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THE CONSTRUCTION OF *SALAFIYYA*:
RECONSIDERING SALAFISM FROM THE
PERSPECTIVE OF CONCEPTUAL HISTORY

Scholars have long struggled with various and even conflicting historical narratives and definitions of Salafism (*al-salafiyya*), but a closer look at the history of the concept itself—rather than of the ideas for which it stands—goes a long way toward explaining the perennial confusion that has typified this religious orientation. This article examines the production of knowledge about Salafism as a conceptual construct and a typological category. It argues that although Salafi epithets have existed since the medieval period, they did not start referring to a religious concept known as *salafiyya* until the 1920s. By the same token, the widely accepted idea that *salafiyya* referred to an Islamic modernist movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is a historical fiction that originates with Louis Massignon. The history of Cairo's Salafiyya Press and Bookstore, however, sheds important light on the process by which the construction of Salafism took place.