XI. ve XVIII. yüzyıllar
İSLÂM-TÜRK MEDENİYETİ VE AVRUPA
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XI. to XVIII. centuries
ISLAMIC-TURKISH CIVILIZATION AND EUROPE
International Symposium
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XI. ve XVIII. yüzyıllar
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Throughout the course of the last five-and-a-half centuries, scholars have exhibited little restraint in praising the far-reaching consequences of Gutenberg's revolutionary printing press and its movable type. Indeed, Douglas McMurtrie declared, 'Neither political, constitutional, ecclesiastical, and economic events, nor sociological, philosophical, and literary movements can be fully understood without taking into account the influence the printing press has exerted upon them.' Correspondingly, Benedict Anderson has argued that it was printing and the development of print capitalism that eventually undermined the world's great empires and led to the rise of nationalism and the modern nation-state.

Still, the spread of a mass print culture penetrated well beyond the societal fabric of communities and effectively revised personal perceptions of the 'self' by its creation of a 'cult of individualism' that allowed its adherents to seek their entertainment, enlightenment and information in solitude. Thus, the emergence of printing bestowed texts as accessible 'silent instructors' that led readers to privately transcend spatial, temporal and authoritative boundaries. However, all of these 'virtues' are just a few of the reasons why printing was so staunchly resisted for so long in the Ottoman Empire; hence, delaying the introduction of widespread print technology to the Sultanate by almost four hundred years.

Regrettably, Western interpretations of the Ottoman intelligentsia's reservations towards the printing press have historically been unfounded; specifically with regard to the view that Islam is inherently unfit to adopt such a novel technology. Rather, as this paper clarifies, a host of factors mediated this particular Ottoman-European exchange; not the least of which was the ineptitude Continental printers in their attempts to translate, reproduce and publish volumes for audiences in the Porte. Furthermore, this essay contextualizes print technology in relation to the role of the scribal illuminati, an influential caste that cannot be underestimated in matters of textual authority.

'Le vrai mobile des revolutions'

'In truth...all the crafts that have been invented in this world are inferior to the craft of printing. To be sure, the ancients built pyramids, set up monuments, erected statues, fortified strongholds, dug canals and water conduits, and paved military roads;
however, those crafts, compared with the craft of printing, are but one degree above savagery.'

-Faris al-Shidyaq, Lebanese Author and Publisher, 1867.

Throughout the course of the last five-and-a-half centuries, scholars have exhibited little restraint in praising the far-reaching consequences of Gutenberg's revolutionary printing press and its movable type. Indeed, Douglas McMurtrie declared, 'Neither political, constitutional, ecclesiastical, and economic events, nor sociological, philosophical, and literary movements can be fully understood without taking into account the influence the printing press has exerted upon them.' Similarly, Benedict Anderson has argued that it was printing and the development of print capitalism that eventually undermined the world's great empires and led to the rise of nationalism and the modern nation-state. Moreover, the spread of a mass print culture penetrated well beyond the societal fabric of communities and effectively revised personal perceptions of the 'self' by its creation of a 'cult of individualism' that allowed its adherents to seek their entertainment, enlightenment and information in solitude. Thus, the emergence of printing bestowed texts as accessible 'silent instructors' that led readers to privately transcend spatial, temporal and authoritative boundaries. However, all of these 'virtues' are just a few of the reasons why printing was so staunchly resisted for so long in the Ottoman Empire; hence delaying the introduction of widespread print technology to the Sultanate by almost four hundred years.

'Indeed the art of printing belongs to the tricky Franks'

Long before the advent of printing, the Ottoman territories had a rich and vibrant scribal tradition. Although the primacy of oral information exchanges had once been the forte of the religious elite who viewed the spoken word as an uncontaminated

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8 Purportedly, these words were uttered by seventeenth century traveler Evliya Celebi upon visiting a Kurdish prince's library in Bitlis. Kreiser, p. 13.
medium.\textsuperscript{10} they quickly recognized the need to document the vast amounts intellectual activity that their teachings encouraged. Initially, lecture notes recorded on papyrus or parchment were combined into a single volume.\textsuperscript{11} Later, after paper manufacturing spread from Samarkand (751) to such urban centers as Baghdad (793), Cairo and Damascus, bookmaking surpassed its humble beginnings as a cottage industry and gave rise to a new class of professional copyists: the \textit{warraqeen}. In addition to reproducing manuscripts, the \textit{warraqeen} also acted as booksellers, agents and publishers for aspiring authors.\textsuperscript{12} Book production during this era, which lasted into the nineteenth century,\textsuperscript{13} was characterized by its intimate conversational nature ‘because the writer and his audience... [were] physically related by the form of publication as performance.’\textsuperscript{14} Accordingly, authors would proceed to a mosque or respectable bookshop with a selected \textit{warraqeen} to whom they would dictate their latest tomes. Although these sessions were open to the public, the spectators were forbidden from making their own copies during the dictations. Once this process, which could easily consume several months, was completed, the author would review the \textit{warraqeen}’s manuscript for errors. After the necessary corrections were made, this master copy was endorsed and submitted to the public domain as the source from which subsequent copies could be made.\textsuperscript{15}

This pre-industrial publication industry rapidly matured into an establishment that nurtured the growth of institutionalized learning.\textsuperscript{16} Well ahead of their European counterparts,\textsuperscript{17} Muslim bibliophiles patronized this burgeoning enterprise to such an extent that both new tradecrafts and associations soon followed. As books became highly-prized possessions, a host of calligraphers, painters, illuminators, binders,\textsuperscript{18} and ink producers found employment in transforming the written word into a prestigious art form. Correspondingly; mosques, shrines, schools, libraries, and private facilities emerged to house the voluminous collections of manuscripts commissioned by generous benefactors.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{13} See Roper, ‘Faris al-Shidyaq…’, p. 209.
\textsuperscript{14} McLuhan, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{15} See Sardar, ‘Paper, Printing and Compact Disks…’, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{19} See Sardar, ‘Paper, Printing and Compact Disks…’, p. 50.
By the fifteenth century, however, the introduction of the movable type printing press in Europe irreversibly altered textual reproduction across the continent. In fact, Michael Clapham claims that by 1503, "about eight million books had been printed, more perhaps than all the scribes of Europe had produced" in the previous millennia, and this is probably a conservative estimate. Furthermore, Europe witnessed the unprecedented dissemination of books as profiteers of the "Gutenberg era" sought to create a viable market for their products. Within the Ottoman Empire, though, Sultan Bayazit II responded promptly in 1485 to the novel print technology by prohibiting its use in Arabic or Turkish formats. Yet, the Porte's Christian and Jewish subjects were exempt from this restriction and allowed establish their own presses and release works printed in their respective languages. Consequently, Istanbul became one of the most important centers for Jewish publishing, rivaled only by Venice and Amsterdam. As early as 1493, members of the city's Jewish community published the Empire's first printed volumes: a compilation of ecclesiastical standards and practice. Six decades later, another Jewish printing press was founded in Cairo (1557), followed by a Maronite press at St. Anthony's Monastery in Quzhayya, Lebanon (1610) and a Greek printing house in Istanbul (1627). This period also saw the first Arabic book, a Melkite Book of Hours, printed in Fano, Italy (1514) presumably for Syrian Christians. Nevertheless, despite these breakthroughs for local minorities, Ottoman Muslims would have to wait until the nineteenth century before they could enjoy the benefits and conveniences of a print culture.

"There is hardly any other nation that is more reluctant to accept good inventions from the others... [as] they have not yet made up their minds to introduce printing... According to their view, the scriptures, their holy letters, once printed would cease to be scriptures..."
The reasons for this conspicuous absence of printing in the Ottoman territories, aside from its adoption by Christians and Jews, have been a subject of considerable controversy ever since the Gutenberg era. Among the explanations offered by academics and commentators alike is that the authenticity of Islam would be polluted if its scriptural tradition was subjected to the press. According to this argument, technology would violate the sanctity of the verse, particularly a technology invented and manufactured by Christians and imported from the West. Additionally, the maintenance of printing presses has been scrutinized by those attempting to rationalize why the devices were forbidden for usage by Ottoman Muslims. This explanation contends that there were suspicions of ‘hog’s bristles in the brush used for cleaning the [print] block, and that to touch the name of Allah with this brush seemed to... [be] the height of blasphemy.

On the other hand, substantial claims have been made suggesting that the real hindrance to Ottoman Muslim printing were the limitations of early movable type. For example, the first Qur’an printed in Europe by Venetian Alessandro de Paganino (1537) was so full of grammatical errors, colloquial expressions and indistinguishable letters that any Muslim would have doubted the worthiness of such technological endeavors. In another instance, the Medici Press’s Arabic edition of Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine (1593) displayed the type of faults that certainly could have proven fatal. To make matters worse, European Arabic typography typically employed Romanized words, Hebrew characters and other ‘extremely crude and sometimes barely decipherable [scripts].’ In comparison to the efforts of a well-developed scribal intelligentsia, these early attempts by enterprising publishers surely appeared almost obscene.

Nonetheless, the very scholarly class that abhorred the vulgarity of the printed word was also the most threatened by it. On a pragmatic level, thousands of scribes faced losing their primary source of income if their skills were replaced by mechanized production. This scenario is supported by F. L. Marsigli’s observation during his tenure in Istanbul at the end of the seventeenth century. In the Sublime Porte, he declared, 80,000 transcriptionists ‘would all lose their means of living if Christians and Jews

See AbiFares, Arabic Typography, p. 65.
See AbiFares, Arabic Typography, p. 43.
See Mahdi, ‘From the Manuscript Age...’, p. 4.
introduced printing in their hunt for profit.\textsuperscript{42} However, circumstantial data from the period indicates that Marsigli may have exaggerated his claim. Primarily, a decree issued in 1716 by Sultan Ahmed \textsuperscript{III} banning the sale hand-copied texts in Istanbul\textsuperscript{43} due to the "paucity of valuable books" suggests that the vast majority of the city's scribe: were not engaged in producing manuscripts. Therefore, only an insubstantial number of them would have been displaced by an Arabic-type publishing house. Rather, it was members of the powerful ulama who feared being ruined by an innovation that promised to erode their authority and disrupt the status quo.\textsuperscript{45}

In the centuries preceding the arrival print-capitalism, the ulama had cultivated an intellectual climate defined by its exclusiveness. Essentially, learning had become a closed circuit available only to a select few.\textsuperscript{46} By virtue of the scarcity of available manuscripts, the ulama were assured that knowledge would never travel too far beyond their control.\textsuperscript{47} To be certain, though, the ulama carefully regulated the scribal process and effectively monopolized the textual tradition in its entirety.\textsuperscript{48} In defense of their actions, the ulama provided a self-preserving rationale: the information contained inside the manuscripts was too valuable to risk being misinterpreted by laymen. Only the ulama, as acting "iluminati, could reveal the true meanings hidden within the passages.\textsuperscript{49} It must be noted, of course, that the rhetorical style of this period was very instrumental in sustaining the ulama's efforts. Prose was 'replete with...puns...imitations, verbal tricks and chronograms,'\textsuperscript{50} that, in turn encouraged what has been called a magic "garden" mentality, promoting esoterism at the expense of both lucidity and rationality.\textsuperscript{51} Finally, there was the genuine concern among the ulama that the proliferation of texts would allow for "ignoramuses to infiltrate the ranks of qualified intellectuals... [which would] actually diminish the quality of books."\textsuperscript{52} Thus, it is for these reasons that the ulama were so heavily invested in their attempts to curtail the Empire's inauguration into the Gutenberg era. In spite of their influence, however, developments in the eighteenth century would eventually force the ulama to compromise and come to terms with the printed word.\textsuperscript{53}

'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 a desirable activity to pursue... so that on a fortunate

\textsuperscript{42} Kaldy-Nagy, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{43} See Kaldy-Nagy, Beginnings of the Arabic-Letter Printing..., pp. 204-205.
\textsuperscript{44} Kreiser, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{46} See Roper, "Faris al-Shidyaq...', p. 209.
\textsuperscript{48} See Roper, "Faris al-Shidyaq...', p. 209.
\textsuperscript{50} Roper, p. 209.
\textsuperscript{51} Rosenthal, p. 36.
day this Western technique will be unveiled like a bride and will not again be hidden. 54

Beginning in the 1700s, Ottoman technical and fiscal shortcomings, revealed by a number of failures on the battlefield, encouraged the Sultanate to increasingly direct its attentions towards the West. 55 Between 1719 and 1723, Ibrahim Pasa, Grand Vizier for Sultan Ahmed III, sent the Empire’s first envoys to Vienna, Moscow and Paris. 56 Reflecting an official change in perception that was occurring during this period, a transition from imperial self-absorption to an outward-looking court, it is worth noting that the mission to France was not only to seek an alliance but to ‘visit… the works of French civilization generally and report on those which might be applicable.’ 57 Accordingly, when the Sultan’s envoy, Yirmisekiz Celebi Mehmed Efendi, returned from Paris he brought news of architectural innovations, European fashions and tastes, and the marvels of the French publishing houses. Shortly thereafter, Mehmed Efendi and Ibrahim Muteferrika developed an initiative to establish a printing operation in Istanbul that used Arabic type. After petitioning the Grand Vizier, the Sheikh al-Islam and a committee of ulama, Muteferrika’s request was granted in 1726. Yet, Muteferrika’s publication rights were contingent on several factors. 58 First, the press was forbidden from publishing texts or treatises on theological topics; this realm would remain the exclusive purview of the ulama and the calligraphers. 59 Secondly, all texts on secular topics such as science, mathematics and history had to be approved by a four-member supervisory committee. 60

Muteferrika’s press, despite being operated out of his own home, managed to release seventeen books between 1729 and 1742. Although each edition was limited to 500 - 1000 copies, 61 it did expose the Sultanate to the possibilities of large-scale textual production. Also, it introduced a new profession to the Porte: the publisher-author. Not only did Muteferrika print pre-prepared tomes like the 1580 Tarihi-i Hind-i Garbi, an anonymous manuscript on the Americas, 62 he also utilized his position to provide the press with both translated pieces and original works. Primarily an author credited with introducing modern scientific thought to a Turkish audience, 63 at one point even

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57 Berkes, p. 33.
59 See Berkes, The Development of Secularism…, pp. 40-42.
63 See Berkes, The Development of Secularism…, pp. 40-42, 46, 50.
publishing his own discourse on magnetic properties, Ibrahim Muteferrika was not blind to the problems that plagued the Empire. In his *Rational Bases for the Polities of Nations*, presented to Sultan Mahmud I, Muteferrika identified the rise of Western Europe by posing the question, ‘Why do Christian nations, which were so weak in the past compared with Muslim nations, begin to dominate so many lands in modern times and even defeat the once victorious Ottoman armies?’ Continuing, Muteferrika pleaded for Westernizing reforms and urged the Empire to persist in its attempts to expand ideologically where it had failed militarily. Unfortunately for Muteferrika, his appeals fell on deaf ears and upon his death in 1742 the presses were silenced for another four decades.

Without Muteferrika’s tutelage, the press lost its most passionate supporter. While there are few explanations as to why the press disappeared after Muteferrika’s death, though some propose that this was due to his workforce being drafted into the Sultan’s army, it is perhaps more plausible that its absence can be attributed to a reassertion of *ulama* authority. This is the case suggested by British Embassy Secretary James Mario Matra in a letter sent from his post in Istanbul in 1779 to Sir Joseph Banks. Matra wrote that, ‘those who maintained themselves by copying of Books, apprehending with reason that their trade would be totally ruined, were so loud in their clamours as to alarm the Seraglio, and as they were supported by a seditious Corps of Janizarys, the Sultan apprehending what really did after happen, that as he mounted the throne by one insurrection, he might be tumbled by another, gave way to their complaints, and suppressed the Press.’ Before the end of the century, though, the conditions that assisted Muteferrika in convincing authorities of the relevancy of print technology in 1726 reemerged: a series of disastrous military campaigns combined with a formal desire for Western-oriented reforms. Once again, the establishment of a printing press accompanied these changes, but this time there were significant differences. This second press, founded in 1784, was a governmental endeavor intended strictly for the publication of textbooks for the newly opened Military Engineering School. More importantly, however, this government press finally marked the introduction of print technology as a permanent feature in the Ottoman Empire.

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64 See Palmer, *The Decline and Fall...*, p. 36.
65 Berkes, p. 42.
66 See Berkes, *The Development of Secularism...*, p. 44.
70 See Berkes, *The Development of Secularism...*, pp. 24-25, 30, 45, 55, 58-60, 64.
71 See Szyliowicz, ‘Functional Perspectives on Technology...’, p. 252.
Nevertheless, unlike Europe, the Sultanate did not experience a print revolution nor any immediate break with its scribal heritage after institutionalized presses became standard. The most obvious reasons for these variations are the different sociopolitical environments in which the devices functioned. First and foremost, Ottoman printing was not initially a capitalist enterprise. Rather, it existed under the guidance of government censors who were more concerned about perceived improprieties than they were with marketability. Moreover, the press’s utility seems to have been interpreted in a manner that did not immediately distinguish it as an autonomous mode of production. Instead, it acted as an extension of scribal manufacturing. For instance, a number of early printed books retained the same ornamentations that characterized manuscripts: painted or gilded motifs, framed texts, decorative bindings, and personalized title pages. Similarly, the subject matter remained relatively stable in this period since many publishing projects were preoccupied with the reproduction of existing manuscripts. In fact, the Arabic script typography used by printers conformed to the criteria set by calligraphers. Secular, non-literary themes were printed with simple nesih characters, whereas poetry and diwans were issued in the more demanding ta’liq style. For designing this latter typeface, renowned calligraphers were often retained by publishers for their expertise; thus further illustrating that both printers and scribes cooperated to maximize the opportunities that the movable type press offered. However, it is important to remember that at this stage of printing the literati clientele was still a closed community not too different from that of earlier centuries. Therefore, the printing industry in the eighteenth century catered to the same desires and tastes of reading circles as the scribes before them; but this customer base would rapidly expand throughout the 1800s.

‘To know the events of the past serves to keep up the laws and character of the Empire’

As previously noted, the first permanent presses in the Ottoman Empire owed their existence to governmental facilities, and it did not take long for authorities to fully appreciate the potentials of publishing. Consequently, Sultan Mahmud II seized the initiative and released the Empire’s first newspaper, Takvim-i Vekayi (1831), in an attempt to reach out to his subjects and provide a voice for the regime. Likewise,

73 See Kreiser, ‘Causes of the Decrease of Ignorance…’, p. 16.
75 See Kreiser, ‘Causes of the Decrease of Ignorance…’, pp. 14-16.
77 See Kreiser, ‘Causes of the Decrease of Ignorance…’, pp. 15-16.
79 This is the mission statement from the debut issue of the first Ottoman newspaper, Takvim-i Vekayi, 1831. Szylowicz, p. 254.
81 See Berkes, The Development of Secularism…, pp. 197-198.
Muhammad 'Ali's administration financed the aptly titled 'Government Press' that printed the state's official periodical, *al-Waqa'i al-Misriyyah* (1828). Concurrent with these publications, two other factors profoundly shaped the printing industry's direction in the region: secularizing reforms and the leadership's support of popular education. Together, these elements contributed to the gradual emergence of a reading public that was not acquainted with the customs of traditional learning. To meet the growing demands of this new readership, numerous private publishing houses opened in every corner of the Empire, hence ushering in the 'development of print-as-commodity.'

By the mid-nineteenth century, the entire publishing trade in the Ottoman territories had been transformed from lone government-run operations to multiple privately-supported ventures. Many of these presses specialized in the 'translations, adaptations and imitations of western fiction,' while others printed independent newspapers and journals that provided convenient forums for intellectual debates. Among the most enduring contributions of these efforts was the introduction of literary genres complimented by simplified prose. M. M. Badawi explains that, 'Instead of the ideal types provided in traditional mediaeval literature, presented in the most elaborate language... concrete observable reality became the subject-matter of writers, particularly in the newly imported forms of drama and fiction. Increasingly, this commercialization of the print 'media resulted in stylistic changes indicative of a less educated, but functionally literate, consumer base that sought-out texts for entertainment value. As a consequence, 'recreational' novels, serials, short stories, articles, and lucid non-fictional accounts rapidly gained an avid following. At the height of this consumer driven market, even the 'long-despised colloquial' was suggested as a possible literary vehicle amongst both the Empire's Turkish and Arabic subjects. This argument gained such substantial momentum that by 1877 the archaic

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83 See Mahdi, 'From the Manuscript Age...', p. 5.
87 Anderson, p. 41.
89 M. M. Badawi, p. 17.
91 M. M. Badawi, p. 16.
94 See Atiyeh, 'The Book in the Modern Arab World...', p. 239.
95 See Somekh, 'The Neo-Classical Arabic Poets...', p. 43.
98 See Cachia, 'The Prose Stylists...', p. 408.
Ottoman form ceased to be a viable print language and in its place appeared a more accessible Turkish idiom.\textsuperscript{99}

The birth of this publishing industry, however, signaled the demise of Ottoman dynastic influence. Certainly, the European powers would intervene following the First World War and accelerate the process,\textsuperscript{100} but spread of print-capitalism had already diluted the Sultanate’s legitimacy. In the journalistic press, ideas like ‘nation, liberty, [and] natural rights… generated new expectations about the performance of the state, about the role and rights of citizens.’\textsuperscript{101} Along these same lines, the novel also assumed a subversive quality that is perhaps best described as proto-national. Tim Brennan clarifies this similarity in his statement that, ‘It was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the ‘one, yet many’ of national life… Socially, the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media.’\textsuperscript{102} Ultimately, though, print-capitalism’s potency derived from its ability to disrupt the elites’ monopoly on knowledge as literacy ceased to be a form of power held only by a select few.\textsuperscript{103} For the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic Ottoman Empire,\textsuperscript{104} this expansion of printed mediums united vernacular communities in manners previously unknown\textsuperscript{105} and served to further the distance between imperial subjects and their sovereigns.\textsuperscript{106} Significantly, this last point is perhaps the final aspect of printing where European expertise, this time involuntarily, far outpaced the Ottoman experience.

\textbf{References}


\textsuperscript{99} See Szyliowicz, ‘Functional Perspectives on Technology…’, p. 256-257.
\textsuperscript{100} See Palmer, \textit{The Decline and Fall…}, pp. 236-243.
\textsuperscript{101} Szyliowicz, p. 256.
\textsuperscript{102} Selim, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{103} See Anderson, pp. 40, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{105} See Anderson, p. 40.


Kreiser, Klaus, 'Causes of the Decrease of Ignorance? Remarks on the Printing of Books in the Ottoman Empire (cat. 15-34)', in Lehrstuhl für Türkische Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur, Universität Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek Bamberg (eds.), The


