartoum each summer (on Trans-Mediterranean Airways) and Farag would run summer student programs there, as well as in Juba.

Shaher Qassous was running the book depository in Jordan and had two very active literature evangelists (LEs) working with him. There was also an LE working in Cyprus and one in Turkey.

In Egypt, the Zeitoun SDA Primary School in Cairo would sell “back” issues of both magazines, which were bundled into one-year sets. Farag was the union publishing director but would do most of his work in Egypt, together with his wife, Fadia. He ran a massive summer student program in Alexandria.

Other managers and staff during the years from 1970 to 1985 included managers Deiter Gramkow, R. F. Stokes, and Boutros Ghazal. Maurice Katrib was the editor-in-chief. The factory foreman was Elias Asmar. Assisting him was Vartkes Azadian, who ran the folders. The typesetters were Najm Khoury and Josephine Abuhaidar. Raymond Kiraz and Berj Tcherkezian operated the photo lab, layout, and darkroom.³⁵

Merging of Middle East Press with the Middle East Union Mission Publishing Department

By 1984, the unfavorable political and economic situation in Lebanon began to adversely affect the press until it became a liability for the union. The physical plant closed and the employees of MEUM, along with some of the foreign press workers were temporarily relocated to Cyprus. While there, plans were made to reorganize the press into a publishing house. Most of the other employees had to look for other jobs. Mansour was transferred to Amman Jordan to carry on with the translation/editing work from there, in addition to teaching at the Amman SDA High School.³⁶

In 1985, Moses Elmadjian from the British Union became publishing director. All administrative activities were now conducted from Cyprus, and for the next five years, printing of the books was outsourced.³⁷

When the political tensions eased a little, some of the press workers and employees returned in 1990 and printing was resumed in a limited manner under press manager Issa Obeid. The publishing director, Roland Fidelia (1992-1995), and accountant Caroline Ghafary performed administrative functions from Cyprus.³⁸ Over the next three years most of the equipment was sold, except for a few small pieces. Storage rooms and old shelves were cleaned out. During this time two discarded manuscripts of the books *Prophets and Kings* and *Acts of the Apostles* were found just before they were to be burned along with other rubbish from the library shelves of the press. They had been translated years ago, but due to the death of Wadie Farag, who had supervised the translation and publishing of Ellen White's books into Arabic, these two manuscripts were not published.³⁹

In 1995, Elias Asmar became production and acting manager until it was finally voted on April 28, 1997 to recommend to the board of MEP printers and publishers that the printing operations of the press be discontinued and carried on only at a pre-press stage as a "desk-top" publishing entity of the MEUM Publishing Department. Materials to be published included Sabbath School materials, mission quarterlies, hymn books, E. G. White books, and books for non-members that tell what the Adventist Church is all about.⁴⁰

Effective April 1, 1999, the Middle East Press merged with the Middle East Union Mission Publishing Department.

⁴¹ Staff to be retained were Josephine Abouhaider (typesetter), Nabil Mansour (translator of periodicals, magazines, and small books as needed), and Roland Fidelia (publishing director for MEUM).⁴² In January 1999 Elias Asmar was voted as publishing director for Eastern Mediterranean Field of MEUM. This was mainly to sell the equipment and to organize the literature program for MEC students. Taking them in the orange van during

the summer months, Asmar and the students covered all of Lebanon, selling most of the books that were left in storage.⁴³

The final closing of the press took place in July 2003, and renovations began almost immediately to convert the press building into headquarters for MEUM.⁴⁴ In the summer of 2007, MEUM, under the direction of President Kjell Aune, moved back to Beirut. The publishing work continued under the directorship of Amir Ghali, while Mansour translated and edited literature from Cyprus until his retirement in 2008. He was replaced by Ashraf Fawzy, who moved to Beirut from Nile Union Academy in Egypt.⁴⁵

In 2011, MEUM was reorganized into Middle East and North Africa Union (MENAUI) and the North African countries, as well as Turkey and Iran, were added to the union. In addition to Arabic, the union resumed publishing and printing materials in Turkish and Farsi and also began producing resources in Kurdish and French.⁴⁶

In 2012, Marshall McKenzie was called as publishing director to MENAUI. He was joined in 2013 by Michael Eckert as associate for sales and distribution.

In 2014 Lebanon re-established student canvassing programs for Adventist youth from across the MENAUI territory. They resumed the sales program in the north of Lebanon and would later spread throughout the region.

In 2015, Michael Eckert was elected as publishing director for MENAUI. Under his leadership the Middle East and North Africa Publishing Association (MENAPA), which departmentally oversaw the development of resources, was renamed *Middle East Publishers* (MEP). An online store was opened in 2015 under www.middle-east-publishers.com.

Between 2015 and 2020 renewed focus was given to develop relevant and contextual resources for individuals of diverse faith backgrounds. These include resources in the following areas:

Sharing literature: Numerous sharing books, tracts, and missionary books for free distribution by church members in English, Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, French, and Kurdish.

Subscription books: Seven megabooks for student canvassing programs, including children, health, and spiritual titles in English, Arabic, and French.

Trade books: Bible study guides, Ellen G. White books in Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish, as well as adult Bible study guides in Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, and French, 28 fundamental beliefs and church manual in Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi.⁴⁷

Contextualized resources: Study guides, sharing books, pocket booklets, sharing tracts, audio recordings, and training resources for the majority population in English, Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish.

In 2016, the department started the “Growing Together Project,” an initiative of the General Conference and Ellen G. White Estate to translate the following 12 Ellen White book titles into Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish:

Patriarchs and Prophets, Prophets and Kings, Desire of Ages, Acts of the Apostles, Great Controversy, Christ's Object Lessons, Christian Service, Counsels for the Church, Counsels on Stewardship, Story of Redemption, Ministry of Healing, Steps to Christ.

As of 2020, the development and printing of the Arabic titles of the “Growing Together Project” were completed, the remaining two books for Farsi are expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2020, while the Turkish translation will require an additional 24 to 48 months for completion.

The publishing department supplies one full-time LE, Sobhy Ramzy, with plans to continue canvassing in upper Egypt.

Under Eckert’s leadership student canvassing programs have steadily grown and expanded throughout MENA. During the winter and summer holidays, and often throughout the year, students from Middle East University in Beirut, Lebanon, and Nile Union Academy in Egypt, canvass dozens of cities, selling hundreds of books. The number of students ranges from seven to 17 per program. Sales programs in other countries throughout MENA have taken place and as of 2020, plans are underway to start a full-time literature program, as well as student canvassing programs in other locations throughout MENA.⁴⁸

Summary of Managers and Publishing Directors

Managers of Middle East Press: R. C. Dinning, 1951–1952; M. J. McCulloch, 1952–1958; R. E. Anderson, 1958–1969; J. A. Aikman, 1970–1976; D. A. E. Gramkow, 1976–1982; R. F. Stokes, 1982–1984; B. Ghazal, 1984–1985; Elias Asmar (acting manager), 1995–1999.

Publishing Directors: M. Elmadjian, 1985–1990; R. Fidelia, 1992–2001; Amir Ghali, 2001–2011; Marshall McKenzie, 2012–2014; Michael Eckert, 2014–present.

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