

Original Research Article

Representation of National Identity and Social Critique within the Context of Syrian Modernity in the Paintings of Tawfiq Tarek

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Abstract

Problem statement: Tawfiq Tarek, one of the prominent painters of the Syrian Ruwad generation, employs academic and Orientalist styles along with the oil painting medium to depict historical identity and deliver social critique. His works — outwardly conservative yet inherently purposeful — address social decay and invite the audience to resist foreign domination. History in his paintings functions as a mirror for contemporary issues, and he is regarded not only as an artistic pioneer but also as a socially, historically, and nationally committed artist. Moreover, considering his modern approach to art education and his role in shaping artistic and national self-awareness in modern Syria, inspired by French teachings, Tarek's works, while reflecting social concerns, focus on national identity and cultural resistance. This study aims to explore how Tawfiq Tarek's paintings express social critique and reinforce national self-awareness within the framework of Arab and Syrian modernity, through the use of academic and Orientalist styles and the oil painting medium.

Research objective: This study analyzes his paintings within the context of contemporary Syrian modernity focusing on eight selected works by Tawfiq Tarek. The present research redefines his place in the history of Syrian art through analytical tables and visual documentation, and emphasizes the continuity of themes such as identity and resistance.

Research method: The research employs a descriptive-analytical method, utilizing tools such as visual analysis and the examination of historical texts.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that Tawfiq Tarek's works, through the use of academic and Orientalist styles and the oil painting medium, offer a purposeful critique of social decay while reinforcing historical identity, national self-awareness, and cultural resistance. His artistic commitment goes beyond mere aesthetics, serving social critique and contributing to the formation of modernity in Syria, which establishes him as a pioneering model of socially engaged art in the Arab world.

Keywords: *Engaged Art, Modern Painting, Arab Modernity, National Identity, Social Critique, Tawfiq Tarek.*

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Introduction

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Arab intellectuals believed that only a fundamental break from traditional cultural structures could overcome the prevailing stagnation in Arab societies and achieve genuine modernity (Naef, 2003, 192). This goal required a process known as *tatqīf* (cultural assimilation or acculturation) (Scheid, 2010, 203), which involved abandoning certain historical customs considered obstacles to progress (Naef, 2002, 221; Scheid, 2010, 203). Fine arts played a pivotal role in this process, as artists regarded them as part of their civilizing mission. Intellectual and social elites also sought to broaden public understanding and appreciation of fine arts to accelerate cultural transformation.

The Ruwad (Pioneers) movement played a crucial role in advancing cultural assimilation by organizing exhibitions and educational events that stimulated interest in fine arts among the educated classes. The term Ruwad refers to groups within society — such as artists from the middle and upper classes — who, though previously excluded, now had the means to participate in the acculturation process (Lenssen, 2014, 27; Scheid, 2010, 209- 218).

In Syria, oil painting — a symbol of Arab modernity — became closely tied to struggles for national independence. After independence in 1946, it served as a medium for reflecting national identity as well as the political and social conditions of the time. However, as Shaw (2011, 3) notes, the early form of painting that later laid the foundations for Arab modernism was not inherently modernist, since it was not aligned with movements aimed at redefining art and breaking away from traditional practices.

Tawfiq Tarek (1875–1940), one of Syria's earliest and most influential artists, left a profound impact on subsequent generations and became a leading figure in the Ruwad movement. Born into a wealthy family with a military background, he

completed his secondary education in Istanbul and entered the city's military academy in 1893 (Qashlan, 2006, 18). At that time, oil painting was part of the basic curriculum in Ottoman military schools. Although its primary function was military, many prominent artists also taught there (Shaw, 2011, 31).

According to Tarek Al-Sharif, Tarek was influenced by Ottoman painters and their documentary approach, although there is no conclusive evidence of a direct impact on his artistic trajectory (Al-Sharif, 1984–85, 14). In 1893, he was arrested for participating in a nationalist political group and was released on the condition that he leave Istanbul (Qashlan, 2006, 18). In 1895, he moved to Paris, where he studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and graduated in 1901 with a degree in design, cartography, and urban planning (*ibid.*).

Upon returning to Damascus, Tarek pursued a full-time career as a painter while also working as an architect, cartographer, and contributing to the restoration of several historical monuments. Although his style was influenced by European models, the themes of his works were shaped by support for national independence and the socio-political concerns of Arab and Syrian society. They reflect a clear commitment to the issues of his time and place.

This study aims to analyze Tarek's artistic commitment and the intersection of history and contemporaneity in his works, thereby examining his role in the formation of Syrian modernity. The central research question asks how Tarek, through the use of academic and Orientalist styles and the oil painting medium, conveys social critique and fosters national self-awareness. The study's hypothesis suggests that his stylistic choices, though seemingly conservative, were deliberate and served transformative objectives. A visual analysis of his works reveals the persistent presence of themes of identity and resistance throughout the history of Syrian art.

Literature Review

Compared to other globally influential countries, Syria has received relatively little scholarly attention, and the available academic resources on the subject are limited. Nevertheless, various studies have been conducted in the social, political, and cultural fields, and numerous publications exist. Due to the scarcity of specialized research on contemporary Syrian painting and the absence of comprehensive studies on its artists, figures such as Tawfiq Tarek have remained relatively underrepresented.

Sawwan (2011), in his brief study, examines the life and works of Tawfiq Tarek, introducing him and highlighting his role in Syrian art. Naef (2003), in her book *A Language of Its Own: The Invasion of Modern Image into the Muslim East*, takes a broader look at Arab art and discusses the efforts of Syrian artists in their pursuit of modernity.

The most significant study on Tarek is Charlotte Bank (2016)'s article, *Painting as Critique: Oil Painting as a Platform for Social and Political Debates in Syria*, which examines Syrian painting and underscores Tarek's role in developing modern painting techniques and tools.

Talebi (2021)'s Ph. D thesis, *A Historical Analysis of the Formation of Syrian Painting* explores the multiple layers of the emergence of contemporary Syrian painting. It analyzes historical, social, and aesthetic contexts and discusses the contributions of pioneering artists, including Tawfiq Tarek. This dissertation serves as a key reference for the present research.

In addition to written sources, information gathered from online databases, libraries, exhibitions, and international galleries has been used selectively in this study. Nevertheless, the present research differs significantly in its nature from previous works: its primary focus lies on the artistic and social analysis of Tarek's oeuvre.

Theoretical Framework

This research is built upon three key conceptual pillars: Syrian modernity, committed art, and the representation of identity within the context of decolonization. These concepts constitute the analytical framework of the study and inform the interpretation of Tawfiq Tarek's artistic approach. Syrian and Arab modernity, grounded in theories of *tatqif* (acculturation) and critiques of modernization processes in Muslim societies, is understood not merely as an imported phenomenon but as a complex and interactive process involving engagement with tradition and the redefinition of historical identity (Naef, 2003; Scheid, 2010). Within this context, oil painting as a modern medium functions as a bridge between the visual traditions of the East and Western styles.

The concept of committed art, informed by discourses such as "painting as critique" (Bank, 2016) and by artists like Louay Kayali, who emphasized the social responsibility of art, provides the analytical foundation for understanding Tarek's oeuvre. In this framework, art is not merely the creation of beauty; it is a tool for raising awareness, delivering social critique, and reconstructing identity.

Theories of identity representation and cultural decolonization, particularly within postcolonial studies, view Tarek's works as a cultural act of resistance against Western hegemony. The representation of Islamic history, critique of political corruption, and revival of indigenous values in his paintings are part of a broader effort to reconstruct a transformative national identity. Tarek's use of Orientalist and academic styles is not simple imitation but a deliberate strategy to communicate his message and to reclaim foreign-imposed meanings in favor of a local discourse (Shaw, 2011).

These theoretical foundations support the main hypothesis of this study: Tarek's stylistic and thematic choices were deliberate and aligned with broader social and identity-driven objectives.

Research Method

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the content and visual dimensions of Tawfiq Tarek's works within the historical and cultural context of Syria. The primary goal is to identify the semantic, symbolic, and stylistic layers of his paintings and explore their relationship with key concepts such as identity, modernity, resistance, and social critique.

In the first stage, data were collected from library and documentary sources, including books, articles, dissertations, specialized databases, catalogues, and images of artworks, drawing upon materials in Persian, Arabic, English, and French.

Subsequently, eight representative works by Tarek were selected for in-depth analysis based on their thematic, stylistic, and historical significance, and their potential for comprehensive interpretation. The selection criteria emphasized the presence of historical, social, and stylistic components relevant to the study's objectives.

The next stage involved visual analysis using the method of pictorial content analysis. Formal elements such as composition, color, light, and perspective, as well as narrative themes and cultural symbols, were examined and interpreted within their historical context.

Finally, the findings were aligned with the theoretical framework and categorized thematically to articulate Tarek's position within the landscape of contemporary Syrian art. This process also opens pathways for the development of comparative research in the fields of Arab and postcolonial art studies.

Data Analysis

• National identity

To analyze the representation of national identity in Tawfiq Tarek's oeuvre, five historical works related to significant events and phenomena

were examined. The findings reveal that Tarek employed painting as a tool for reconstructing national identity and emphasizing Arabism. His works typically combine a sense of pride in a glorious past with a critique of contemporary social decline.

The culmination of this approach can be seen in his painting "The Battle of Hattin", which was begun in 1940 and completed after his death by his student Zuhair Al-Sabbān (Fig. 1). This composition, built around a pyramidal structure with Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi as its focal point, is far more than a historical depiction of a medieval battle; in the context of the French Mandate, it also conveys a powerful political and nationalist message (Maari, 2006, 447) (Table 1). The white horse of Salah al-Din, contrasted against the brown horse of the enemy, symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, while the fortresses in the background underscore the deep historical roots of resistance (Hussam Al-Din & Abu Ayyash, 1988, 27).

Created during the French occupation and World War II, this painting stands as a powerful example of the reconstruction of national pride and a call to resist foreign domination (Maari, 2006; Hussam Al-Din & Abu Ayyash, 1988). Although on the surface, The Battle of Hattin appears to be a conventional historical painting, the artist's intention was to depict the strength of resistance against French colonial exploitation in Syria, a feature that significantly enhances its political and critical nature.



Fig. 1. The Battle of Hattin, Tawfiq Tarek and Zuheir Al-Saban, oil on canvas. Source: Maari, 2006, 447, 57.

Table 1. Visual Analysis of the Battle of Hattin. Source: Authors.

Visual element	Description	Underlying message
Triangular composition	Saladin at the center, mounted on a white horse	Authority and leadership
Colors	White (Saladin), brown (enemy)	Contrast of good and evil
Background	Castles and soldiers in the distance	Historical depth and national resistance

This political resonance explains why, more than two decades later, the Ba’ath Party reinterpreted the painting, aligning Hafez al-Assad’s ideological image with the mythic figure of Salah al-Din and using the artwork to serve its own nationalist objectives — a likely reason for its installation in the Syrian Presidential Palace. In contrast, the painting “Abu Abdullah al-Saghir” (Fig. 2), inspired by Louis Bouchard’s “Al-Ulama” (Fig. 3), delivers a satirical critique of the last Muslim king’s failure to preserve Granada. While Bouchard’s painting features more intricate details and forms, Tarek centers his composition on the main group of figures, highlighting a corpulent man, symbolizing gluttony, accompanied by women dancing before him. This arrangement conveys an implicit critique of weak leadership and moral corruption. By adapting Al-Ulama, Tawfiq Tarek uses

a historical event as a cautionary lesson for contemporary society. Just as Abu Abdullah’s fall led to the collapse of his kingdom, the laziness and incompetence of contemporary elites threaten to drive Arab societies into crisis. A visual analysis of this work reveals that the slender palace columns and the large female figures emphasize the structural and moral weaknesses of the period (Table 2). This contrast between glory and decline reflects Tarek’s commitment to the reconstruction of Arab identity.

The analysis of these two works (Abu Abdullah al-Saghir and Al-Ma’mun) highlights Tarek’s commitment to representing nationalist and independence-oriented spirit. By presenting Arab luminaries and emphasizing pride alongside the critique of ineffectual rulers, he conveys a dual message of commendation and

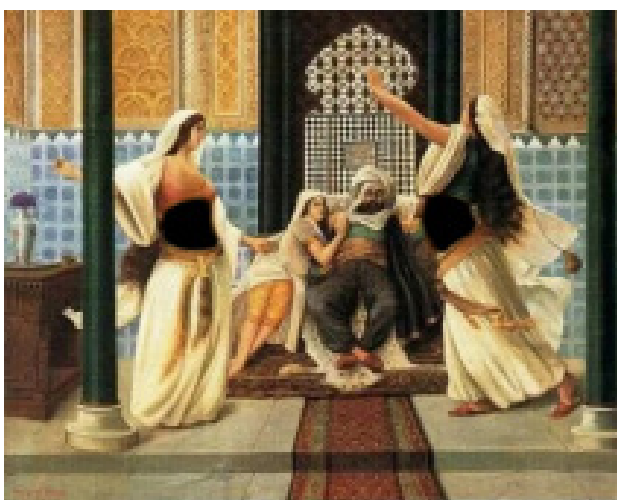


Fig. 2. The Painting of Abu Abdullah al-Saghir (1322 AH / 1903–1904), Oil on canvas, 100 × 80 cm. Source: Atassi, 1998, 66.

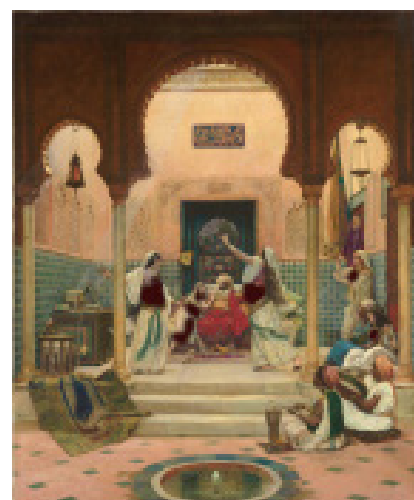

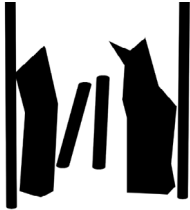
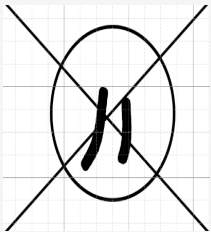


Fig. 3. The Painting Al-Ulama (1893), Paul Louis Bouchard (1853–1937), oil on canvas, 43.9 × 29.3 cm. Source: Atassi, 1998, 66.

Table 2. Visual analysis of Abu Abdullah al-Saghir. Source: Authors.

Images	Description
	<p>The painting Abu Abdullah al-Saghir provides a visual critique of his rule during the historical decline of the Muslim realm.</p>
	<p>The artist, through precise composition and the selection of meaningful elements, depicts the fragility of power during Abu Abdullah's era. The female figures, larger than the fragile palace columns, symbolize the decay of the monarchy and the weakness of governance.</p>
	<p>The ruler's focus on indulgence, depicted through a closed circle of women and his bent posture, signifies the decay of power. The arrangement of horizontal and vertical lines and his central position emphasize the collapse of Arab identity. The execution style—with precise lighting, classical proportions, and influences from Orientalist painting—further reinforces this theme.</p>

censure, reflecting his ideals of nationalism and the pursuit of independence.

Another prominent work, “The Assembly of Caliph Al-Ma'mun” (Fig. 4), further demonstrates his interest in and dedication to Arab identity and heritage. The painting depicts the Abbasid caliph in a governmental hall with meticulous attention

to architectural details, aiming to showcase the grandeur of the Arab-Islamic legacy during Al-Ma'mun's reign (Table 3).

Other religious and architectural paintings, such as “Hajj” and “Palmyra”, further reinforce Syrian and Arab identity. In Hajj (Fig. 5) Tarek depicts the collective movement of pilgrims

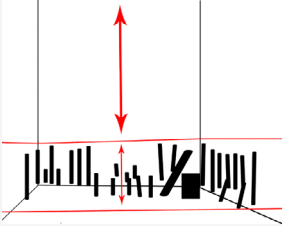
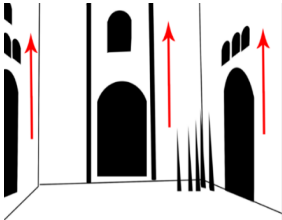
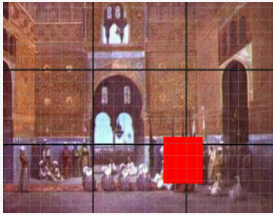


Fig. 4. The audience of caliph Al-Ma'mun, Tawfiq Tarek, oil on canvas. Source: Ali, 1993, 54.



Fig. 5. Hajj, Tawfiq Tarek, oil on canvas. Source: Atassi, 1998, 66.

Table 3. Visual Analysis of The Audience of Caliph Al-Ma'mun. Source: Authors.

Images	Description
	<p>In this painting, two major visual techniques are employed to emphasize Al-Ma'mun's grandeur:</p> <p>Scale and prominence: Al-Ma'mun is depicted as the largest figure in comparison to the other characters, and the throne occupies more space around him, visually reinforcing his significance.</p> <p>Architectural framing: The Islamic architectural setting, with its expansive empty space above the figures, accentuates their relative smallness in the presence of authority. Even the standing figures are roughly equal in height to Al-Ma'mun, underscoring his role as a mediator between God and humans, a concept reinforced through the overall composition.</p>
	<p>The emphasis on Al-Ma'mun's Islamic authority is effectively conveyed through visual elements that guide the viewer's gaze upward, reinforcing his elevated status and power.</p>
	<p>The work clearly adheres to classical principles: Al-Ma'mun is positioned at the golden point of the composition, and unity of time, place, and character is maintained. Inspired by Greek and Renaissance art, the painting employs intermediate colors, perspective, proportional figures, and delicacy in details, resulting in a composition that is both classical and instructive.</p>

toward Mecca using bright colors, evoking a sense of spirituality and Arab cultural unity (Atassi, 1998, 66).

Palmyra, (Fig. 6) another notable work, portrays the ancient ruins, highlighting Syria's historical connection with ancient civilizations and inviting viewers to reflect on their local heritage (Table 4).

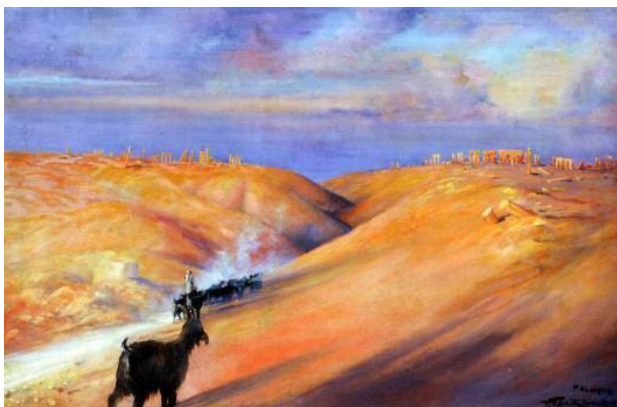


Fig. 6. Palmyra, Tawfiq Tarek, oil on canvas. Source: Atassi, 1998, 66.

• **Social critique through orientalist metaphors**

Tawfiq Tarek employed Orientalist style as a dual-purpose tool: to critique existing conditions and simultaneously reconstruct Arab identity. Unlike European Orientalists, who often depicted the East in a fantastical or decadent manner, Tarek recreated this style in a localized and purposeful way to effect tangible change. His use of academic techniques alongside the Ruwad approach, often described separately from contemporary artistic developments, was a deliberate choice. As Shaw (2011, 129) notes, Arab Ruwad artists, unlike modern European artists, adopted a less radical, more populist approach, aiming for direct engagement with general audiences and indirect awareness-raising.

In the painting Abu Abdullah al-Saghir (Table 2), the enclosing circle around Abu

Table 4. Visual analysis of Palmyra. Source: Authors.

Visual element	Description	Underlying message
Ruins	Broken columns in the background	Grandeur of the past and continuity of identity
Lighting	Warm sunset light on the stones	Sense of nostalgia and national pride
Empty Space	Human figure	Emphasis on timeless heritage

Abdullah emphasizes the decline of authority and the weakness of Arab power. The soft lighting and detailed elements borrowed from Orientalism highlight the contrast between outward splendor and inner weakness. Like his other selected works, this painting illustrates Tarek’s approach to political critique and the representation of Arab identity and history, showcasing his modernist contribution to Syrian art.

Tarek’s landscape paintings also carry an implicit critique, inviting reflection on Syrian identity in the face of Western influence. For example, a 1914 painting depicts a realistic rural scene with a dirt road flanked by scattered wooden fences. The foliage mixes brown and orange with green, and the sky has an autumnal, dark-tinged atmosphere. The combination of green, blue, and gray-brown tones alongside dark clouds creates a contrast of light and darkness.

The primary theme emphasizes the duality in nature, reflecting the artist’s sensibilities: lushness and decay, light and darkness, and other simultaneous existential contrasts, each meaningful only in relation to the other. The rural road running through the scene symbolizes the human path amid these dualities, an inevitable journey well expressed through artistic realism (Fig. 7).

Another painting presents a realistic depiction of the village of Damer in Hampshire, England, observed firsthand by the artist. The scene includes woodlands, a railway, a train, utility poles, and a hill in the background. The color

contrast between green trees and brown earth under a gray sky is pronounced. Two elements of modernity — the railway and utility poles — replace the earlier rural road, symbolizing the human trajectory toward modern technology in the existential world. The brown earth conveys mundanity or weariness, while the green trees represent vitality. The contrast between nature (trees and land) and technology (railway and electricity network) reflects the tension between indigenous nature and Western modernity.

At the center, two birds, one white and one black, are in flight, likely symbolizing the duality between nature and industry (Fig. 8).

This work offers an implicit critique of Western modernity, prompting the viewer to reflect on the impact of modernization on Syrian identity (Table 5).

• Artistic commitment and intellectual role

Tawfiq Tarek’s continuous engagement with the social and political issues of his time demonstrates his deep commitment to a society to which he was genuinely devoted. His works carry an intellectual message, employing art as a means of raising awareness and fostering social consciousness.

The painting “Damer Road” (Fig. 8) exemplifies this approach. It simultaneously depicts elements of nature (trees, land, and sky) and manifestations of modernity (railway and utility poles), illustrating the tension between indigenous identity and Western modernity. In this work, the railway cutting through nature

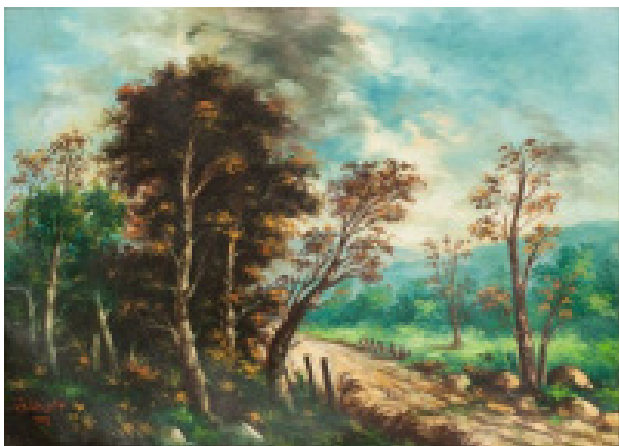


Fig. 7. Untitled, Tawfiq Tarek, 1914, oil on wood, 50 × 70 cm. Source: www.atassifoundation.com

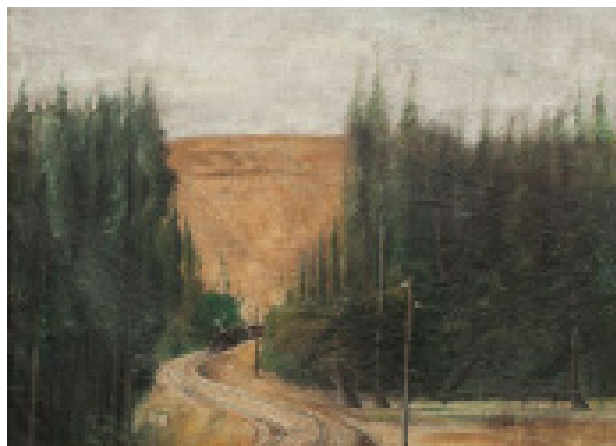


Fig. 8. Damr Road, Tawfiq Tarek, 1918, oil on canvas, 60 × 70 cm. Source: www.atassifoundation.com

Table 5. Visual analysis of Damr Road. Source: Authors.

Visual element	Description	Underlying message
Color Contrast	Green and brown in nature, gray in the sky	Contrast between nature and decay
Railway and Train	Railway and approaching train	Presence of modernity within vernacular landscape
Absence of Human Figures	Focus on nature without human presence	Reflection on local identity

and the approaching train serve as a metaphor for the intrusion of modernity into traditional Syrian society. The white and black birds at the center symbolize the duality between nature and industry, a contrast highlighted not only in form but also in content (Atassi, 1998, 67). Like many of Tarek’s works, this painting encourages critical reflection on the impacts of modernization on society and local identity (Table 5).

Tarek’s portrait paintings of ordinary people reflect his social commitment and his effort to move away from aristocratic portrait traditions. Executed in oil on wood with a realistic style, these works emphasize individuality and Syrian identity, aiming to establish a direct connection with the general audience (Lenssen, 2014, 49) (Fig. 9).

By selecting diverse subjects — from historical events such as The Battle of Hattin, to landscapes

like Damer Road, and architectural heritage such as Palmyra — Tarek demonstrated his commitment to reconstructing Syrian identity across multiple dimensions. He employed art not only for aesthetic purposes but also as an educational and critical tool to promote social awareness.

As Kayyali emphasizes, an artist must act committedly in both life and work, reflecting the social realities and aspirations of their people. Art emerging from the everyday life and needs of society possesses the potential for enduring influence and global impact (Kayyali, n.d.).

Discussion

Tawfiq Tarek’s works demonstrate a profound connection between art, identity, and commitment within the context of Syrian modernity. By selecting diverse subjects — from history (The



Fig. 9. Aisha, 1935 CE, oil on wood, 53 × 40 cm.
Source: www.atassifoundation.com

Battle of Hattin) to nature (Damer Road) and religious culture (Hajj) — he reconstructed Arab and Syrian identity. Tarek's approach to social and political phenomena was highly critical, and his nationalist perspective, coupled with an analytical function, distinguished him from other Syrian artists (Scheid, 2010, 209).

Tarek considered the corruption of rulers and the decline of leadership as key factors in the erosion of social identity, using history as a cautionary framework (Naef, 2002, 225). He produced valuable works critiquing Arab kings and historical rulers.

To convey his messages, Tarek adopted academic and Orientalist styles; contrary to their perceived conservatism, these styles allowed him to reach a broader public. As Shaw (2011, 129) notes, non-Western artists utilized European styles

for local purposes, a strategy Tarek employed successfully. Oil painting, as a symbol of modernity in the Arab world, enabled him to present critical ideas in an accessible visual language (Naef, 2003, 149).

The influence of French colonial rule on Tarek's works is undeniable. The Battle of Hattin, portraying Saladin as a victorious Muslim hero against the West, can be read as a response to French domination, emphasizing that even great powers are vulnerable to defeat (Ende, 1984, 70). This commitment and belief were later carried forward by artists such as Louay Kayyali and Yusuf Abdalki, but Tarek served as an initial model for linking history and the contemporary era (Naef, 1996, 266). The political resonance of his works is evident in later reinterpretations, including the Ba'ath Party's use of The Battle of Hattin displayed in the Syrian Presidential Palace (Al-Sharif, 1984–85, 16).

Compared to Ottoman artists, Tarek's Arab nationalist approach and commitment to social change are strikingly clear. Shaw (2011, 3) observes that Ottoman art distanced itself from radical modernism, and Tarek followed a similar path; yet, this choice did not reflect a lack of awareness, but rather a strategic method to communicate with a general audience. Consequently, Tarek's artistic commitment was rooted in nationalist and reformist ideals, aligning with the objectives of Ruwad artists for modernization while simultaneously combining political engagement with efforts to instigate social transformation (Naef, 2003, 149).

Conclusion

Tawfiq Tarek, as one of the pioneers of modern Syrian painting, was more than a purely aesthetic artist; he was a committed, nationalist painter who transformed art into a platform for representing identity and social critique. Examination of his body of work shows that Tarek, utilizing academic and Orientalist visual

language, drew upon Arab-Islamic history and heritage to address contemporary questions and strengthen collective consciousness.

His works can be understood through three main axes: 1) Revival of historical pride and national identity: Works such as *The Battle of Hattin* and *Palmyra* depict Arab victories and civilizational grandeur, aiming to reinforce national self-confidence and remind viewers of the historical capabilities of Arab societies on the global stage. 2) Critique of decline and social warning: The reinterpretation of Abu Abdullah al-Saghir, inspired by Louis Boucher, demonstrates that Tarek saw the fall of Arab rulers due to material excess as a cautionary message for contemporaries, using art to critique societal conditions. 3) Linking tradition and modernity: Works like *Damer Road* portray the entry of modernity while emphasizing the need to integrate it within the framework of Syrian historical identity.

These three axes indicate that Tarek's stylistic choices, though seemingly conservative, were deliberate and socially and politically purposeful. By referencing history as a mirror for contemporary times, he both revived national pride, alerted society to cultural decline, and underscored the necessity of creative engagement with modernity. His use of religious-historical themes, such as *The Mausoleum of Ma'mun* and *the Hajj*, further reflects his effort to highlight Muslim unity and redefine Islam's role in advancing culture and civilization.

Based on the findings of this study, Tarek's position can be redefined on three levels: 1) a painter who connected Syrian and Arab history with contemporary visual language. 2) a visual intellectual who placed art in the service of social awakening. 3) a model of committed art in the Arab world that successfully mediate identity, social critique, and the demands of modernity.

Ultimately, the study of Tawfiq Tarek's works demonstrates that modern Syrian painting

cannot be understood without considering his social commitment and Arab-nationalist orientation. His reinterpretation of history is not merely nostalgic but a deliberate act of cultural decolonization and redefinition of the Arabs' place in the contemporary world. Tarek thus provides both a theoretical and practical model for committed Arab artists and a framework for studying modern art in the context of identity-seeking and cultural resistance.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

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