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Did Ottoman Sultans Ban Print?

Kathryn A. Schwartz

Did printing transform the Ottoman Empire? And what took the Ottomans so long to print? Much of the scholarship surrounding the topic of Ottoman printing, or the occurrence of printing within the Ottoman Empire (1453–1922), is structured around these two related frameworks. In this essay, I argue that these frameworks are ahistorical because they predicate Ottoman printing on the European experience of print. To support this point, I examine the disproportionate role played by certain early modern European accounts of Ottoman printing within Western and Arabic historiography. In particular, I examine the life cycle of scholars' belief that Ottoman sultans banned printing, which I contrast with extant documentation for the imperial Porte's stance on printing. I argue that the sources available to scholars today do not support the notion that the sultans banned printing. Rather, they demonstrate that this claim arose from early modern European scholars' search to articulate their sense of Ottoman inadequacy through explanations for why Ottomans did not print. The history of this particular line of inquiry is significant, I argue, because many scholars continue to probe the issue of why Ottomans did not print. In so doing, they maintain the expectation that print would revolutionize society, even though they have begun questioning the existence of the ban.

I. Background and Historiography

The Ottoman Empire hosted scores of early modern printing endeavors beginning with those of Castilian and Aragonese Jewish immigrants in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These instances of printing overturned the monopoly that handwriting held over the written word. Nonetheless, manuscript production remained hegemonic. Early modern presses within the empire did not spark a sustained, society-wide remediation from manuscript to print production. This lack of broad societal change did not result from the failure of early modern Ottoman presses. With the exception of one eighteenth-century press in Istanbul,[1] their printers did not predicate

their work on the goal of revolutionizing written production. Their presses operated outside of mainstream Ottoman society. And instead of printing to subvert manuscript production, these early modern Ottoman printers worked towards diverse purposes.

Despite the discrete nature of early modern Ottoman presses, scholars of Ottoman printing welded these presses together narratively. Nearly every twentieth- and twenty-first-century history of Ottoman printing begins by listing the chronological development of typographic presses, whether the ultimate topic of the work be printing in a specific nation,[2] from a specific press,[3] or within the wider Arab world.[4] Scholars varied their starting points: some began their lists with the invention of woodblock printing in China,[5] while others started with Gutenberg's press.[6] But regardless of the beginnings of these lists, they converged around the oriental printing presses of early modern Europe.[7] From Europe, scholars' lists jumped temporally and geographically to Ottoman printing presses whereupon their primary topics of research then commenced.[8]

Scholars generated these lists under the expectation that printing would dominate the written word. They ascribed a teleological agency to Ottoman printing, as illustrated by book historian Geoffrey Roper's conclusion about eighteenth-century presses: "print had not yet become an agent of change in the Muslim world, although the way was now open for it."[9] This sense of expectancy fueled scholars to search for isolated instances of printing irrespective of parameters of time, space, and culture. The fusion of the Islamicate and technology transcended historical detail, and provided justification for scholars to cover presses that ranged from Safavid Iran to Europe.[10] Safavid printing during the seventeenth century marked an instance of Muslim printing, while Semitic printing in humanist Europe demonstrated that typography could support oriental languages. Although the Safavids and Venetians had little impact upon the development of Ottoman presses, this detail mattered not. The guiding force behind the historiographical narrative of Ottoman printing was not man, it was the determinism of the appeal that the printing press held to man.

Scholars thus projected the idea that idiosyncratic efforts at printing were related forays into the destined print culture of the twentieth-century Middle East. Enthusiasm for this print culture allowed the historian Khalid Muhammad 'Azab to proclaim "that it is possible for us to say without any exaggeration that all the advancement that man has attained in the modern era, and all that he is blessed with from civilization, comes foremost from his knowledge of the art of printing."[11] But this enthusiasm obscured

consideration of why the presses were established in the first place. It also took the European experience of print modernity for its model, requiring some explanation for why Ottomans did not print. This issue of framing is important because it continues to preclude most scholars from examining Ottoman printing without bias.

Ottoman printing has been the focus of scholars from various fields and disciplines, including library studies, Middle Eastern history, and book history. Nonetheless, scholars have framed Ottoman printing in a fairly uniform way. In library studies, George Atiyeh (1923–2008) may be taken as an authority on Ottoman printing because of his role in editing the 1995 volume *The Book in the Islamic World*.[12] In Atiyeh's chapter on "The Book in the Modern Arab World" he approached Ottoman printing from the vantage of European print culture. Although he did not ask why the Ottomans took so long to print overtly, he used this question to structure his pursuit of the past. He then offered generalizations about Islamic mores to explain the "absence of printing."[13]

In Middle Eastern history, Ami Ayalon may be considered an authority on Ottoman printing since he authored several publications related to the topic, including three books.[14] Ayalon's 2010 paper on Arab booksellers and bookshops highlighted the shortcomings of the explanations offered for "the old aversive attitude [of Middle Eastern societies] to Gutenberg's invention."[15] But although Ayalon found no satisfactory explanation for "this striking historic delay" between Europeans and Ottomans, he supported the idea that Middle Easterners viewed print technology negatively.

Finally, in book history we may look to Roper as the foremost authority.[16] In *The Oxford Companion to the Book* published in 2010, Roper authored a chapter entitled "The History of the Book in the Muslim World" in which he asked: "Why was book printing not adopted by Muslims for more than 1,000 years after it was invented in China and 250 years after it became widespread in western Europe (in spite of its use by non-Muslims in the Muslim world)?"[17] Roper then went on to answer this question, which centered on something that never occurred, with generalizations about Muslim sensibilities.

These three examples demonstrate that important scholars of Ottoman printing have predicated their research on the European experience of print. Although they came to the topic from different subfields, they allowed for the expectations that Ottoman printing should have begun with the invention of typography, and that printing would transform the empire. Such cohesion amongst experts of Ottoman printing has empowered others to

approach the topic similarly. For example, a 2011 study of Saharan literacy noted a Muslim resistance to printing.[18] A 1988 history on Middle Eastern photography applied the idea of an Islamic discomfort with printing to the reproduction of photographs amongst Jews and Muslims.[19] A 2004 anthropological study presented the imperial stance on printing as representative of a "tradition-modernity tension," which the Porte eventually settled in favor of modernity.[20] A 2012 economic study argued that the Ottoman sultans opposed printing to preserve their ability to collect taxes.[21] A 2000 cultural history of the subjects of the Ottoman Empire featured a section entitled "For and Against the Art of Printing," which focused on explaining why Ottomans were 'against' printing.[22] And a 2005 historical survey of the Ottoman Porte perpetuated the longstanding claim around which this essay revolves: "Printing had had a chequered history in the Ottoman Empire. Jewish refugees from Spain and Portugal had brought this relatively new technology with them when they settled in Istanbul and elsewhere in 1492, but according to contemporary Jewish sources, Sultan Bayezid II soon banned all printing and his order was reiterated by Sultan Selim I in 1515—the crime was punishable by death."[23]

These allusions to Ottoman printing present a cohesive portrayal of it in tone, from which readers may understand that the Ottomans did badly not to print, and that there was something particular about the Ottomans which held them back from printing. Despite this coherent tenor, however, the nine examples that I have provided offer nine different explanations for why Ottomans did not print. They argue that the Ottomans were held back by some combination of: two Ottoman sultans who prohibited printing; a "tradition-modernity tension;"[24] a Semitic religious taboo on printing which impacted Jews and Muslims but not Christians; the sultanic desire to preserve revenue; the jealous interests of the intellectual elite in conjunction with the widespread Muslim love for handwriting; an "old aversive attitude" towards printing;[25] and a general opposition to "a metal object, coming from Christendom."[26]

The differences between these explanations arise because much of the scholarship on Ottoman printing lacks reference to specifics. It is usually unclear to whom scholars are referring when they talk about Ottoman printing, whether their subjects be Muslims, all Ottomans, or certain Ottomans. It is also unclear as to what type of printing scholars are referring to, whether that be typography, lithography, or impressions generally. Finally, scholars are unclear as to when and where their conclusions apply. This lack of specificity derives from a lack of early modern Ottoman sources that engage with the question of why Ottomans did not print.

I am not the first person to problematize the historiography on the development of Ottoman printing. So far as I am aware, the historian John-Paul Ghobrial was the first to do this as a graduate student in a 2005 paper entitled "Diglossia and the 'Methodology' of Arabic Print."[27] Ghobrial bracketed the term 'methodology' to highlight its inadequacy given that scholars structured their pursuit of the topic around the idea of a European printing revolution.[28] He argued that Ottoman printing ought instead to be studied through the roles played by vernacular languages, and the global production of oriental typefaces.[29] Ghobrial's critique was furthered by the literary historian Dana Sajdi in a 2009 paper entitled "Print and Its Discontents."[30] Sajdi elaborated upon the orientalizing and Eurocentric tropes that have featured in writings about Ottoman printing from the eighteenth century.[31] Moreover, she called for scholars to study the continuities between handwritten and printed texts through the survival of distinctive authorial practices and literary genres, arguing, for example, that the manuscript chronicle served the purpose of the journal and the printed newspaper.[32]

My own approach is to study printing through the ways in which people from particular locales incorporated it into their pre-existing economies for producing texts, and thinking about them.[33] However, this essay attempts to flesh out the history of the issue that Ghobrial and Sajdi raise, namely how the study of Ottoman printing came to be dominated by the European experience of print. I do this by examining the life cycle of one particular historiographical claim that we encountered above for why Ottomans did not print, the sultanic ban. Before turning to the origins of the ban, let me first give an overview of the documentation that we have for the Porte's stance on printing.

II. Evidence for the Official Ottoman Stance on Printing

There is little evidence to support the notion that the Porte maintained a negative view of printing, or that this view was established in Islamic belief. No reference to making impressions appears in the Qur'an, the Islamic sacred book, the *ḥadīth*, sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, or the *sunna*, traditions relating to Muhammad. At least one early modern Ottoman fatwa, or non-binding religious legal interpretation, did discuss print, but as will be shown below, it did so to endorse the technology and was incorporated into a firman, or a secular sultanic decree that lasted the term of a sultan's reign.

Indeed, the main method through which the Ottoman Porte regulated printing was through firmans. Because firmans were used to administer the empire, their topics concerned issues of a military, fiscal, and civil nature which fell beyond the purview of the *sharīʿa*, or Islamic law as derived mainly from the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. To the extent that the Porte issued firmans on printing, their contents addressed the business of printing in relation to particular people and texts, as opposed to the permissibility of the technology in general.

It is important to note that the Porte promulgated a vast number of firmans, and that each one went through several stages of production within the office of the chancery.[34] As a result, traces of them generally survive. According to the historiographical record, Ottoman sultans promulgated four firmans related to the subject of printing during the early modern period.[35] These were issued by Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512); Selim I (r. 1512–20); Murad III (r. 1574–95); and Ahmed III (r. 1703–30). However, it is unclear whether two of these firmans ever existed, namely those of Bayezid and Selim.

The Non-Extant Firmans of Bayezid II and Selim I

If they ever existed, the most important firmans for the historiography of early modern printing were those of Sultans Bayezid and Selim. Scholars have reported that these firmans banned printing, but the details that they ascribed to the ban varied. For example, it has been claimed that the firmans prohibited: the printing of texts outright;[36] the printing of texts on the basis of religious affiliation;[37] the printing of texts in certain languages;[38] the printing of texts in certain scripts;[39] and the possession of printed texts altogether.[40] This lack of consensus likely derives from the lack of a common source of reference. So far as I can tell, no one has claimed to have seen the firmans of Bayezid and Selim concerning print. It is therefore difficult to discern their positions on printing, a task which is all the more complicated given that the sultanic libraries contained "a wide variety of printed texts on a range of subjects" from Europe between the reigns of Mehmed II (r. 1444–46 and 1451–81) and Suleyman I (r. 1520–66).[41]

The First Extant Firman, Murad III

Murad (r. 1574–95) issued the earliest extant firman concerning print in 1588. It survives at the back of the 1594 Arabic edition of Euclid's *Elements*

published by the Medici Oriental Press in Rome.[42] The firman asserted the rights of two European merchants to their trade of "valuable printed books and pamphlets in Arabic" within the empire.[43] It ordered that the traders were to henceforth be left unmolested by those who "are opening up their shipments by force, and with little or no payment at all are taking their wares and interfering with their trade."[44] Two centuries later, the imperial printer Ibrahim Muteferrika (1675–1745) corroborated the popularity of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish books printed from Europe when he lamented people's desire for them despite their flaws: "They are full of misspellings and mistakes, and the letters and lines are not easily read. There is no one, finding in his hands a book in Western letters and style, who will see in it any semblance of beauty and decoration or correctness in spelling and orthography. These books are being found in the lands of Islam, having been produced in quantity, and they have become desirable, and are inexpensive. However, their quality and finish is as given above."[45]

The Second Extant Firman, Ahmed III

Ahmed's 1727 firman endowed a permit to print to the aforementioned Muteferrika, a Unitarian convert to Islam who reached prominence in the imperial court. As the Medici Press did with their firman from Murad, Muteferrika printed this firman in the first book that he reproduced, the 1729 Ottoman-Arabic dictionary *Kitab-ı Lugat-ı Vankulu*.[46] Unlike the Medici press, however, Muteferrika put his firman upfront before an essay that he composed on printing entitled "*Vesiletu't-Tiba'a*," or "The Usefulness of Printing."[47] Because this essay is an important source for the official Ottoman stance on printing, I examine it further in conjunction with Ahmed's firman.

Muteferrika published his essay as a prologue. He wrote it to "become free from public and private questioning . . . so that it is clear that he is on a true, straight road in this work. . . . "[48] Muteferrika's description of typography suggests that his contemporaries were unfamiliar with the process. He argued that printing fell amongst the arts, with the proviso that "the art of printing is a beneficial one."[49] "When a book is printed," he explained, "there are several thousand exactly identical copies, and printing is a means of producing many clear, excellent, perfect books in a short time."[50] He elaborated upon this explanation through comparisons, noting that printing functioned as "a type of inscribing analogous to the action of engraving and writing by the pressing of words and lines on a page, it is like coining money

or inscribing walls, or like the impression from a signet ring when pressed down upon a document."[51]

Muteferrika also explained his motivations for printing. Believing print to be "an aid and help to the general public," he endeavored "to make an effort to publish in the world, in large numbers, books on the necessary arts and sciences, books that are sound and accurate and in every way acceptable."[52] After the Jews and Christians lost their holy books,[53] and the Muslims survived onslaughts of the Chingizids in Central Asia, the Mongols in Baghdad, and the Europeans in Andalusia,[54] Muteferrika argued that printing could preserve and multiply books to revitalize learning. He admonished that waning Ottoman military prowess jeopardized learning beyond common threats to books, like "disturbed conditions, destructive events, and destroying fires. . . . "[55] Without books, "students of the sciences [would] suffer severe difficulties."[56] Each generation needed to do their part to preserve these vessels of knowledge. But "the men of the current age, being followers of ease and being exhausted, and having debilitating wealth and ease, ignore beauty; consequently, innovative works are not appreciated or preserved."[57]

Muteferrika enumerated ten benefits of printing. Printing fostered learning. It allowed Muslims to revisit the great works of their noble past. It made beautiful and accurate calligraphy with ink that was "safe and secure from the misfortune of becoming wet," unlike the fading ink of "books written by pen."[58] It forged a new commodity for commerce that made each book, when printed up in the thousands, "inexpensive" for "students both rich and poor."[59] Printing organized knowledge in "summary" and "detail" respectively, via tables of contents and indexes.[60] It "reduc[ed] ignorance" by disseminating books "in town and country."[61] It promoted order and calm in outlying regions of the empire by enlightening the public to ultimately "become a foundation for the strength of the Empire."[62] It served as a worthier counterpart to the greatness demonstrated by the Ottoman military. It allowed "the Muslims to take precedence in the book trade" by overcoming the poor-quality European printed books sold within the empire.[63] Lastly, printing guaranteed the Ottomans everlasting fame through the joy it fostered within the empire and across the Muslim world:

> The various peoples of the world, that is, the Arabs and [Persians], the people of the Turks, Tatars and Turkmen, Kurds, Uzbeks, Chagatay, Hindi and Sindi, Persians and Maghribis, Yemenis, Greeks, Ethiopians and the Sudanese, all together having been exalted by Islam, they have need of various kinds of books. Therefore, introducing and bringing about this important and great work certainly

> increases and augments the glory and majesty of the Ottoman state, and is the cause of a glorious victory for the Empire and a splendid preface and a glorious superscription, lasting until the day of judgment. It will be remembered with goodness by the tongues of the world and will bring forth the good prayers of all believers; without dispute, printing is a means to enliven and make happy the Muslims.[64]

Muteferrika followed his essay with a list of endorsements for his work, or *taqārīẓ,* from imperial elites. The practice of promoting texts through blurbs from eminent figures may be observed in manuscripts from Mamluk Egypt from as early as the fourteenth century.[65] But Muteferrika applied these accolades to the work of the printer. He promulgated sixteen *taqārīẓ* over two page openings,[66] including those from such distinguished figures as the empire's *kazıaskers*, or chief judges.

Muteferrika placed this material directly after his reproduction of Ahmed's firman. The text of the firman was printed from its standard opening phrase, which appeared in large letters: "It shall be implemented accordingly."[67] To the right of this invocation, Muteferrika noted that the phrase had been written by the sultan himself.[68] Ahmed's firman began by addressing its recipients by name.[69] Its contents appear to have been drawn from Muteferrika's essay, which it cited as "a learned tract."[70] For example, the firman established the prominence of books within the Islamic tradition, and it introduced printing through a discussion of the hazards that faced the preservation of learning. Moreover, it stated that printing resembled the operation for "coining money and impressing paper with a signet ring."[71]

Although some scholars have argued that Ottomans rejected typography because of its Western origins, the firman referred to printing as a "western technique"[72] and gave it a practical value: "books produced by printing cause several thousand volumes to be produced from a single volume, all of which are accurate copies. With little effort there is great return, making this activity desirable to pursue."[73] Accordingly, the firman stated that Muteferrika's work "will be a reason for Muslims to say prayers for you and praise you to the end of time."[74] It is ironic that the Porte promised Muteferrika eternal Muslim acclaim for opening his press, if the act of printing was a religious taboo in eighteenth-century Istanbul. It is also surprising that the narrative arc of Ottoman printing rests upon Ahmed's firman. Several scholars have used this firman to signal an about-face in the imperial policy on printing.[75] Yet Ahmed's firman was coherent with that of Murad, to the extent that both documents depicted printing as licit.

Nevertheless, Ahmed's firman designated what Muteferrika could and could not print along religious lines. Many scholars have emphasized this point, as it is the Porte's first documented restriction on printing. But while the firman forbade Muteferrika from printing the Islamic canon, it did not state why. This silence has been interpreted as an Islamic resistance to printing,[76] and as a matter of convention: "[Muteferrika's printings] were all secular works—on history, geography, language, government (including one by Müteferrika himself), navigation and chronology—because the printing of the Qur'an and religious texts was still forbidden."[77] However, an alternative reading of this silence presents itself: that, as a privilege granted to a particular person, the firman did not entitle Muteferrika to publish from the Islamic canon. Whatever the Porte's reasoning for precluding Muteferrika's press from printing religious materials, the firman suggested that this proposition began as Muteferrika's own: "Excepting books of [jurisprudence], Koranic exegesis, the traditions of the Prophet, and theology, you asked the Padishah's permission in the aforementioned tract [i.e., Muteferrika's essay on printing] to print dictionaries, history books, medical books, astronomy and geography books, travelogues, and books about logic."[78] It did not address the issue of printing the Qur'an directly.

Before Ahmed's firman was issued, Muteferrika's request was submitted to the *şeyhülislām*, or Grand Mufti, Yenishehirli ʻAbdullah Efendi (r. 1718–30).[79] The *şeyhülislām* acted as the chief interpreter of the *sharīʻa* within the empire. He issued fatwas in response to questions about the faith which arose from new or complex issues. Muslims sought out fatwas on all kinds of topics, like whether coffee should be considered an intoxicant.[80] Fatwas take the form of question and response, and Muteferrika printed the *şeyhülislām*'s fatwa beneath Ahmed's firman:[81]

> The question was asked: Zeyd claiming expertise in the science of printing, illuminating, and producing copies of the letters and words of dictionaries, logic, philosophy and astronomy texts, and like works, thus being able to produce exact copies of these books, is there not permission in the Holy Law for this good work? The one who is an expert at printing seeks a legal opinion because producing an accurate edition of a work in a short time, with no errors and many copies, results in there being an increased number of books, which is a benefit to the community.
>
> The answer is: Being able to produce this great benefit, this person receives permission with the condition that several educated persons be appointed as [correctors] (*müṣaḥḥiḥ*) . . . .[82]

The *şeyhülislām* recognized the potential of printing to cause harm by stabilizing errors through numerous copies of a faulty text, but he otherwise endorsed printing. After his fatwa was incorporated into Ahmed's firman, the latter affirmed that

> great benefit will come from the order based on that legal opinion, allowing for the exception of the religious subjects mentioned in the tract written with the pearl pen of wisdom. This legal opinion is well-prepared and stands out in a vast ocean as exemplary in the Shaykh's career. . . . The imperial permission becomes proper on account of this well-explained authoritative declaration, this perfectly eloquent and noble opinion.[83]

The firman ended by naming the correctors appointed to carry out the *şeyhülislām*'s stipulation, and by repeating the terms of Muteferrika's privilege.[84]

Ahmed's firman does not appear to have made Ottoman printing licit. Rather, it represents the effort that Muteferrika expended to promote the work of his press.

III. The Life Cycle of the Notion that Ottoman Sultans Banned Printing

As shown, a disconnect exists between the evidence for Ottoman printing and the way in which the topic has been portrayed by several scholars. This outcome derives from the disproportionate emphasis which has been placed upon the European experience of print as a model for the Ottoman context, as well as scholars' uncritical reliance upon European observers' accounts of Ottoman printing. Although I have argued this point in general terms thus far, let me examine it in greater detail through the historiographical claim that Bayezid and Selim banned printing. Specifically, I examine how this rumor originated and how it cycled from the early modern Western historiographical tradition into the Ottoman historiographical tradition in Arabic at the turn of the twentieth century. I then show how the rumor survived through the writings of the first historians of the Middle East during the mid-twentieth century.

The Ban's Rise amongst Early Modern European Scholars

European scholarly concern for Ottoman texts began when the Ottomans captured the Christian capital of Byzantium, Constantinople, in 1453. The conquest caused Western scholars to lament the loss of Byzantine manuscripts to the Muslim East.[85] As historian James Hankins noted, "one aspect of the supposed barbarism of the Turks was their hostility to good letters. This was a highly effective theme in an age and among a class of men who valued Greco-Roman literature as the purest source of the arts and of civilized values. It also fit well with the theme of the fall of Constantinople and the end of Greek civilization."[86] Such accounts dwelt on the loss of Byzantine manuscripts instead of the lack of Ottoman printing, likely because Europeans had just begun to discover typography themselves.

As the sixteenth century progressed, so did the state of European printing. Historians of the book argue that the European printed book stabilized in the 1530s, such that there is general agreement that the incunabular period ended by that point.[87] Early modern European accounts of Ottoman texts shifted from focusing on the loss of Byzantine manuscripts to the lack of Ottoman printing in tandem with this development. The claim that the Ottomans did not print because of bans issued via the firmans of Bayezid and Selim arose during this period. It appears that the first person to publish this assertion was the French Franciscan priest and cosmographer André Thevet (1502–90).

Thevet wrote about the firmans in the second volume of his eight volume work entitled *The True Portraits and Lives of Illustrious Greek, Latin, and Pagan Men*.[88] Printed from Paris in 1584, the book comprised chapters on distinguished historical figures. In Thevet's chapter on "Jean Guttemberg, Inventor of Printing,"[89] he compared the invention and adoption of printing in Europe to the absence of the technology in the East:

> What I know for sure is that the Greeks, Armenians, Mingrelians (*Mingreliãs*),[90] Abyssinians, Turks, Persians, Moors, Arabs & Tartars do not write their books except by hand. [And] that among the others, the Turks are constrained by the ordinance (*ordinance*) of Baiazeth, second in name, their Emperor [*i.e.*, Bayezid II], published in the year fourteen hundred eighty-three, carrying the prohibitions (*defenses*), on the pain of death to not consume (*de n'user*) printed books, which was the ordinance confirmed by Selim, first of name [*i.e.*, Selim I], his son, [in] the year one thousand five-hundred fifteen.[91]

Thevet did not provide a reference for this claim. Nor did he address the permissibility of printing amongst non-Muslims within the empire. In fact, Thevet did not mention the permissibility of the act of printing at all. "Turk" consumers of printed books were the target of the ban that he related.

Thevet's account produces more questions than answers. If Bayezid issued his firman in 1483,[92] he did so nine years before the influx of Spanish Jews to the empire.[93] Since Jewish exiles from Spain became the empire's first printers, it is unclear who might have printed the books that were forbidden from being consumed, from where, and in which languages. Moreover, an important development occurred within the empire during the 32 years that spanned the firmans of Bayezid and Selim: Ottoman Jews and Christians began printing. Despite this change in circumstance, Thevet did not suggest that Selim revised his father's ordinance. Instead, he depicted their firmans as one and the same.

There are reasons to question Thevet's reliability more generally. Although Thevet traveled to the Levant, he was not expert in the languages or cultures of the region. With regard to Thevet's travels elsewhere to places like the new world, academics of the early Americas from other fields have questioned his dependability. An anthropologist, for example, wrote a paper entitled "The Reliability of Andre Thevet's New England Material."[94] In it, the author took a strong stance on the accuracy of Thevet's writing, arguing that "the Thevet account must almost certainly be rejected," and that "this account would be most valuable were it not for the fact that there is good reason to question its veracity."[95]

Moreover, other early modern European reports contradicted Thevet's claim. Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli (1658–1730), for example, challenged the notion that the sultans banned printing. Marsigli had firsthand dealings with the Ottomans for twenty years from the 1680s. He travelled in the empire, battled against it in service to the Habsburgs, and lived amongst Ottoman janissaries as a prisoner of war.[96] In Marsigli's book on the Ottoman military, he refuted the notion of the Ottoman printing ban: "The Turks, it is true, do not print their books at all. But this is not, as is commonly believed, because they are prohibited to print, or because their books are unworthy of printing."[97] Marsigli's statement ought to carry significant credibility due to his fluency in the Ottoman language and his abiding bibliophila. He amassed more than six hundred oriental manuscripts during his travels.[98] And beyond that, Marsigli was himself a printer who worked with Medici oriental typefaces at the press that he established in Bologna.[99]

But European scholars appear to have adopted Thevet's account. Joseph de Guignes (1721–1800), for example, served as the secretary-interpreter

for oriental languages at the French Royal Library (*secrétaire-interprète pour les langues orientales*).[100] In 1787, Guignes published a "Historical Essay On the Origin of the Oriental Characters of the Royal Press."[101] His discussion of the development of oriental typefaces in Europe moved from the books which they were used to produce to remarks on the history of printing within the Ottoman Empire. Guignes wrote: "We have already learned that Selīm I, emperor of Constantinople, renewed in 1515 an ordinance (*ordinance*) of his father Bajazeth II who forbade, on the penalty of death, the use of (*de se servir de*) printed books."[102] He cited this statement by referring his readers to the "manuscript notes of the secretariat of the king's library."[103] But this report likely originated with Thevet's account, given that the two statements align so closely.

Marsigli's effort to correct Europeans' "commonly believed" but false notion of a ban demonstrates two important points about early modern European thought on Ottoman printing. First, it shows that the idea of an Ottoman printing ban was already secure amongst Europeans by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Marsigli's rejection of the rumor that Ottomans were "prohibited to print" suggests that by then, the reported ban on consuming print had already morphed into a wider sense that the act of printing was forbidden. Second, the persistence of the rumor of the ban reveals that the accusation struck a chord amongst Europeans. The ban fit within Europeans' wider sense of Ottoman barbarity and decline,[104] and the empirical dearth of Ottoman printings correlated with the claim that the Ottomans did not tolerate print.

During the eighteenth century, European scholars of the Ottoman Empire attempted to identify the causes of Ottoman military and societal weakness.[105] They found their answers in the points of difference that existed between them, like Ottomans' imperial religion of Islam and lack of printing. They explained the latter as a missed opportunity for a societal enlightenment of the kind that Europe had experienced. Constantin-François Volney (1757–1820) reflected this stance when he wrote of the absence of printing in Ottoman Egypt: "It is impossible therefore for books to multiply, and consequently for knowledge to be propagated. If we compare this state of things with what passes among ourselves, we cannot but be deeply impressed with the advantages of printing. We shall even be convinced, on reflexion, that this art alone is possibly the main spring of those great revolutions, which, within the last three centuries, have taken place in the moral system of Europe."[106] Volney articulated the idea that printing caused societal enlightenment. In the nineteenth century, Ottoman scholars writing in

Arabic incorporated this notion, and then the ban, into their first surveys of Ottoman printing.

The Ban's Adoption by Ottoman Scholars Writing in Arabic During the Nineteenth Century

So far as I can tell, the first Ottoman writer to address the history of Ottoman printing was Ahmed Cevdet Pasha (1822–95), a leading scholar and bureaucrat within the Porte who drafted the Ottoman civil code, or *Mecelle*.[107] Ahmed Cevdet covered Ottoman printing in Volume One of his *History* published in Ottoman in 1853.[108] The Arabic translation of this volume was printed from Beirut in 1890.[109] Because this translation influenced subsequent Arabic scholarship on Ottoman printing in the nineteenth century, I focus on it here.

Ahmed Cevdet allotted nearly nine pages to the history of printing within the fourth chapter of his book.[110] "There is no doubt," he wrote under the section entitled "Digression On the Craft of Printing," "that the craft of printing is a magnificent art without a befitting peer so that it is called the mother of civilization (*umm al*-madanyya) because it is the most beneficial and exalted thing of all human invention."[111] Ahmed Cevdet subscribed to the idea that printing catalyzed societal progress, so much so that he suggested that print birthed civilization. He likely acquired this idea from European sources, for it departed from Muteferrika's view of print as a tool for magnifying the empire's existing greatness and aligned more closely with Volney's depiction of print as a civilizing force.

Ahmed Cevdet further suggested his use of European sources through his very coverage of the history of printing, which began with six pages devoted to the development of typography as it spread among printers from Mainz to Holland.[112] The transliterations that he supplied for the names of these cities suggest that Ahmed Cevdet relied upon French scholarship for this information.[113] Yet ironically, given that these sources originated from a tradition which showed a preoccupation with the lack of Ottoman printing, Ahmed Cevdet attempted to account for the slow development of printing across Europe. He attributed the delay in the spread of the technology to wars and conquests, "people with feeble minds" who thought print did more harm than good, and the protestations of copyists whose livelihoods were threatened by printing.[114]

From printing in Europe, Ahmed Cevdet moved on to discuss the development of print in the Ottoman Empire. He made no mention of a sultanic

ban. And in contrast to his portrayal of the European resistance to printing, he wrote that: "At the very outset, desire for this craft appeared in the empire from the eastern territories [*i.e.*, the Levant]; however, its existence did not reach prominence until after several years."[115] But although Ahmed Cevdet provided an explanation for the European delay in adopting print, he did not elaborate upon why printing, though desirable to Ottomans, failed to reach instant prominence amongst them. Through this asymmetry he suggested that Europeans had resisted printing more strongly than Ottomans had.

Ahmed Cevdet went on to cover Muteferrika's printing venture. He noted that Muteferrika wrote out his essay to "obtain help in the form of money" for his press.[116] He circulated his "petition . . . for a license to print (*rukhṣaṭan bi-tab'*)" amongst important imperial figures who endorsed it, and then the *şeyhülislām* wrote him a fatwa allowing him to "execute (*bi-ijrā'*) this craft."[117] Finally, the Porte issued all of these documents together in the form of a firman "licensing (*bi-'l-rukhṣa fī*) [Muteferrika] to print all books except books of exegesis, *ḥadīth*, jurisprudence, and theology."[118]

According to Ahmed Cevdet's wording, the *şeyhülislām* did not sanction the act of printing. Rather, he endorsed Muteferrika's "execution" of the craft. Moreover, Muteferrika's "license to print" was described as a permit rather than an endorsement of a taboo art form. The wording of Ahmed Cevdet's writing therefore provides little indication that he saw this event as a breakthrough moment in Ottoman printing. However, he did represent Muteferrika's work as an important development. Ahmed Cevdet noted that "before [Muteferrika's request], the use of this craft had been deliberated in the empire, but no one ventured to execute it (*'alā ijrā'hā*) so the representatives of the state were uncertain in responding to [Muteferrika]."[119]

Ahmed Cevdet went on to discuss the success of Muteferrika's enterprise, and its collapse with his death. He wrote that "at that time, the Porte was busy with sweeping preoccupations so it did not have time to permit someone [else] to do the work after him so the aforementioned press remained idle for a long time."[120] Ahmed Cevdet concluded his "Digression" with a reflection on why Muteferrika's license to print precluded him from publishing religious texts. It is here that Ahmed Cevdet projected a turning point in the history of Ottoman printing:

> It is no secret that the license granted . . . did not include printing [works of] exegesis, *ḥadīth*, jurisprudence, and theology . . . and that is a caution against the resistance [put up by] the adherents of fanaticism (*aṣḥāb al-ta'aṣṣub*). So a long time passed in which

> religious books (*kutub shar'ıyya*) were not printed [even though] scholars of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence did not think it objectionable to print religious books. For in [printing religious books] there are acts that violate [their] glorification, and that is based on the incontrovertible assertion (*al-qaḍīya al-musallama*) the [scholars] have and that is '[to all] things their purposes.' Building on this assertion they permitted the binding of the holy Qur'an out of fear that its pages would scatter and be lost, even though in the binding there are matters that violate glorification more so than printing like bruising [the text] with hammers and narrowing [its] quires. And for the good purposes of making books more numerous [with regard to the assertion 'to all things their purposes'], they classified printing [religious books] generally as a service to scholars. So all of the adherents of the disciplines (*aṣḥāb al-funūn*) [which rely upon religious books] profit from that.[121]

In Ahmed Cevdet's opinion, the most significant development in Ottoman printing was not Muteferrika's request to print, but rather, the printing of religious books during the intervening years between it and *The History*'s publication. An extreme religious faction had been responsible for obstructing the printing of these religious texts, according to Ahmed Cevdet. His explanation counters scholars' claims to a general Ottoman resistance to typography that originated from the sultanate, mainstream society, widespread Islamic values, copyists, and the religious establishment.

Ahmed Cevdet's account represents a bridge between the European and Ottoman historiographical traditions on Ottoman printing. Although it did not mention the ban, it entertained the themes of contemporary European scholarship on Ottoman printing. Moreover, it disseminated these ideas to an Ottoman audience and in particular, to Arabic readers.

Seven years after Ahmed Cevdet's *History* was published in Arabic, Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914) published another "History of Printing."[122] Zaydan was among the Beiruti literati who emigrated to Cairo in the late nineteenth century.[123] From there, he founded a printing press called al-Hilal, the Crescent, and began producing his "scientific, historical, wholesome, and literary journal published twice monthly" under the same name.[124] Zaydan published the piece on printing without designating its author. It appears to be the earliest history of print to be composed in Arabic directly; however, it drew from the translation of Ahmed Cevdet's "Digression" in form and content, and it cited him as a source.[125]

The essay began by restating the European view of the import of printing that Ahmed Cevdet had evoked:

> There is no debating that printing is one of the greatest factors in the spread of modern civilization (*al-tamaddun al-ḥadīth*) and the illumination of the minds of the general public. . . . Seekers of knowledge before [printing], then, had to search for a book which could not be found save for a few copies. So they had to go about copying [the books], or seeking copies of [the books], and so they spent months or [even] years doing that. And it is well known that in this [effort] there was difficulty, loss of time, and great expenditures. As for now, printing spreads books at the lowest of prices, so it made it easy for the poorer of the people to obtain them. And there is the greatest virtue in disseminating knowledge, culturing minds, and spreading morals. Th[is] reading investigates the history of [the] invention [of print] as it relates to Europe, and how it entered the east and spread within it.[126]

As promised, the essay next turned to the history of printing in Europe in the same manner as Ahmed Cevdet had done before.

Although little distinguished the essay which Zaydan published from that of Ahmed Cevdet at first, an important distinction arose between them through the former's concern for "Arabic printing."[127] It charted the rise of oriental printing from Europe to its spread across the Eastern world, examining presses according to the chronological order of their founding for the most part, in conjunction with the regions in which they arose. The essay moved from Arabic presses in Europe to those in Istanbul, Lebanon, Syria, Jerusalem, Egypt, Tunis, Mecca, and India,[128] for "although they are not Arab, the Indians use Arabic letters for writing in their tongue."[129] Zaydan's piece therefore began the historiographical tradition of fusing all instances of Islamicate printing together, in the manner that we first encountered under Guignes's effort to trace the development of oriental typefaces across Europe. It thereby provided its Arabic readers with the same type of history that Europeans had reserved for their own history of printing.

Because Zaydan's essay relied upon Ahmed Cevdet's writing, it too made no mention of the ban. Nonetheless, it inspired the entrance of the ban into the Ottoman historiographical tradition. In 1900, Louis Cheikho (1859–1927), the famous Jesuit Catholic priest, took aim at the essay.[130] Cheikho's religious training had brought him from his hometown of Mardin to France and Austria before he began publishing his "Catholic journal (*majalla*)" *al-Mashriq*, or *The Orient*, from Beirut in 1898.

Between 1900 and 1902, Cheikho penned and published seventeen installments of an essay entitled "The History of the Art of Printing in the

Orient."[131] Each essay covered oriental printing as it arose from a particular part of the world in time, from places such as Europe, Istanbul, Beirut, and Basra.[132] Within these locations, Cheikho focused upon printing amongst specific groups, such as Catholic printing in the Orient or Syrian printing in Beirut.[133] If Cheikho's work appeared to be a more detailed version of the essay published by Zaydan, that is because Cheikho intended for it to be just that. He opened his series with the following remark:

> It was three years ago that the owner of *al-Hilal* [*i.e.*, Zaydan] printed in his journal an article on the invention of printing and its history in Europe ending with a discussion of the history of Arabic printing. This section on Arabic printings, despite its benefits, does not exceed three pages and does not sufficiently cover the topic. Not to mention that its learned author gathered in it the good and the bad [i.e., his work included some errors] (*al-ghathth wa-'l-samīn*). So we have decided to return to this research and to establish everything that we can possibly gather about the history of oriental printing.[134]

Cheikho set out to surpass Zaydan's essay by furnishing Islamicate typographical printing with a comprehensive history. Indeed, his work outstripped Zaydan's piece in breadth and depth. His first essay began with innovations in printing made by the Chaldeans and the Chinese, and he argued that the Andalusians knew about lithography and printing by woodcarving.[135] "However," he wrote, "this art was difficult to pursue and required a lot of time."[136] Cheikho implied that Gutenberg's invention simplified the printing process, and he concluded his essay with a survey of oriental printing in Europe drawn from European sources.[137]

The Ottoman printing ban was transmitted into Arabic scholarship at the start of Cheikho's next essay, which focused on printing in Istanbul. So far as I can tell, this is the earliest account of Bayezid and Selim's firmans to be published by an Ottoman subject:

> In our previous article on the history of the discovery of printing and the spread of this art in Europe, we pointed out what the learned orientalists printed of the great oriental tradition (*al-ta'līf*), especially Arabic, up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Today, we resume the discussion of this beneficial subject by researching the entrance of printing into the Orient:
>
> Constantinople had arrived to this noble craft before other capitals of the Orient. But the great sultans of the family of Osman did

> not look upon printings with favor immediately, for they were afraid that extremists (*aṣḥāb al-ghāyāt*) would be intent on (*yaʿamadu ilā*) religious books so as to misrepresent [printings] and defame them by falsification. And that is what brought Sultan Bayazid II in the year of 1485 to produce an imperial ordinance (*ḥakamin ʿālī*) in which he forbade (*nahy*) his subjects (*raʿāyāhu*) from consuming (*ittikhādh*) printings. And Sultan Salim I, the warrior, renewed the ordinance of his father in the year 1515. However, this ordinance did not stand except for temporarily, and printing spread throughout the Porte by the permission of the rulers.[138]

Cheikho's discussion of the ban engaged with two familiar themes. First, he echoed Ahmed Cevdet's point that religious extremists delayed the development of Ottoman printing during Muteferrika's lifetime. Cheikho, however, situated the extremists in the time of Bayezid. Second, Cheikho noted that the sultanic firmans forbade Ottomans from "consuming printings" in wording that paralleled Thevet's account of the ban. Cheikho did not cite Thevet directly. He did, however, reference Guignes's essay to uphold his claims about Bayezid and Selim.[139] It therefore appears that word of the ban flowed from Thevet to Guignes to Cheikho over a period of three centuries.

Perplexingly, however, Cheikho cited Ahmed Cevdet's "Digression" within his discussion of Muteferrika.[140] This is interesting given that Ahmed Cevdet's account of Ottoman printing conflicted with that of Guignes. Ahmed Cevdet noted that Ottomans appreciated printing from the moment that they encountered it. By contrast, Guignes claimed that Ottomans were forbidden from consuming printed texts initially. The inconsistency between Guignes and Ahmed Cevdet's accounts left Cheikho with a choice. He could have relied upon one work to the exclusion of the other. Or, he could have noted the inconsistencies between them. Instead, Cheikho cobbled together pieces from both texts. He opened his narrative of Ottoman printing with Guignes's report of the ban, after which he elaborated upon Ahmed Cevdet's portrayal of Muteferrika.

Cheikho forced two incompatible narratives together by using a European account of Ottoman printing to foreground an Ottoman scholar's account of Ottoman printing. Both histories centered around print and its ability to shape society, and the Ottoman tradition for such writing grew directly from that of Europe. Yet these connections were undermined by the premise upon which the European scholarship rested. Most European scholars structured their views about Ottoman printing around the idea that the Ottomans were backward for not printing enough. They saw the great-

ness of European civilization through this marker, and maker, of Ottoman weakness. When Ottoman scholars wrote on Ottoman printing, they too asserted their societal greatness. But while Europeans could position themselves against Ottoman backwardness, the only counterpart from which Ottoman scholars could distinguish their society was its pre-printing past. This required some explanation, which in turn encouraged them to admit certain "facts" from the European tradition into their own.

Cheikho's essay therefore extended the ban from European to Ottoman scholarship. It also perpetuated it within both circles, which increasingly came to overlap. *Al-Mashriq*, for example, was consumed by Ottoman and Western readers alike as it featured correspondence between journals within the empire in addition to nearly forty journals from Europe and North America.[141] Because the rumor of the ban became established uniformly, it was able to pass as fact in many of the first histories of the modern Middle East.

The Ban's Establishment among Historians of the Modern Middle East during the Twentieth Century

The mid-twentieth century marked the rise of the historical subfields of Middle Eastern history, Turkish nationalist history, and Arab nationalist state history which was most prominently manifested in Egypt.[142] Historians of these subfields used printing as an indicator of Ottoman backwardness and nationalist renaissance because printing hardly occurred during the empire's apex, but took off during its fall. Their writings therefore modified and stabilized the ideas about Ottoman printing that had first developed among early modern Europeans, allowing contemporary scholars to circulate the ahistorical perspectives on Ottoman printing with which I began this essay.

The work of Bernard Lewis helps to illuminate how this process unfolded. Lewis lists himself as the first professional historian of the Middle East to write in English.[143] Although this claim is contested, it is generally recognized that there were few historians of the Middle East within the Western academy during the mid-twentieth century.[144] Before Lewis, several Western scholars of the Islamicate world produced work that is considered part of the historical corpus. However, they did not count themselves as historians during their lifetimes. For example, Hamilton A. R. Gibb (1895–1971) described himself as a philologist, which was a specialization that he considered to be separate from the formal training required of historians.[145] Accordingly, Lewis could claim to be a professional historian of the Middle East because he studied both as an Arabist under Gibb, and as a historian.[146]

Lewis's mid-century scholarship played a formative role in developing Middle Eastern history within the Anglophone academy,[147] and it also influenced the Turkish and Arabic traditions. Lewis's seminal book, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, has informed Middle Eastern historiography since its 1961 publication.[148] This impact is exhibited by the seven English editions of *The Emergence* published since 1961,[149] and the nine Turkish editions of the book published since 1970.[150] To my knowledge, *The Emergence* has never been printed in Arabic. However, eleven years before it was first published, Lewis put forth a book entitled *The Arabs in History.*[151] *The Arabs in History* boasts 22 English editions,[152] two Turkish editions beginning from 2006,[153] and an Arabic edition from 1954.[154] Lewis used *The Arabs in History* to draw out similar themes to *The Emergence*. For example, the two books share a chapter entitled "The Impact of the West."[155]

It is in "The Impact of the West" chapter in *The Arabs in History* that Lewis first proclaimed that "the Ottoman Sulṭāns for long banned printing in Arabic or Turkish."[156] Although this statement followed in the tradition established by Thevet, Lewis fixed the idea of the ban within twentieth-century English and Arabic scholarship. As Lewis himself remarked in the preface to his 2002 English edition, "the Arabic version was made by two distinguished Arab historians and was praised by such eminent Arab scholars as Shafiq Ghorbal in Egypt."[157] Indeed, Shafiq Ghorbal (1894–1961) was Egypt's preeminent historian during the second quarter of the twentieth century.[158]

Because of Lewis's authority in English historiography and Ghorbal's authority in Arabic historiography, the ban entered mid-twentieth-century scholarship as fact. For example, Khalil Sabat's (1919–2001) *History of Printing in the Arab East* was published four years after the Arabic publication of *The Arabs in History.*[159] The opening page of Sabat's first chapter maintained that: "Sultan Bayazid II worried that his Muslim subjects would avail themselves of this new invention [i.e., printing], so he had no choice but to issue in the year of 1485 a command that forbade non-Jews from using Gutenberg's technique. When Sultan Salim I came to the throne he decided to renew in year 1515 the command of his father with regard to the printing press, out of fear that people forgot [the command] as time passed."[160]

Before I turn to Lewis's re-release and further stabilization of the ban in English and Turkish historiography through *The Emergence,* let me explain the general appeal of Lewis's work to the Anglophone, Turkish, and Arabic traditions. In *The Emergence*, Lewis studied the "streams of influence that

have gone to make modern Turkey."[161] Because he found the Republic's strengths in its redress of Ottoman failings, he compared Turkey to Europe and contrasted it with the Ottoman Empire. For example, the opening chapter of *The Emergence* which preceded "The Impact of the West" was entitled "The Decline of the Ottoman Empire."[162] Lewis's comparison of civilizations for their sources of prosperity and decay stemmed from Gibb and Harold Bowen's (1896–1959) *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization On Moslem Culture in the Near East*.[163] In turn, Gibb and Bowen relied on Arnold Toynbee's (1889–1975) attempt to examine civilizations universally through *A Study of History.*[164] And Shafiq Ghorbal counted among Toynbee's students.[165]

Lewis's scholarship therefore aligned the relevant schools of thought around the idea that the Ottomans had hindered societal progress. The Turkish nationalist narrative jettisoned imperial history in the attempt to complement the state's projection of itself as Western and modern.[166] Kemalists used Europe to represent modernity, and the Ottomans to represent traditionalism. Hence Lewis's claim that the Ottomans banned printing suited the thrust of Turkish nationalist historiography, even though the veracity of the ban was by 1928 already being questioned in at least one Turkish history of print.[167] The ban, and the general Kemalist disavowal of their Ottoman past, also accommodated post-World War I Egyptian nationalist historiography. Egyptian nationalist historiography portrayed the Ottoman possession of Egypt from 1517–1918 as four centuries of stagnation which came to be reversed only through the efforts of defiant local rulers. Jamal al-Din al-Shayyal (1911–67), one of Egypt's great nationalist historians, espoused this view when he wrote that "the Islamic Middle East had witnessed a fundamental change at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman Turks succeeded in eliminating the Mamluk state in Egypt and Syria (*al-shām*) . . . perhaps this explains the general recession in scholarship (*al-ḥaraka al-ʻilmıyya*)—particularly historical composition—in Egypt throughout the three centuries in which it was subjected to Ottoman rule. . . . This noticeable void continued until the eighteenth century approached its end, when an attempt for independence and separation from the Ottoman state began in Egypt . . . which facilitated this shift towards a scholarly renaissance . . . ."[168] Another seminal historian of modern Egypt, ʻAbd al-Rahman al-Rafiʻi (1889–1966), underscored the link between this renaissance and printing in his study of Egypt during the first half of the nineteenth century: "To speak about printing brings [us] to the intellectual renaissance (*al-nahḍa al-ʻilmıyya*), for [printing] is one of the most impor-

tant causes of this renaissance since it is the operative vehicle for spreading information and learning . . . ."[169]

The harmonious way in which these traditions engaged decline, renaissance, and print permitted Lewis's claims about the Ottoman printing ban to go unchecked. Lewis treated Ottoman printing with greater detail in *The Emergence* than he did in *The Arabs in History*, although this treatment was still brief. He invoked printing to support his wider argument, suggesting that it was an important European innovation that the Ottomans failed to adopt. In other words, printing was an "impact of the West" whose absence within the empire contributed to the Ottoman "decline." Lewis cited two early modern European accounts of Ottoman printing to justify his point. These were the writings of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522–92), a Hapsburg ambassador to Istanbul whose *Turkish Letters* was published in 1581,[170] and Nicolas de Nicolay (1517–83), a French surveyor for King Henry II whose *Navigations, Wanderings and Voyages Made in Turkey* was published in 1577.[171] Both men lived in the empire during the 1550s.

Like Lewis, Busbecq and Nicolay were intrigued by the European innovations that the Ottomans adopted, and those that they did not. Lewis quoted from Busbecq that

> no nation in the world has shown greater readiness than the Turks to avail themselves of the useful inventions of foreigners, as is proved by their employment of cannons and mortars, and many other things invented by Christians. They cannot, however, be induced as yet to use printing, or to establish public clocks, because they think that the Scriptures, that is, their sacred books—would no longer be *scriptures* if they were *printed*, and that, if public clocks were introduced, the authority of their muezzins and their ancient rites would be thereby impaired.[172]

Busbecq described the European technologies that the Ottomans employed accurately. However, he suggested that the Ottomans were averse to printing and mechanical time telling because of the threat that these innovations posed to Islamic tradition.

Lewis could have qualified Busbecq's account by arguing that the Ottoman preference for some Western technologies over others was governed by practical considerations. Cannons and mortars were novel and useful to the Ottomans.[173] But printing and public clocks were new means of accomplishing tasks that manuscript copyists and public sundials satisfied already. Or, Lewis could have probed the validity of Busbecq's claim that presses and

clocks undermined Islamic authority. Instead, he elaborated upon the religious crux of Busbecq's account to conclude: "Firearms could be accepted, since they would be of service in the Holy War for Islam against the infidels; printing and clocks could not be accepted, since they served no such purpose, and might flaw the social fabric of Islam."[174]

Lewis next affirmed and expounded upon the Ottoman-Islamic aversion to printing that he conjured through Busbecq. Under Bayezid, Lewis noted, Iberian Jewish immigrants to the Ottoman Empire could print "on condition that they did not print any books in Turkish or Arabic, and confined themselves to Hebrew and European languages."[175] He then invoked Nicolay's account in a footnote to bolster this claim, and Busbecq's before it:

> Moreover the [Jews] have amongst themselves artisans in all the most excellent arts and crafts, especially the Marranos who have recently been banished and chased from Spain and Portugal, which is to the great detriment and shame of Christianity since they teach to the Turkish many inventions, devices, and machines of war, like making artillery, arquebuses, cannon powder, bullets, and other weapons. Similarly they set up printing, which had never before been seen in these regions: by these means, in fine characters they highlighted several books in various languages: Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and similarly Hebrew, which is natural to them. But in neither Turkish nor in Arabic are they permitted to print.[176]

The Busbecq and Nicolay quotes that Lewis chose to employ are striking for their lack of reference to manuscript production, and their disregard for the practical purpose of printing: the reproduction of identical versions of one text. These lapses aligned with the twentieth-century understanding that printing played a deterministic role in shaping society.[177]

But while the contours of Nicolay and Busbecq's accounts were similar, they conflicted in detail. Nicolay argued that Ottoman printing appeared in five languages, but neither in Arabic nor Turkish for lack of permission. Hence to Nicolay, the language of the printing determined its permissibility. But Busbecq stated that printing altogether "cannot . . . be induced" because Muslims found it incompatible with their mores. Nicolay and Busbecq's assessments of Ottoman printing therefore differed with regard to whether Islam caused the marginalization of printing, even though Nicolay's account could support Busbecq's interpretation that Ottoman Christians and Jews were permitted to print.

Lewis did not acknowledge the inconsistency between Busbecq and Nicolay's accounts. Instead, he fused them together and embellished their details.

Lewis concluded from them that Bayezid issued "the ban on printing in Turkish or Arabic."[178] He wrote that "the most important technical innovation from Europe outside the military field was undoubtedly printing,"[179] and implied that the empire was destined to collapse because of its dismissiveness towards Western technology: "Though clever with their hands in making useful devices like guns, clocks, and printing presses, the Europeans were still benighted and barbarous infidels, whose history, philosophy, science, and literature, if indeed they existed at all, could hold nothing of value for the people of the universal Islamic Empire."[180]

Some mid-twentieth-century historians of Turkey followed Lewis's lead in using early modern European accounts of Ottoman printing to reflect their interest in the empire's collapse. Serif Mardin, for example, authored a paper entitled "Some Notes On an Early Phase in the Modernization of Communications in Turkey."[181] In it, Mardin argued that an inchoate form of "national consciousness" arose through "changes in social communications" in the empire.[182] He posited that "a communications crisis of some importance existed in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, which had been building up for some time. . . . "[183] One of the examples Mardin invoked was the state of printing in the empire. He quoted an English diplomat, Paul Rycaut (1629–1700), who expounded upon the differences between the "virtue of the Sword" and pen in the Ottoman court.[184] Although Rycaut's account concerned the state of seventeenth-century Ottoman scholarship, Mardin depicted it as a prescient vision of the empire's collapse:

> It is indeed true that there existed both among the *Ulema* and the "men of the pen" a fear that the masses would begin to meddle in questions which were beyond their understanding.
>
> In the seventeenth century the British diplomat Rycaut had quite sagaciously established the connection between this attitude and the state of printing in the Ottoman Empire, stating:
>
> "The art of Printing . . . is absolutely prohibited amongst them because it may give a beginning of that subtlety of learning which is inconsistent as well as dangerous to . . . their government . . . ."[185]

The ban, and the sense that printing played a role in imperial decline, cycled through writings produced during this important historiographical period.

This consensus on printing amongst influential historians of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman Middle East cast a long shadow over subsequent scholarship. In 1985, Wahid Gdoura authored a detailed study of Ottoman printing entitled *The Debut of Arabic Printing in Istanbul and Syria.*[186] When

Gdoura addressed the firmans of Bayezid and Selim, he probed the validity of Thevet's account. However, he questioned the details of the account instead of its crux. Gdoura found Thevet's contention that the Ottomans banned printing to be correct, but he found it strange that Thevet neglected to specify that Ottoman Jews were exempted from the ban on printing.[187] We encountered the notion that the Ottoman sultans banned all printing, except for Jewish printing, under Lewis. Lewis had relied on Nicolay for this intelligence. Perhaps not coincidentally, Gdoura cited *The Emergence* in the bibliography of his book.[188] It appears that Lewis's stature encouraged Gdoura to accept the underlying premise of Thevet's claim. Instead, the inconsistency between Thevet and Lewis's accounts should have motivated Gdoura to probe both of these sources.

Since scholars who specialized in Ottoman printing could ascribe such weight to the ban, it follows that non-specialist scholars might not question the soundness of their claims.

The Ban May Be Slowly Dying, but Scholars of Ottoman Printing Are Still "Waiting for Godot"

I close this essay with my sense of where scholarship on Ottoman printing now stands. My main conclusion is that while several scholars of the topic have begun interrogating the ban, they continue to explore Ottoman printing from the framework which supported its rise.

In 2014, Orlin Sabev, a historian of Ottoman printing in eighteenth-century Istanbul, published a paper entitled: "Waiting for Godot: The Formation of Ottoman Print Culture."[189] Sabev guided his readers towards the Eurocentric themes that have propelled the topic from the sixteenth century:

> As for the transition from scribal to print culture in the Turkish-Muslim segment of Ottoman society, its long print revolution or evolution, as you like, was preceded by a long delay or wait. Printing in western Europe began in the mid-fifteenth century, and non-Muslim Ottoman subjects such as Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Orthodox Slavs, Arabic- or Turkic-speaking Christians established their own printing presses to print predominantly religious texts during the late fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteen centuries; but the first Ottoman Muslim printing enterprise was launched only in the third decade of the eighteenth century.
>
> How can we explain such a delay?[190]

Sabev's investigation of this delay led him to question several explanations which scholars have proposed over the centuries.[191] Significantly, this gave him cause to repudiate the ban: "In his book on Turkish literature, printed in 1688, Giovanni Donado asserts that the Ottoman sultans banned printing . . . . There is, however, no documentary evidence available so far to confirm the allegations that the Ottomans were negatively inclined toward printing."[192]

But despite Sabev's challenge to the ban, he continued to explore the temporality of Ottoman printing with Europe as his starting point. The further purpose of his paper was to address the two main problems that he saw facing scholarship on Ottoman printing: scholars had yet to agree on whether print was an agent of change, and when Ottoman print culture set in.[193] Sabev used a modified version of the paradigm laid out by Elizabeth Eisenstein's 1979 *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* to argue that "İbrahim Müteferrika was an 'agent of change,' though not an 'agent of *immediate* change.'"[194]

Scholars of Ottoman printing have begun to have reservations about the veracity of the ban. Some have avoided mentioning it within their writing out of a growing sense of its inaccuracy. Others have questioned the existence of the ban outright, albeit as an aside folded into their wider work.[195] But it is not enough to cast doubt on the veracity of a foundational "fact" that has structured the framing and analysis of Ottoman printing since the sixteenth century. Especially given that it originated from a question which remains in circulation, prompting similar derivations to be formulated, namely: "if the Ottoman state knew about the new technology [i.e., printing] shortly after its invention, why did it not attempt to benefit from it?"[196]

With scores of able copyists throughout Istanbul and other imperial cities, a more sound question presents itself: why print? As the Ottoman chronicler Ibrahim Peçevi (1574–1649) noted when he wrote "An Analysis of the Printed Writing of the Unbelievers":

> The invention of printing by the unbelievers is a very strange art, and verily an unusual invention . . . . [I]t was devised in the year 1440 in [Mainz] by a wise man called Aywan Kutanbark [*i.e.*, Johannes Gutenberg] . . . . [S]ince then all the books by the unbelievers are produced by printing . . . . When one intends to print a book it is as hard as handwriting to arrange the types in lines. But once arranged one thousand copies can be printed in less time than copying one volume by hand.[197]

The purpose of printing is to reproduce texts faster than is possible by hand-copying them. Although printing has acquired meaning as a civilizing force, it is in the first instance an act.

To understand Ottoman printing, scholars must examine the ways in which the people of particular communities incorporated it into their manuscript culture for producing, using, and thinking about texts. In other words, they ought to explore Ottoman printing with the same localized historical detail, attention to practicality, and freedom from precedence that Europeanists enjoy. Such a framework "provincializes Europe," to quote Dipesh Chakarbarty, rendering the European experience of print as one of many instead of paradigmatic of all.[198] Indeed, focusing upon discrete Ottoman contexts for textual culture makes it possible to detect instances of Ottomans' intentional engagement with foreign practice.

To conclude with an answer to the question that I posed through the title of this essay, extant documentary evidence does not support the claim that Ottoman sultans banned print. What it does support, however, is scholars' longstanding attempt to explain the Ottoman experience of printing through that of Europe. Ban or no ban, it is this perspective that ought to be made an object of study and finally dislodged from the foundational core of scholarship on Ottoman printing.

Notes

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1. Specifically that of Ibrahim Muteferrika (1675–1745), as I discuss further below.

2. See for example: Mahmud Muhammad Tanahi, *Al-Kitab al-Matbu' bi-Misr fi al-Qarn al-Tasi' 'Ashar: Tarikh wa-Tahlil* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1996), 19–24.

3. See for example: Abu al-Futuh Radwan, *Tarikh Matba'at Bulaq wa-Lamha fi Tarikh al-Tiba'a fi Buldan al-Sharq al-Awsat* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Amiriyya, 1953), 1–27.

4. See for example: Elias Hanna Elias, *La Presse Arabe* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1993), 8–12.

5. See for example: Khalid Muhammad 'Azab and Ahmad Mansur, *Al-Kitab al-'Arabi al-Matbu': Min al-Judhur ila Matba'at Bulaq* (Cairo: al-Dar al-Misriyya al-Lubnaniyya, 2008), 14–22.

6. See for example: Fawzi Abdulrazak, "The Kingdom of the Book: The History of Printing as an Agency of Change in Morocco Between 1865 and 1912" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1990), 57–74.

7. See for example: Khalil Sabat, *Tarikh al-Tiba'a fi al-Sharq al-'Arabi* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1958), 17; Muhammad Mahir Hamada, *Al-Kitab al-'Arabi Makhtutan wa-Matbu'an: Tarikhuhu wa-Tatawwuruhu hatta Matla' al-Qarn al-'Ishrin* (Riyadh: Dar al-'Ulum, 1984), 219–29.

8. See for example: Wahid Gdoura, *Le Début de l'imprimerie Arabe à Istanbul et en Syrie: évolution de l'environnement culturel, 1706–1787* (Tunis: Université de Tunis, Institut supérieur de documentation, 1985), 38–197; Al-Sa'id Dawud, *Al-Nashr al-'A'ili fi Misr: Dirasa Ta'siliyya* (Cairo: as-S. Dawud, 2008), 29–65.

9. Geoffrey Roper, "The History of the Book in the Muslim World," in *The Oxford Companion to the Book*, ed. Michael F. Suarez and H.R. Woudhuysen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Vol. 1, 333.

10. 'Azab, *Al-Kitab al-'Arabi al-Matbu'*, 29–60; 62.

11. 'Azab, *Al-Kitab al-'Arabi al-Matbu'*, 13.

12. George N. Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995).

13. Atiyeh wrote: "In most of the Ottoman Empire, including the Arab world, the *'ulamā'* [or Muslim religious scholars] opposed the introduction of printing. It was only in 1727 that the use of the printing press for printing in Arabic script was permitted, and that was only for the production of non-religious materials. Belief in Islam's superiority over other religions, because the Koran is God's eternal word, and veneration of the Arabic language as the medium for revealing the word of God, made the *'ulamā'*, the Sultan, and others oppose the use of a metal object, coming from Christendom, to reproduce the honored language of revelation. There were certainly other reasons for this opposition, but those listed above were the weightiest ones. Here one wonders if the absence of printing was not an important element in the late arrival of modernism and modern technology to the Empire. Most of the Empire was rather slower in the assimilation and circulation of the new learning, leaving the Arab world far behind the West in terms of progress. Lebanon and Egypt were the first to realize this and to take advantage of the printing press" (Atiyeh, "The Book in the Modern Arab World: the Cases of Lebanon and Egypt," in *The Book in the Islamic World*, 235).

14. Namely: Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900–1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). He also authored a book that treats printing as a major sub-theme: Ami Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

15. Ayalon wrote: "Printing was adopted in the Middle East several centuries after it had swept Europe. A common explanation for this striking historic delay ascribes it to a distrustful attitude of sultans and 'ulama' alike toward the foreign invention, on religious as well as political grounds: they feared that machined mass-production of writings might desecrate Islam's holy texts and sacred language. If becoming widespread, it might also undermine their exclusive say in the community. Middle Eastern societies, then, did not adopt printing because their political and spiritual leaders were wary of it. The delay has also been attributed to opposition by the Empire's scribes and book copiers, presumably an influential cadre, who naturally feared for their livelihood. Of late, scholars have begun to question the plausibility of such explanations and the credibility of their underlying evidence. Recent probes into the historic Middle Eastern dislike for printing tend to look at cultural factors rather than religious and political ones. They focus mostly on the society's time-honoured preference for oral over written modes in communicating and retaining knowledge, a preference that would render the mass production of texts unnecessary. Such an explanation is perforce as tentative as the old, and seems to leave something to be desired. Be that as it may, the old aversive attitude to Gutenberg's invention began to lose ground in the eighteenth century, as a part of broader changes in the Empire's

domestic and international realities" (Ami Ayalon, "Arab Booksellers and Bookshops in the Age of Printing, 1860–1914," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 1, [2010]: 74).

16. Geoffrey Roper, ed., *The History of the Book in the Middle East* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2013).

17. Roper continued: "The reasons for this delay must be sought both in the nature of Muslim societies and in the supreme religious and aesthetic role accorded to the written word within them. Some indications of the profound Muslim attachment to MS books and scribal culture have already been given, and there can be no doubt that this was the main reason for the reluctance to embrace printing. Some more specific reasons can also be adduced.

"The use of movable type seemed to be the only practical method of printed-book production before the 19th century. This involved creating punches and matrices and casting individual types for all the letters and letter combinations of the Arabic alphabet, in their different forms; then, the compositor had to reassemble these separate sorts to create lines of text and pages of a book. As far as Muslims could see, this was done without regard to the intrinsic subtleties of the processes of calligraphic composition, and its relation to underlying aesthetic and 'spiritual' considerations. Such segmentation and mechanization of the sacred Arabic script seemed tantamount to sacrilege in the eyes of devout Muslims. The production of the Qur'an by mechanical means was considered unthinkable, but other texts bearing the name of God (as nearly all did) were also regarded by most scholars and readers as not to be violated by methods of mass production. Rumours were also spread of the use in printing of ink brushes made from hogs' hair, which would automatically defile sacred names; other rumours circulated about impure inks, which might also have the same effect.

"Apart from these considerations, the mass production of books by printing challenged the entrenched monopolies of intellectual authority enjoyed by the learned class (*'ulamā'*), and threatened to upset the balance between that authority and the power of the state" (Roper, "The History of the Book in the Muslim World," 332–33).

18. It included the claim that "it was only in the 1800s that Muslim societies, that had resisted for centuries the industrialization of manuscript production, adopted the printing press, centuries after it was in use among most Western and Asian literate societies . . . " (Ghislaine Lydon, "A Thirst for Knowledge: Arabic Literacy, Writing Paper and Saharan Bibliophiles in the Southwestern Sahara" in *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, ed. G. Kratli and Ghislaine Lydon (Boston: Brill, 2011), 63).

19. "But even more restrictive . . . were the religious taboos of a traditional society; for example, the second Commandment, which forbids the making of graven images, offered little chance for the new invention to root itself among pious Jews. The first local photographers to open shop were mostly Christians who did not see themselves bound by such a prohibition or converted Jews. (This was true even in the more progressive Ottoman Empire, where the leading photographers, the Abdullah brothers, were Armenians converted to Islam, and Sebah was of Greek-Christian origin.)" (Nissan Perez, *Focus Fast: Early Photography in the Near East, 1839–1885* [New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988], 74–76).

20. "By the early nineteenth century, even the Koran could be discussed in print, and by 1848, a wide variety of texts, totaling 514 and covering diverse topics in science, literature, and language, among others, were printed and marketed" (Michael Shapiro, *Methods and Nations: Cultural Governance and the Indigenous Subject* [New York: Routledge, 2004], 16).

21. "We argue that Ottoman rulers banned printing in Arabic characters because they were fearful of its effect on their legitimacy. By undermining the ability of religious authorities to confer legitimacy, the printing press would have raised the cost of collecting taxes and lowered the ruler's revenue" (Metin Coşgel, Thomas Miceli, and Jared Rubin, "The Political Economy of Mass Printing: Legitimacy and Technological Change in the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 40 [2012]: 364).

22. "It has long been a matter for debate among Turkish, European and recently also Tunisian scholars, why the printing of Ottoman works began only in the eighteenth century. A series of religious, aesthetic, socio-political and ultimately economic factors played a part in this . . . . Many Istanbul bibliophiles regarded the Arabic characters generally used in Europe as decidedly unlovely . . . . Another problem resulted from the many errors contained in a high proportion of printed texts . . . . Printing also had the drawback of arriving in the Muslim world as a 'Christian invention.' . . . Moreover, by no means all literary figures and theologians were convinced that the spread of reading was a good thing . . . . At least until well into the seventeenth century, the Ottoman bureaucracy also looked on printed books as a potential source of conflict . . . . As well as these political and religious-cum-cultural arguments against printed books, there was also an economic consideration" (Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire* [New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000]: 94–96).

23. Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 366. Finkel is the only scholar I have come across to refer to such fifteenth-century Jewish sources on the ban. She does not provide a reference to them.

24. For more on this thesis from its originator, refer to Reinhard Schulze, "The Birth of Tradition and Modernity in 18th and 19th Century Islamic Culture. The Case of Printing," *Culture & History* 16 (199): 29–72.

25. Ayalon, "Arab Booksellers," 74.

26. Atiyeh, "The Book in the Modern Arab World," 235.

27. John-Paul Ghobrial, "Diglossia and the 'Methodology' of Arabic Print" (paper presented at the 2nd International Symposium of History of Printing and Publishing in the Languages and Countries of the Middle East, Paris, 2–4 November, 2005. Permission for citation granted by the author).

28. Ghobrial, "Diglossia," 1–3, 7.

29. Ghobrial, "Diglossia," 7–8, 17.

30. Dana Sajdi, "Print and its Discontents. A Case for Pre-Print Journalism and Other Sundry Print Matters," *The Translator* 15, no. 1 (2009): 113.

31. Sajdi, "Print and its Discontents," 105–23.

32. Sajdi, "Print and its Discontents," 124–26. Sajdi maintains this argument in her book, *The Barber of Damascus*, which demonstrates the development of chronicle writing amongst non-elites in and around eighteenth-century Damascus (Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013]).

33. Kathryn Schwartz, "The Political Economy of Private Printing in Cairo as Told From a Commissioning Deal Turned Sour, 1871," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017): 25–45; and Kathryn Schwartz, "Meaningful Mediums: A Material and Intellectual History of Manuscript and Print Production in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Cairo" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2015).

34. Şule Aksoy Kutlukan, "Introduction" in *Osmanlı Padişah Fermanları*, ed. Ayşegül Nadir (London: A. Nadir, 1986), 7–21.

35. Other firmans on printing are likely to have been promulgated. For example, the American Protestant missionary Pliny Fisk (1792–1825) referenced one such firman in a letter written from Aleppo on September 11, 1824 (Alvan Bond, *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk, A.M. Late Missionary to Palestine* [Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1828], 386–88). Fisk reports that the firman was issued by Mahmud II (r. 1808–39) to forbid the distribution of Christian scriptures printed in Europe within the Ottoman Empire.

36. Refer to the above-listed quote from Caroline Finkel (Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 366).

37. "The ban on printing issued in 1485 by Sultan Bāyezīd II . . . was not valid for Arab Christians—nor for that matter for Jews and Armenians—as non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire" (Dagmar Glass and Geoffrey Roper, "Part I: The Printing of Arabic Books in

the Arab World," in *Middle Eastern Languages and the Print Revolution: A Cross-Cultural Encounter*, ed. Eva Hanebutt-Benz, Dagmar Glass, and Geoffrey Roper [Westhofen: WVA-Verlag Skulima, 2002], 177).

38. "The ban on printing in Turkish or Arabic remained effective until the early eighteenth century, when its relaxation was due largely to the efforts of two men" (Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961], 50).

39. "Before establishing its own official press in 1726, the Sublime Porte had hitherto forbidden (edicts of Bāyezīd II in 1485 and of Selīm I in 1515) the Muslims to print texts in Arabic characters (although it permitted the Jews to print texts in Hebrew)" (G. Oman, "Matbaʿa," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* [Brill Online, 2013]).

40. "The Turkish sultan, who was not only the nearest but also the most powerful Muslim ruler, was quick to realize what was happening in Europe [i.e., printing], and he feared the consequences this new activity might have among his subjects. A ban on the possession of printed matter was proclaimed by Sultan Bayazid II as early as 1485, and was repeated and enforced in 1515 by Selim I, who shortly thereafter became the conqueror of Egypt and Syria, the central lands of Islam, and at the same time master of the holy places in Arabia. The ban did not affect the Jews, who from 1490 printed a number of Hebrew books in Istanbul and later on also in Salonika, including the Pentateuch with the Aramaic Targum Onkelos, a free translation, and Sa'dia Gaon's commentary, the latter partly translated in to Persian. Such remained the situation until about 1700" (Johannes Pedersen and Geoffrey French, trans., *The Arabic Book* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 133–134).

41. Sean Roberts, *Printing a Mediterranean World: Florence, Constantinople, and the Renaissance of Geography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 154. For a detailed discussion of Mehmed II's library, refer to Julian Raby, "East & West in Mehmed the Conqueror's Library," *Bulletin du bibliophile* 3 (1987): 297–321.

42. Euclid, *Euclidis Elementorum geometricorum libri tredecim* (Rome: In typographia Medicea, 1594), verso of last page.

43. Christopher M. Murphy, trans., "Appendix: Ottoman Imperial Documents Relating to the History of Books and Printing," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 283.

44. Murphy, trans., "Appendix," 283.

45. Murphy, trans., "Appendix," 291.

46. Ismaʿil bin Hammad Jawhari, *Kitab-ı Lugat-ı Vankulu* (Constantinople: Dar ut-Tıbaat il-Mamure, 1729), folio 2.

47. For the full English translations of "*Vesiletu't-Tibaʿa*" and the Imperial firman granted to Muteferrika by Ahmed III, refer to Murphy, "Appendix," 284–92. For their reproductions, along with the endorsements, or *taqārīẓ*, of the text, refer to Gdoura, *Début de l'imprimerie Arabe*, 276–80.

48. Murphy, "Appendix," 287.

49. Murphy, "Appendix," 289.

50. Murphy, "Appendix," 290.

51. Murphy, "Appendix," 289.

52. Murphy, "Appendix," 287.

53. Murphy, "Appendix," 287.

54. Murphy, "Appendix," 288.

55. Murphy, "Appendix," 288.

56. Murphy, "Appendix," 288.

57. Murphy, "Appendix," 288. The notion of Ottoman societal decline, as portrayed by sixteenth-century Ottoman sources, is explored in: Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 1986). The self-reported Ottoman decline did not come from a comparison to Europe. Rather, early modern Ottoman elites articulated their sense of decline relative to societal changes within the empire itself.

58. Murphy, "Appendix," 289.

59. Murphy, "Appendix," 290.

60. Murphy, "Appendix," 290.

61. Murphy, "Appendix," 290.

62. Murphy, "Appendix," 290.

63. Murphy, "Appendix," 291.

64. Murphy, "Appendix," 291–92.

65. Franz Rosenthal, "'Blurbs' (Taqriz) From Fourteenth-Century Egypt," *Oriens* 27/28 (1981): 177–96.

66. Jawhari, *Kitab-ı Lugat-ı Vankulu*, folios 3 & 4.

67. Jawhari, *Kitab-ı Lugat-ı Vankulu*, folio 2; Şule Aksoy Kutlukan, "Introduction," 18; Arnoud Vrolijk, Personal correspondence, 29 September 2015.

68. Jawhari, *Kitab-ı Lugat-ı Vankulu*, folio 2.

69. Murphy, "Appendix," 284.

70. Murphy, "Appendix," 284.

71. Murphy, "Appendix,", 284.

72. Murphy, "Appendix," 285.

73. Murphy, "Appendix," 284.

74. Murphy, "Appendix," 284.

75. One scholar noted that Muteferrika's partners "had become acquainted with the art of printing during a sojourn in Paris, and it was they who managed to convince the government that it could be of value" (Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, 133–134). Another wrote that "printing with Arabic metal types was formerly prohibited in the Ottoman Empire, until 1726. However, non-Muslim minorities were allowed to have printing presses on the condition that they printed with non-Arabic characters . . . . After much deliberation, the Sultan Aḥmed III issued a decree in 1726 that allowed the use of Arabic fonts for the printing of secular texts only. This marked the beginning of the printing and publishing of secular Arabic and Turkish books" (Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFares, *Arabic Typography: A Comprehensive Sourcebook* [London: Saqi Books, 2001], 68).

76. For example, one scholar wrote that: "In 1727, when permission was asked by an Hungarian by the name of İbrahim [Muteferrika] for the erection of a printing press at Constantinople, the Ulema under Sultan Aḥmed III delivered a verdict that it was against the religion and honor of Islam to allow the printing of the Koran, because the Koran rested upon written tradition, and must in no other way be handed down. Permission to set up a press was finally given him on condition that the Koran should not be printed, and in 1727 a history of Egypt appeared, but it awakened such opposition that until the nineteenth century no more printing was attempted in Moslem lands, and even through the nineteenth century printing has had to fight against great odds" (T.F. Carter, "Islam as a Barrier to Printing," *The Muslim World* 33 [1943]: 214). Another argued that Ahmed's firman "prohibited the printing of texts that dealt with Koran, *tafsîr*, *ḥâdîth* and *fiqh*. The original restricted injunction was later expanded to include the printing of any manuscripts containing Islamic texts" (Schulze, "Birth of Tradition and Modernity," 41–42).

77. Roper, "History of the Book," 333.

78. Murphy, "Appendix," 285.

79. Murphy, "Appendix," 285.

80. In the sixteenth century, Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–95) and the *şeyhülislām* Ebussuud Efendi (r. 1545–74) believed that coffee should be banned, as evidenced by their respective firman and fatwa which may be read in English translation in: Eminegül Karababa and Güliz Ger,

"Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture and the Formation of the Consumer Subject," *Journal of Consumer Research* 37, no. 5 (2011), 737–60. For more on the objection to coffee by the Ottoman establishment, refer to Ralph Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

81. Jawhari, *Kitab-ı Lugat-ı Vankulu*, folio 2.

82. Murphy, "Appendix," 285.

83. Murphy, "Appendix," 285.

84. Murphy, "Appendix," 285.

85. Andrei Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman World in Renaissance Europe* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2012), 39.

86. James Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 121–22.

87. David Shaw, "The Book Trade Comes of Age: The Sixteenth Century," in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 220; Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 91.

88. André Thevet, *Les vrais pourtraits et vies des hommes illustres, Grecz, Latins, et payens, recueilliz de leurs tableaux, livres, medalles antiques, et modernes* (Paris: Par la vefue I. Keruert et Guillaume Chaudiere, 1584), Vol. 2, 515 verso.

89. Thevet, *Les vrais pourtraits*, 514 recto–517 verso.

90. Mingrelia was a principality located in the Black Sea region of what is present-day Georgia.

91. Thevet, *Les vrais pourtraits*, 515 verso.

92. Later accounts place the ban in the year 1485.

93. Geoffrey Roper, personal correspondence, 29 September 2013.

94. Bert Salwen, "The Reliability of Andre Thevet's New England Material," *Ethnohistory* 10, no. 2 (1963): 183–85.

95. Salwen, "The Reliability of Andre Thevet's New England Material," 183.

96. John Stoye, *Marsigli's Europe, 1680–1730: The Life and Times of Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, Soldier and Virtuoso* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 23–27, 36.

97. Le Comte de Marsigli, *L'Etat militaire de l'empire Ottoman, ses progrès et sa décadence. Premiere partie* (The Hague and Amsterdam: Chez Pierre Gosse, & Jean Neaulme. Pierre de Hont, Adrien Moetjens, etc., 1732), Vol. I, 40.

98. His acquisitions form the basis of the University of Bologna's oriental collection today. Stephan Roman, *The Development of Islamic Library Collections in Western Europe and North America* (UK: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1990), 156–57.

99. Roman, *Development of Islamic Library Collections*, 156–57.

100. *Biographe universelle, ancienne et moderne*, *ou histoire, par ordre alphabétique, de la vie publique et privée de tous les homes qui se sont distngués par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes* (Paris: Chez L. G. Michaud, 1817), Vol. 19, 99.

101. M. de Guignes, "Essai historique sur l'origine des caractères orientaux de l'Imprimerie Royale, sur les ouvrages qui ont été imprimés à Paris, en Arabe, en Syriaque, en Arménien, &c. & sur les caractères Grecs de François I.er appelés communément Grecs du roi," in *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Roi lus au comité établi par Sa Majesté dans l'Académie Royale des inscriptions et belles lettres* (Paris: De l'Imprimerie royale, 1787), Vol. 1, ix–ccii.

102. Guignes, "Essai historique," xxviii.

103. Guignes, "Essai historique," xxviii. I have not been able to consult the archives of this library.

104. For more on European depictions of Ottomans during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, refer to Lucette Valensi, *The Birth of the Despot: Venice and the Sublime Porte* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009).

105. Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 62–65.

106. Constantin-Francois Volney, *Travels Through Syria and Egypt, in the Years 1783, 1784, and 1785. Containing the Present Natural and Political State of Those Countries; Their Productions, Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce; With Observations On the Manners, Customs, and Government of the Turks and Arabs. Translated from the French* (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1788), Vol. II, 450.

107. For more on Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, refer to Richard Chambers, "The Education of a Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Alim, Ahmed Cevdet Paşa," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 4 (1973): 440–64.

108. Ahmed Cevdet Paşa*, Tarih-i Cevdet* (Istanbul: Matbaa-yi Umeyre, 1853-1883), 12 Vols.

109. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat* (Beirut: Matba'at Jaridat Bayrut, 1890), Vol. 1.

110. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 76–84.

111. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 76.

112. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 76–81.

113. For example, his spelling of Mainz, "*māyāns*," drew from the French 'Mayence' (*Ibid.*, 76).

114. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 81.

115. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 81

116. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 82.

117. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 82.

118. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 82.

119. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 82.

120. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat*, 83.

121. Ahmad Jawdat Pasha, *Tarikh Jawdat* , 84.

122. "Tarikh al-Tiba'a," *Al-Hilal* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Hilal, September 1897–August 1898), Vol. VI, 249–54.

123. For more on Jurji Zaydan, refer to Thomas Philipp, *Gurgi Zaidan: His Life and Thought* (Beirut: in Kommission bei F. Steiner, 1979).

124. "Tarikh al-Tiba'a," title page.

125. "Tarikh al-Tiba'a," 252.

126. "Tarikh al-Tiba'a," 249.

127. "Tarikh al-Tiba'a," 252.

128. "Tarikh al-Tiba'a," 253–54.

129. "Tarikh al-Tiba'a," 254.

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131. Louis Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq," *Al-Mashriq* (Beirut: Matba'a al-Kathulikiyya li-l-Aba' al-Yasu'iyin, year 3, issues 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22; year 4, issues 7, 10, 11, 19; and year 5, issues 2, 9, 18, January 1900–November 1902).

132. Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq," 3:2, 15 January 1900, 78–85; "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Al-Istana," 3:4, 15 February 1900, 174–180; "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Bayrut," 3:11, 1 June 1900, 501–508; and "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Al-Matabi' fi al-Jazira wa-l-'Iraq," 5:18, 15 September 1902, 840–844.

133. "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Matba'atna al-Kathulikiyya," 3:15, 1 August 1900, 706–716; "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Al-Matba'atani al-Suriyya wa-l-'Umumiyya," 3:21, 1 November 1900, 998–1003.

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135. Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq," 78–79.
136. Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq," 79.
137. Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq," 79–85.
138. Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Al-Istana," 174–75.
139. Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Al-Istana," 175.
140. Cheikho, "Tarikh Fann al-Tiba'a fi al-Mashriq: Al-Istana," 177.
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144. Mitchell, "Middle East in the Past," 82, 113.
145. Lewis, *Notes on a Century*, 28.
146. Lewis, *Notes on a Century*, 28.
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