

Three Modes of Reading: Writing and Reading Books in Early Modern Ottoman Society¹

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Dedicated to Klaus Kreiser –

For the pains he took for his humble friend and on the occasion of his retirement

In an autobiographical section of his *Seyahatnâme* [Book of Travels], Evliya Çelebi explained how he joined the entourage of Sultan Murad IV and became the Sultan's companion. The twenty-year-old Evliya attracted the Sultan's attention by reading the Quran (apparently with great skill) in front of a large crowd at Hagia Sophia on Kadir night on 22 Ramadan 1045 (the spring of 1636). He was consequently presented to the Sultan in the privy room. Murad IV demanded that he read something out loud. Evliya replied by asking the Sultan what type of text he would like to hear, as he was capable of holding forth on subjects from seventy-two different branches of science, in Farsi, Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Assyrian, Turkish, and Eastern languages. To demonstrate his erudition, he recited a catalog of poetic forms, including some little known ones.³

1 Originally published as “Üç tarz-ı mütalaa: Yeniçağ Osmanlı Dünyası’nda kitap okumak ve yazmak”, *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 1 (Bahar 2005): 51-76. The first version of this article was presented in June 2001 at the Bamberger Orient-Kolloquium. I am grateful to the Department of Turkology, Bamberg University Oriental Studies Institute, for giving me the opportunity to participate in this colloquium. I would like to express my endless gratitude to my editor, student and friend Bahar Siber, who reviewed my Turkish with great patience and care and also thoroughly critiqued my article, to my friends Olcay Akyıldız (Boğaziçi Ü.), Thomas Berchtold, Sinan “Refik” Çetin, Zeynep Altok (İstanbul Bilgi Ü.), Anna Vlachopoulos (Münih Ludwig Maximilian U.), Oktay Özel (Bilkent Ü.) and Kerem Ünüvar (İletişim Yayınları). Thanks also to my two anonymous reviewers. There may be a number of errors in this article, which is the product of the early stages of a comprehensive study. I hold sole responsibility for these errors.

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3 Translator’s note: As the reply is quite technical in nature, we have provided the reader with a summary instead of a translation of the original text, which is as follows: “Padişahım, yetmiş iki ulumden, Farsi mi ve Arabi mi Rumi mi ve İbrani ve Süyani mi Yunani ve Türki ve Şarki ve varsağı ve kar u nakş ve savt ü zecel ve amel ü zikir ve tasnifat ve kavlı ve hazengir veyahud ebyat-ı eş’ardan bahr-ı tavil ve kasaid ve terci bend ve terkib bend ve mersiye ve ıydiye ve muaşşer ve müsemmen [ve] müsebba ve müseddes ve muhammes ve penc-beyt ve gazeliyat ve kıt’a ve müselles [ve] {dübeyt} ve müfredat ve muanniyat-ı ilahiyatından ne murad-ı şerifiniz olursa beser-çeşm buyrun okıyayım. (Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Muhammed Zilli, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi: Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 304 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu, Dizini*, vol. 1, Orhan Şaik Gökyay, ed.

Despite this somewhat boastful list of his talents, the wit Evliya displayed in the rest of the conversation won him a place as a palace servant. According to his account, the Sultan granted his wish to continue his education under his former professor on condition that the lessons were given at the palace. As a sign of his favor, the Sultan asked his head treasurer to give Evliya a beautiful inkwell set and a few books. Evliya received, in his own words “twenty superb books written for kings” as well as a Quran read by the Sultan himself.⁴

Which books would a young, well-educated, Turkish-speaking Muslim Ottoman such as Evliya need in the seventeenth century? Table 1 provides a list of the thirteen titles he received from the sultan.

TABLE 1

Books presented by Murad IV to Evliya Çelebi, 1636

<i>Name of book as cited by Evliya</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Language</i>
Kâfiye	Probably Jamal ad-Din Abu Amr ibn Hājib (d.1248), <i>al-Kāfiyya fi Nahw</i> (Carl Brockelmann, <i>Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur</i> , 2+3 vols.[Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937-49 – hereafter GAL] 1: 303)	syntax	Arabic
Monlâ Cami	Abd ar-Rahmān-e Jāmī (d.1492), <i>Ravzat al-Akhyār va Tohfāt al-Abrār</i> (TDVIA 4: 470-71) or another work by the same author, e.g. <i>Dīvān</i> or <i>Nafakhat al-Ons</i> (TDVIA 7: 97)	ethics, Sufism, poetry	Farsi
Tefsir-i Kadi	Kāzī Bayzāwī Nāsir ad-Dīn Abū Abdallāh Muhammed bin Umar (d. 1286), <i>Anwār at-Tanzīl wa Asrār at-Tahwīl</i> (GAL S1:738)	commentary	Arabic
Misbah	Alī Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d.1413), <i>al-Misbh</i> (GAL 1: 294-95), commentary of Sirāj ad-Dīn Ya’qūb as-Sakkākī (1160-1229), <i>Miftāh al-‘Ulūm</i> (GAL 1: 294-95)	grammar, syntax, rhetoric	Arabic

Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996, p. 100).

4 Ibid., p. 103.

Dībāce	Possibly Ibn Haldūn’s <i>Muqaddima</i> or Sa’dī’s introduction to his <i>Golestān</i>		
Müslim	Muslim b. al-Haccāc (d. 875), <i>al-Jāmi’ as-Sahīh (as-Sahīh al-Muslim)</i> (TDVIA 7: 124-29)	hadith	Arabic
Buhārī	Abū Abdullāh Muhammad b. İsmā’īl al-Buhārī (d. 870), <i>al-Jāmi’ as-Sahīh</i> (TDVIA 7: 114-23)	hadith	Arabic
Mülteka’l- ebhur	Ibrāhīm b. Muhammad al-Halabī (ca. 1456-1549), <i>Multaqā al-Abhūr</i> (GAL 2: 571)	fiqh	Arabic
Kuduri	Abū al-Hasan Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Qudūrī (972-1036/37), <i>al-Mukhtasar</i> (GAL 1: 174)	fiqh	Arabic
Gülistan	Sa’dī-e Shīrāzī (d.1292) (TDVIA 14: 240-41), <i>Golestān</i>	poetry	Farsi
Bostan	Sa’dī-e Shīrāzī (d.1292) (TDVIA 14: 240-41), <i>Būstān</i> (TDVIA 6: 307-8)	poetry	Farsi
Risāb üs-Sıbyār [?]			
Lugat-ı Ahterî	Muslih üd-Din Mustafa el-Ahterî (d.1560/61), <i>Lughat</i> (TDVIA 2: 84-85)	dictionary	Arabic-Turkish

A quick glance is enough to see that the breadth of cultural reference that so charmed the sultan in Evliya’s response is not reflected in this list, which is composed of standard reference works and schoolbooks often read at madrasahs*. Those in Farsi include the main language-teaching books.⁵ Evliya writes that the head treasurer brought him the books immediately upon the Sultan’s order. Topkapı Palace must have held a stock of several copies of these books for its residents. From this rare glimpse of institutional learning at the palace, we can even venture a guess that the curriculum followed at the palace was not all that different from that followed at a madrasah.

The books cited by Evliya contain no Turkish titles, let alone any books in Greek or Assyrian. The list is, however, a useful source for the average cultural horizons of an educated Ottoman, who might be an Islamic scholar or a palace resident.

⁵ There remains a need for detailed research on the curriculum followed by madrasahs. For now: Mustafa Bilge, *İlk Osmanlı Medreseleri*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, İstanbul, 1984, pp. 40-64; Hüseyin Atay, “Fatih-Süleymaniye Medreseleri Ders Programları ve İcâzet-nâmeler,” *Vakıflar Dergisi* XIII, 1981, pp. 171-235; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilatı*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1984 [1st ed. 1965], pp. 19-32; Cevat İzgi, *Osmanlı Medreselerinde İlim*, vol. 1.; *Riyazi İlimler*, İz Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1997, pp. 67-116; Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *XX. Asra Erişen İstanbul Medreseleri*, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu (AKDİTK) Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 2000, pp. 8-23.

Evliya Çelebi did not stay at the palace for long; he left on his first voyage after less than five years, deciding to adopt the life of a traveler and to write his *Seyahatnâme*. His departure was a step both he and his personal circle took seriously. As his father, Dervish Zillî, bade him farewell, he gave him some money and “twelve superb books.”⁶ Table 2 shows these books.

TABLE 2

Books presented by Dervish Zilli to his son Evliya Çelebi, 1641

<i>Name of book as cited by Evliya</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Language</i>
Kitab-ı Kâfiye	Probably Jamāl ad-Dīn Abū Amr ibn Hājib (d.1248), <i>al-Kāfiyya fī Nahw</i> (GAL 1: 303)	syntax	Arabic
Kitab-i Şafiye	Jamāl ad-Dīn Abū Amr ibn Hājib (d.1248), <i>as-Şāfiyya</i> (GAL 1: 305)	grammar	Arabic
Monlâ Cami	Abd ar-Rahmân-e Jāmī (d.1492), <i>Ravzât al-Akhyar va Tohfât al-Abrâr</i> (TDVIA 4: 470-71) or another work by the same author, e.g. <i>Dîwân</i> or <i>Nafakhat al-Ons</i> (TDVIA 7: 97)	ethics, sufism, poetry	Farsi
Kuduri	Abū ‘I-Hasan Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Qudūrî (972-1036/37), <i>al-Mukhtasar</i> (GAL 1: 174)	fiqh*	Arabic
Mülteka	Ibrâhîm b. Muhammad al-Halabî (ca. 1456-1549), <i>Multaqâ ‘I-Abhūr</i> (GAL 2: 571)	fiqh	Arabic
Kitab-ı Kuhistani	al-Kūhistânî (d. 950/543), <i>Jāmi’ ar-Rumūd</i> (EI 3: 162)	fiqh	Arabic
Hidaye	Burhân ad-Dīn Ali b. Abū Bakr al-Marghīnānî (d.1197), <i>al-Hidāya Sharh Bidāya al-Mubtadî</i> (GAL 1: 376; TDVIA 7: 471-73)	fiqh	Arabic
Genzine-i Raz	Dukagîn-zade Yahya Beğ (d.1582), <i>Genzine-i Raz</i> (TDEA) 8: 542-44)	ethics, poetry	Turkish

A young person who has just started a new stage of his education – even if it is at the palace – is likely to receive reference books and standard school books as a gift: the list of books

⁶ Evliya Çelebi b. Derviş Muhammed Zillî, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi: Topkapı Sarayı Bağdat 304 Yazmasının Transkripsiyonu, Dizini*, vol. 2, Zekeriya Kurşun, Seyit Ali Kahraman, Yücel Dağlı (eds.) Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999, p. 38.

presented by Murad IV to Evliya Çelebi contains no surprises. However, the books Dervish* Zilli gave his son are exactly the same type of books, and some titles even figure on both lists – and none of them are about language-learning. Why did Dervish Zilli not choose to give his son books on geography, popular among the Ottomans, for example Kazvini's *Acaib ül-Mahlûkat* or a work by Abu'l-Fida? Why did he not give his son a single book on Sufi literature to meet a traveler's spiritual needs? Both son and father were Sufi. The list of books suggest not so much someone who is going on a long voyage, but rather a teacher appointed to a provincial madrasah.

I find all this important because it points to a distinctive characteristic of Ottoman culture. To explain what I mean by this, I need to give an overview of early modern Ottoman book culture, which forms the bulk of this article.

Issues of method

Anyone theorizing about Ottoman book culture or more generally about Ottoman knowledge systems must take into account that this was a society which took up movable type only partially, late and hesitantly.

That said, the Ottomans were no stranger to the printing press. The first Ottoman printing press was set up in Istanbul in 1493 by Jews who printed Hebrew texts, and from that time onward hundreds of books were printed (albeit intermittently) by Jewish printing houses in Istanbul and Thessaloniki.⁷ Orthodox Serbs, who printed religious books, established printing houses in the south-eastern European provinces in 1539 and 1544, but these were

⁷ Ittai Joseph Tamari, "Jewish Printing and Publishing Activities in the Ottoman Cities of Constantinople and Saloniki at the Dawn of Early Modern Europe," *The Beginnings of Printing in the Near and Middle East: Jews, Christians and Muslims*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2001, pp. 9- 1 0; *ibid.*, "Zu den hebräisch-schriftlichen Drucken vom 15. bis 19. Jahrhundert", *Sprachen des Nahen Ostens und die Druckrevolution: Eine interkulturelle Begegnung; Katalog und Begleitband zur Ausstellung*, Eva Hanebutt-Benz et al. (ed.), Gutenberg-Museum Mainz, WVA-Verlag Skulima, Mainz, Westhofen, 2002, pp. 33-53, esp. 46-48.

short-lived.⁸ Although Istanbul had its share of Greek and Armenian printing houses, works in these languages were more often than not printed outside the imperial borders⁹ and were then introduced to Ottoman readers via import and trade. Importing books in languages spoken by Muslims was permitted by a famous fatwa promulgated by Murad III.¹⁰ However, a significant number of printed books were imported into Istanbul even before this fatwa. For example, Francesco Berlingheri dedicated Butlamyus' *Geographia* to Mehmed II the Conqueror, Beyazid II and to Prince Cem in exile, respectively.¹¹ In 1560, the printer Marcantonio Giustinian, who held the monopoly of Hebrew printing in Venice at the time, prepared and printed an immense Turkish-annotated world map by an imaginary Tunisian named Haji Ahmed for the Ottoman market.¹² Despite all these contacts with the printing press, even those sectors of Ottoman society most familiar with the technology, such as the Jews of Istanbul or Thessaloniki, found printed text improper.¹³ Despite the efforts of Ibrahim Muteferrika, who printed the first Turkish books within Ottoman borders, and his successors, the situation was to remain unchanged from 1727 until the nineteenth century. The century-long period following Muteferrika's initiative is notable not for the increase in printed works, but for the lack thereof.¹⁴ From the perspective of the Ottoman history of knowledge, it was

8 İbrahim Muteferrika, "Osmanlı Matbaasının Kuruluşu ve Başlangıcı," ("Origo et Principium Typographia Otthomanica"), Nedret Kuran-Burçoglu, Machiel Kiel (eds.), *Muteferrika ve Osmanlı Matbaası*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004, pp. 63-75, here 65-66 (from the introduction).

9 Meliné Pehlivanian, "Mesrops Erben: Die armenischen Buchdrucker der Frühzeit", *Sprachen des Nahen Ostens und die Druckrevolution*, pp. 53-92, esp. 55-80.

10 For the most recent facsimile, see *Yazmadan Basmaya: Muteferrika, Mühendishane, Üsküdar*, Turgut Kut, Fatma Türe (eds.), Yapı Kredi Kültür Merkezi, İstanbul, 1996, p. 16.

11 Jerry Brotton, "Printing the World," *Books and the Sciences in History*, ed. Marina Frasca-Spada, Nick Jardine, Cambridge University Press (CUP), Cambridge, 2000, pp. 35-48, esp. 43-46.

12 Ibid., 35-39, older studies: Victor L. Ménage, "The map of Hajji Ahmed and its Makers," *BSOAS* 20, 2 (1958), 258-314; *Yazmadan Basmaya*, pp. 14-5.

13 The mid-seventeenth century author Peçuyi İbrahim described "the infidel's printing press" as a "strange art": *Ta'rih-i Peçuyi (Tarih-i Peçevi)* (Matbaa-ı Âmire, [İstanbul], 1283); re-edition Fahri Ç. Derin, Vahit Çabuk (publisher), Enderun, İstanbul, 1980, vol. 1, p. 106.

14 For a summary of the research on Muteferrika, see Kemal Beydilli: "Muteferrika ve Osmanlı Matbaası: 18. Yüzyılda İstanbul'da Kitabiyat," *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 128 (2004), pp. 44-52. Beydilli especially writes of Orlin Sabev, *Parvoto osmansko pateşestvie v sveta na peçatiata kniga, 1726-1746* (Avangard Prima, 2004). My complete ignorance of Bulgarian means that I could read only the English summary, some tables and the extensive appendices (esp. İbrahim Muteferrika's estate inventory, transcribed on pp. 340-359).

not the establishment of the Muteferrika printing house that constituted a turning point, but that of its first competitor, because the appearance of rivals may be construed as the societal acceptance of this technology. This was obviously achieved to a certain degree as a result of Henry Cayol's lithography workshop, which later became a printing press,¹⁵ but the concept of competition deserves to be further discussed.

Many analyses of Ottoman print culture in the light of modernist or progressive paradigms describe the slow introduction of the printing press into the Ottoman Empire as a shortcoming.¹⁶ I have explained elsewhere¹⁷ why I find this type of argument, most authoritatively developed by Wahid Gdoura,¹⁸ insufficient, partly inconsistent, and illogical, particularly when applied to bookbinders. In order to understand how Ottoman culture reinvented itself, it is useful to see its disdain for the printing press not as a deficiency, but as a manifestation of a functional cultural approach in which the Ottoman knowledge production and distribution system¹⁹ functioned so well that the Ottomans, Muslim or otherwise, were content with manuscripts and felt no need for printed books.

If this system had failed to fulfill its function (for example, if Evliya Çelebi was dissatisfied with the manuscripts he was given), the Ottomans would doubtless have integrated, adapted and used the printing press according to their own needs, just as they had

15 *Encyclopedia of Islam: Second edition*, (hereafter: *El: sec. ed.*) E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1954-2004 vol. VI, p. 802 (art. "Matbaa", Günay Alpay Kut).

16 The *Encyclopedia of Islam*, for instance, claims that "The reason for the Muslims' aversion for printing doubtless included motives of religious conservatism but also the vested social and economic interests of the professions of calligraphers, book illustrators, binders, etc." *Ibid.*, p. 800. Some Islamic authors claim that enough manuscripts were produced in Ottoman society to obviate the need for printed books and add – with a liberal twist – that there was no demand for them: Hidayet Nuhoglu, "Muteferrika Matbaası ve Bazı Mülâhazalar," *İstanbul Armağanı 4: Lâle Devri*, Mustafa Armağan, ed., İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı, İstanbul, 2000, pp. 211-25, esp. 218-19 (a shorter version of this article can be found in the collected work *Osmanlı*, edited by Yeni Türkiye Yayınevi, vol. 7); Coşkun Yılmaz, "Hezarfen bir Şahsiyet: İbrahim Muteferrika ve Siyaset Felsefesi," *ibid.*, p. 259-333, esp. 283.

17 Unprinted presentation, "Buchdruck und Handschrift im Osmanischen Reich des 18. Jahrhunderts: Ein Vorschlag zu einer Neubewertung," *27. Deutscher Orientalistenlag* (Bonn, 28 Sept - 2 Oct 1998).

18 Wahid Gdoura, *Le début de l'imprimerie arabe à İstanbul et en Syrie: Evolution de l'environnement culturel, 1706-7787*, l'Institut Supérieur de Documentation, Tunisia, 1985, pp. 71-122.

19 The term was inspired by İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin's *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Eğitim ve Bilgi Üretim Sisteminin Oluşumu ve Dönüşümü* (AKDYYK Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1993).

done with firearms. The fact that they chose not to do so demonstrates the strength of their manuscript culture. Or rather, to avoid argument with those who hold that the invention of the printing press was a vital step in the advancement of humanity, it calls for a fine-grained analysis of which aspects of manuscript culture Ottoman intellectuals held on to until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, the historical record is somewhat patchy. With this in mind, I will present my observations on manuscripts and archive materials and a rough map based on secondary literature offering a more detailed description of Ottoman manuscript culture.

My argument is linked to the debate on the relationship between media and culture which has been ongoing since Elisabeth Eisenstein's study²⁰ on the print revolution. This multi-layered and complex discussion is also connected to the work of Jack Goody²¹ on oral and written practices, which has gone beyond interdisciplinary frontiers to be taken up by cultural anthropologists. Other media theorists such as Michael Giesecke²² have developed typologies of oral, scribal, typographical and electronic media cultures. One of the aims of this article is to test the validity of such models and typologies against those from the margins of Europe, or to provide material for such tests. In recent years, Eisenstein and other scholars have been criticized for underestimating continuities between the pre- and post-printing press periods.²³ Ottoman society, which was skeptical about printing technology, is a good example of the dynamics of a lively manuscript culture²⁴.

20 Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, CUP, Cambridge, 1983.

21 Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, CUP, Cambridge, 1983 (re-ed: 1992).

22 *Der Buchdruck in der frühen Neuzeit: Eine historische Fallstudie über die Durchsetzung neuer Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien*, 2. ed., Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1998 (1st ed.: 1991).

23 The aforementioned articles from the first section of *Books and the Sciences in History* are a good example of this.

24 In this article, the concept of "manuscript culture" is the equivalent of Giesecke's *scriptorium*. In a manuscript culture (despite the presence of numerous oral practices), written texts which are copied individually maintain strong authority (or only the texts which have this authority are put into writing) and from this viewpoint, there is a clear opposition between written and oral cultures. On the other hand, the printing press induced a standardization of texts and the multiplication of knowledge (or the traits that electronic or digital culture has started to create, and which are as yet difficult to predict) which do not exist in manuscript culture. Thus,

The following section will touch briefly upon three crucial elements: first, the production of Ottoman manuscripts, then their distribution and storage, and finally, their use. A detailed description of Ottoman culture is beyond the scope of this article, which focuses on Muslim and Turkish society.

The production of Ottoman manuscripts

Book production consists of two phases which are separate in print culture, but are generally carried out by a single individual in manuscript culture: the composition of the text and the production of the finished product. While it is rare for the writer and the printer to be the same person, the author is often the first (and in many cases the only) copyist.

There was therefore little difference between author and copyist in Ottoman culture. Nearly all Ottoman professionals in the business of manuscript production were in guilds: miniaturists, illuminators, bookbinders, booksellers,²⁵ paper producers, paper burnishers, ink makers, inkwell makers, pencil sharpeners,²⁶ and even public scribes writing petitions or letters for law courts and offices.²⁷ Only copyists and calligraphers did not have a guild.²⁸

The system of guilds was in line with Ottoman economic theory, whereby economic activities were geared towards the seamless provision of necessities – a policy now known as provisionism.²⁹ Specialist merchant guilds were solely responsible for the production and sale

manuscript culture is as distinct from oral culture as it is from that of printing. The concept of culture which I use here does not suggest any particular diachronic model, nor does it reject the existence of practices belonging to another culture on a marginal or secondary level (such as the printing press in the Ottoman Empire after 1493).

25 *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. 1, p. 291.

26 Gisela Procházka-Eisl, *Das Sûrnâme-i Hümâyûn: Die Wiener Handschrift in Transkription, mit Kommentar und Indices versehen*, Isis, İstanbul, 1995, pp. 118, 153, 167; Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu (ed.), *Osmanlılarda Narh Müessesesi ve 1640 Tarihli Narh Defteri*, Enderun, İstanbul, 1983, p. 102-9.

27 *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi*, vol. 1, p. 225.

28 From what I gather, there is no conflicting information in secondary literature. However, three Muslim copyists figure in the list of professional groups in a land registry book from Tokat dating from 1455. It does not seem logical that books should be produced in a city with no booksellers or bookbinders. See İhan Şahin, Feridun M. Emecen, "XV. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Tokat Esnafı," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* (Journal of Ottoman Studies) no VII-VIII (1988), pp. 289-308, esp. p. 301.

29 Mehmet Genç, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Devlet ve Ekonomi," *V. Milletlerarası Türkiye Sosyal ve İktisat Tarım Kongresi: Tebliğler; Marmara Üniversitesi, Türkiyat Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, İstanbul 21-25*

of specific goods.³⁰ As a result, the archives are full of complaints, justified or otherwise, about violations against these monopolies.³¹ A monopoly on manuscript production would have meant that no-one could legally copy a text, which would have been impossible to maintain; moreover, such a prohibition would have been impossible in a society where copying the Quran was considered to be a good deed.³²

However, broadly speaking, Ottoman society did not possess specific spaces for manuscript production on the lines of the medieval European scriptoria supplying monasteries and centers of learning. No institution other than the palace is known to have employed a calligrapher or copyist. According to the only source on the subject, a list of palace personnel from the time of Suleiman the Magnificent, no more than four or five calligraphers were ever employed at the palace scriptorium.³³ There is no reason to suppose that the sole duty of the five or six individuals employed by booksellers discussed below was to copy books.³⁴ The admittedly unsystematic impression given by colophons³⁵ at the end of manuscripts, providing information about the writing process, is that most copies were made either for the copyist himself or at his request. Although I have handled many manuscripts written by copyists who described themselves as scholars or dervishes, I have never seen a colophon written by a self-declared bookseller. May there have been a rule against professional copyists signing their work in the colophon and asking for a prayer from the reader? This seems unlikely, since the

Ağustos 1989, AKDTYK Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1990, pp. 13-25, esp. pp.18-21.

30 *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, İstanbul, 1988 (*TDVİA*), vol. 11, pp. 426-30 (art. “esnaf,” Ahmet Kal’a, pp. 423-30); Suraiya Faroqhi, “Ottoman Guilds in the Late Eighteenth Century: The Bursa Case,” *Making a Living in the Ottoman lands, 1480 to 1820*, Isis, İstanbul, 1995, pp. 93-112; Amnon Cohen, *Osmanlı Kudüs’ünde loncalar*, trans. Nurettin Elhüseyni, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001 (*Guilds in Ottoman Jerusalem*, 2000), pp. 170-71.

31 Gedenkschrift for, Eren, İstanbul, 2002, pp. 167-77.

32 For hadith regarding the copying of not only the Quran, but also other useful scientific texts for the benefit of later generations, see *TDVİA TDVİA* vol. 23, pp. 369-71 (art. “istinsah “ Nebi Bozkurt, Nevzat Kaya), esp. p. 370.

33 İsmail Hakkı Uzuncarşılı, “Osmanlı Sarayı’nda Ehl-i Hiref (Sanatkârlar) Defterleri,” *Belgeler*, 11, 15 (1981-86), pp. 23-76, esp. 64, 70-72.

34 The relatively high number of employees is based on the writings of Evliya Çelebi about the situation in İstanbul: *Seyahatnâme*, vol. 1, p. 225.

35 *TDVİA*, vol. 12, pp. 354-56 (art. “ferâğ kaydı,” Orhan Bilgin).

names of artisans who made products such as book bindings or inkwells were so well associated with their products that they were given in Mübahat Kütükoğlu's register of market prices for the year 1640.³⁶

Overall, book production in Ottoman society was a decentralized process that took place in an individual setting. It gave Ottoman copyists considerable margin in using the various options offered by the manuscript production process: they could add marginal notes and edit, annotate, shorten, or extend the text. A significant proportion of Ottoman literature consists of commentaries and translations: anyone who works on Ottoman texts knows that the contributions of the commentator or translator generally outweigh the author's own text. It is therefore difficult to decide whether a text described as a Turkish translation should be considered a translation or a new work in its own right.

At this stage, we must ask what makes an Ottoman book a book. For both manuscripts and printed works, the expectation of those working on Ottoman books seems³⁷ to be that a book is a text with an internal structure and sections. It generally starts with a prayer and a preface that is stylistically independent from the main text. It ends with an epilogue and a colophon containing additional information such as the date, the name of the copyist, and another prayer. It might also include a list of contents or a *takriz* (a text expressing appreciation of the work, somewhat uncommon in the Ottoman context).

Libraries are full of manuscripts with the features of anthologies, collections of excerpts and miscellaneous notes, none of which fulfill these expectations. These *mecmuas*³⁸, which have nothing in common with books other than the fact that they contain text, are treasures of Ottoman intellectual history which are still waiting to be discovered. They reflect

36 Kütükoğlu, *Narh Defteri* [Price Fixing Register], pp. 106-9.

37 My use of the word “seems” here indicates that I am drifting even further away from a solid basis grounded in sources and that I am drawing on knowledge I have gleaned from my daily readings.

38 Editor’s note: Collections of miscellaneous texts by one or several authors compiled for mainly private use: see <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/acdh/tools/mecmua/>.

the taste of the collector who compiled them. Zdenka Veselá has written about one such journal.³⁹ If such a collection really belonged to a single individual, then it can fairly be expected to reflect his personal preferences and problems better than any other text, even if the text in question was merely composed of excerpts.

It is possible that these types of journals were treated with less care than “serious” books and that many may have been lost. They probably played a more important role in Ottoman society than has hitherto been suspected. However, it is not easy to draw a clear line between these types of journals and “serious” books. A typical manuscript held by the Czech National Library in Prague provides a good example. It is an oblong “*inşa*” (prose) journal of the type that a judge or a deputy judge would use. Its 239 folios are full of examples of documents used in sharia courts. Is this a “serious” book and an “original work”? One answer is no, this is not a book. The text does not start off with the name of Allah or a prayer, the author does not introduce himself, and there are no readily identifiable sections. The first set of documents includes the posting of a teacher to a primary school, authorization papers given to women hoping to remarry after being abandoned by their husbands, a text about sheep tax (*adet-i agnam*), two testimonials about witches, an example about a hanged criminal and correspondence about the repair of a church.

However, after the first fifty folios, sections entitled “*bab*” or “*fasıl*”⁴⁰ are placed in some sort of order by subject. The manuscript even has a title. The first line can be read as *haza kitap Sakk-ı Cedid ki zikr olunur* [it is announced that this book is a register of official documents]. The text also has an ending; the man who collected and organized the documents, or who copied them, introduces himself as Soleiman, a deputy judge in Hasköy, near Istanbul.

39 “Das Lesevergnügen eines osmanischen Stadtbewohners,” *Armağan: Festschrift für Andreas Tietze*, Ingeborg Baldauf, Suraiya Faroqhi (ed.), enigma, Prague, 1994, pp. 227-39.

40 Editor’s note: Both terms mean “chapter” or “section”.

This situation invites speculation. The last date in the text is 10 Recep 1171 (20 March 1758). If the *Naip* (deputy judge) Soleiman in the colophon is the same as Soleiman, judge of the city of Laruri, as stated in the property title record⁴¹ dated 1 Safer 1172 (4 October 1758) on the cover page of the manuscript's first folio, then it is highly probable that it is the draft of a collection assembled by a deputy judge to show that he was a serious candidate for the post of judge – and he was probably appointed. But we will never know which of the documents he wrote himself, or whether he was the editor or the author, in accordance with modern definitions. Before the journal was sent to Prague by Oscar Rescher (Osman Reşer), it was taken seriously by at least one reader, who added comments. Its binding is now very fragile, indicating that it was regularly consulted. No *Sakk-i Cedid* in finished form is known.⁴² It is difficult to say if the *Sakk-ı Cedid* in Prague was a “serious” book for an Ottoman living in a manuscript culture. The reader who added comments would probably say it is, while other readers might have differed.

Such journals to illustrate an important point: in manuscript culture, the line between author and translator, copyist and commentator, is just as blurred⁴³ as the line between draft and work, copy and edition. Sometimes there is more than one answer – and sometimes none at all – to the question “whose work is this?”

The distribution and storage of Ottoman manuscripts

Issues of production should focus on authors as much as on manuscripts. However, in terms of distribution and storage – terms that require as much prudence as “production” – there is

41 Národní knihovna České republiky v Praze (NKP) XVIII 061, folio 1 a.

42 Josef Matuz, “Über die Epistolographie und inšā-Literatur der Osmanen,” *XVII. Deutscher Orientalistentag vom 21. bis 27. Juli 1968 in Würzburg: Vorträge*, Wolfgang Voigt (ed.), 2nd section, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1969, pp. 574-94.

43 Here I am trying to understand the intellectual potential of what Eisenstein calls “textual drift” in *Printing Revolution*, pp. 73-88, meaning that no copy of a manuscript is the same. This can be assessed as an imperfection since the text is not constant.

little option other than to focus on the book itself as a concrete object with a purpose. If books have a destiny, then the copies of a text must have a collective biography. What is the biography of an Ottoman manuscript?

Unfortunately, Ottoman historiography is short on research into the history of manuscripts.⁴⁴ What adventures might a manuscript undergo? Books changed hands as gifts, grants, bequests;⁴⁵ they were sold,⁴⁶ exchanged, or borrowed,⁴⁷ and sometimes stolen. Most authors would dedicate a carefully scribed copy of their work to an existing or potential patron, hoping to be rewarded for their work and genius, socially or materially.

Although there was a lively book trade in some cities, in many leading cities it was not organized enough to leave a trace in any sources. Tokat, an important production center and trading city, had no booksellers. There are no signs of a book trade in sixteenth-century Manisa,⁴⁸ Ankara or Konya⁴⁹. Trabzon seems to have had only one bookseller at the end of the sixteenth century.⁵⁰ Jerusalem, with its stream of pilgrims and scholars, had a booksellers' and bookbinders' guild in the latter half of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth.⁵¹ Other

44 Very few manuscript catalogs give this type of information. The country has not developed its own philological tradition, nor has it adopted that of the West, so most studies in the area are incomplete and insufficient. As such, the situation in Turkey is heartbreaking. For a critical overview on the subject, see Hatice Aynur, "Türkiye'de Türkçe Yazma Eserlerin Kataloglanması Üzerine bir Değerlendirme, 1989-2002," *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 26, 1 (2002), pp. 37-52.

45 The religious rules governing bequests led libraries to be broken up. For an example of deliberate measures against this, see Christoph K. Neumann "Arm und Reich in Qaraferye," *Der Islam* 73.2 (1996), pp. 259-312, esp. pp. 294-95.

46 Qurans usually changed hands as gifts. On an eighteenth-century fatwa which aimed to solve the problematic legitimacy of selling Qurans, see Tahsin Özcan, *Fetvalar Işığında Osmanlı Esnafı* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2003), 58. There are conflicting principles regarding this trade. On the one hand, it is not possible to transfer the holy book to someone else (*El: sec. ed.*) vol. VIII, pp. 925a- 934a [art. "ŞalâtSal_t," G. Monnot), esp. p. 927a) and it is therefore difficult to claim that it is acceptable to teach it, recite it or, of course, copy it in exchange for money. On the other hand, there are hadith which accept that the Holy Book, as an object, has a certain value. See *TDVİATDVIA*, vol. 26, pp. 409-12 (art. "Kur'an: X. Kur'an'la İlgili Fıkhî Hükümler," Mehmet Şener), esp. p. 411. Just as it was common practice to recite the Quran in exchange for a salary at Ottoman foundations (waqf), it was also normal for Qurans to be sold.

47 İsmail E. Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri Tarihi: II Il; Kuruluştan Tanzimat'a Kadar Osmanlı Vakıf Kütüphaneleri*: AKDITYK Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, Ankara, 1991, pp. 75-76.

48 Feridun M. Emecen, *XVI. Asırda Manisa Kazâsı*, AKDITYK Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 1989 pp. 76-77.

49 Özer Ergenç, *XVI. Yüzyılda Ankara ve Konya: Osmanlı Klasik Dönemi Kent Tarihçiliğine Katkı*, Ankara Enstitüsü Vakfı, Ankara, 1995, pp. 99, 102.

50 M. Haneli Bostan, *XV-XVI. Asırlarda Trabzon Sancağında Sosyal ve İktisadi Hayat*, AKDITYK Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 2002, p. 419.

51 Cohen, *Osmanlı Kudüs'ünde Loncalar*, pp. 170-71.

than these, only major centers of population had a book trade. Cairo had bookshops in the *Kutubiyya* market near el-Ezher and in Han El Halili han. Evliya mentions twenty bookstalls, but early-nineteenth-century European tourists only record eight or ten.⁵² Cairo-based scholars regularly copied books as a source of additional income.⁵³ There were forty-three Muslim booksellers in Bursa:⁵⁴ Evliya Çelebi writes of sixty shops and 300 employees in Istanbul in the latter half of the sixteenth century:⁵⁵

Even these itinerant booksellers garnish their shops with thousands of types of books, and their booksellers wander the streets with bags full of books, saying “my *Mülteka* and *Dürer-i Gurer*⁵⁶ are good but you must read my *Keşşaf*⁵⁷ and don't forget about *Tarikat-ı Muhammedi* either; it is also a good book”.⁵⁸

There is a discrepancy between Evliya's self-description and the quality of the books presented to him. On one side is a reference to a sophisticated, rich range of knowledge; on the other is a very short list made up of best-selling Arabic reference books. *Mülteka* has already been described. *Dürer* and *Gurer* are two related works by the fifteenth-century scholar Molla Hüsrev on fiqh. *Keşşaf* is a famous twelfth-century commentary on the Quran. *Tarikat-ı Muhammedi* is a study on ethics and Sufism by the leading sixteenth-century Orthodox Sunnite scholar Birgevi Takıyuddin Mehmed,⁵⁹. The itinerant bookstall owner may

52 André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, Institut Français de Damas, Damascus, 1973, vol. 1, p. 343.

53 Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants*, Institut Français de Damas, Damascus, 1974, vol. 2, p. 426.

54 M. Asım Yediyıldız, *Şer'îye Sicillerine Göre XVI. Yüzyıl İkinci Yarısında Bursa Esnaflı ve Ekonomik Hayat*, Arasta, Bursa, 2003, p. 206.

55 Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi, vol. 1, p. 225.

56 *TDVİA*, vol. 10, pp. 27-28 (art. “Dürerü'I-Hükkâm,” Ahmet Akgündüz).

57 İslâm Ansiklopedisi, vol. 13, [Millî] Eğitim [Maarif] Bakanlığı, İstanbul, 1944-88, p. 511 (art. “Zemahşerî”, Nuri Yüce).

58 *Bunlar dahi dükkânların niçe bin kitab-ı güna-gün ile zeyn edüp ayak sahhaflan “Mülteka ve Dürer-i Gurer'im iyidir amma Keşşaf'ımı keşf edüp Tarikat-ı Muhammedi'den ayrılmam eyi kitabdır” diyü torba tobra kitablarla ubur ederler.* Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnâmesi, vol. 1: 291.

59 *TDVİATDVİA*, vol. 6, p. 193 (art. “Birgivi,” Emrullah Yüksel).

have been selling one of the readily available Turkish translations of the Arabic original.⁶⁰ Booksellers were present in larger numbers and in a more organized fashion in cities where there was a greater concentration of ulema, such as in Jerusalem, Bursa and Istanbul. Along with the high number of books on fiqh, this situation indicates that the booksellers were mostly geared toward madrasah students.

Does Evliya's text suggest that smaller bookstall owners sold more popular books, while newer works tended to be sold within the author's own circle? Books on certain Sufi sects would also probably be sold and read only by sect members. Although there are no significant clues pointing at a profound change in Ottoman book production during the early modern age, there is an important development in distribution and storage in the eighteenth century: the spread of libraries.⁶¹ Ottoman *külliyeh** had libraries to serve the madrasahs they housed, though not in separate buildings. Fifteenth-century records prove the existence of humble libraries and collections bequeathed by private individuals to a mosque, madrasah or *zawiya**.⁶² These are generally modest compared to the main collections of *waqfs**. However, in the eighteenth century, library building reached new heights. They were no longer connected to other institutions and were open to all.⁶³ These relatively large libraries were also found in major provincial towns. For example, the Sultana's chamberlain, Yusuf Agha, built a library in the late eighteenth century near a dervish lodge in Konya, next to the Selimiye Mosque.⁶⁴ However there were no such libraries in Aleppo, where the largest madrasah

60 One of these translations would become the first book on Islam to be printed on Ottoman soil. Ali Birinci, "Birgivi Risalesi: ilk Dinî Kitab Niçin ve Nasıl Basıldı?" *Tarih Yolunda: Yakın Mazînin Siyasî ve Fikrî Ahvâli*, Dergâh Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001, pp. 193-96 [first published in 1996 in the journal *Türk Yurdu*].

61 See Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri*; Faruk Bilici, "Les bibliothèques vakıf-s à İstanbul au XVIIe siècle, prémices de grandes bibliothèques publiques," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* (REMMM), no 87-88 (1999), pp. 39-59.

62 Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri*, 15-59; *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, Kültür Bakanlığı, İstanbul, 1993-95 (DBIA), vol. 5, p. 76 (art. "Kütüphaneler, Mimari," Ayşe Yetişkin Kubilay).

63 The first independent library was bequeathed by Köprülü Mehmed Pasha. This may be because the grand vizier died before the complex was finished. Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri*, pp. 61-62.

64 Müjgân Cunbur, "Yusufağa Kütüphanesi ve Kütüphane Vakfiyesi," *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1, 1 (1963), pp. 203-17; *Konya Yusufağa Kütüphanesi: Tarihçe, Teşkilât Ve Kataloğu* (Konya, o.J.).

library had approximately three thousand books, comparable to major private libraries elsewhere.⁶⁵ The situation was similar in Damascus.⁶⁶

An Ottoman book collection described as “large” could contain anything from a few dozen to a few thousand books. The impressive library of Sultan Ahmed III (1703-1730) aimed to provide all the important texts at Topkapı Palace.⁶⁷ The building which he had put up in the third courtyard was the palace's first stand-alone library.⁶⁸ He also forbade the selling of books outside of Istanbul.⁶⁹

As befits a patrimonialist regime, his servants followed their master's precedent. The estate inventories of ambitious eighteenth-century political dignitaries list many high-quality book collections. Ahmed Pasha, a landowner, provincial administrator and tax collector who died in 1769 while governor of Morea, a provincial Ottoman town on the fringes of the Empire, left around five hundred books.⁷⁰

The libraries of high-ranking dignitaries and officials often became foundation libraries. Grand vizier Shehid Ali Pasha bequeathed four libraries, three in Istanbul and one in

65 Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, pp. 236-37.

66 The zawiya and madrasah libraries in Damascus were very rich even during the pre-Ottoman period. See Imad E. Ghanem, *Zur Bibliotheksgeschichte von Damaskus, 549-922/1154 - 1516*, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn, 1969, and Youssef Eche, *Les bibliothèques Arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie et en Égypte au moyen âge*, Institut Français de Damas, Damascus, 1967. Both works emphasize the wealth of pre-Ottoman Arabic culture.

67 To lay claim to some of the books Shehid Ali Pasha bequeathed to his own library, Shaykh al-Islam Ebu Ishak Ismail was asked to issue a fatwa stating that as there was supposedly no precedent for the donation of books of philosophy, astrology, traditional tales, and history, such a donation could not be considered valid. Ahmed Refik [Altınay], who was the first to publish this fatwa in *Âlimler ve Sanatkârlar, 900- 1200*, A. Hilmi (ed.), Kitabhane-i Hilmi, İstanbul, 1924, pp. 330-35, esp.332, saw this as an instance of eighteenth-century conservatism, while Erünsal (*Türk Kütüphaneleri*, pp. 74-76) deftly interpreted it as a fabrication to seize the books for the palace library.

68 For İstanbul Library, see Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri*, pp. 78-80. On the lesson on exegesis given in presence of the Sultan and the ulema* at the library opening, see Mehmed Raşid, *Ta'rih-i Raşid*, Matbaa-ı Amire, [İstanbul], 1282, vol. 5, pp. 176-77.

69 Mehmed Raşid, *Ta'rih-i Raşid*, vol. 4, p. 238.

70 Shortly before his death, Ahmed Pasha married into the influential Hetmanzade family in Morea. It is likely he was planning a permanent role in the political life of Morea. See Christoph K. Neumann, “How Did a Vizier Dress in the Eighteenth Century?”, in *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity*, Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph K. Neumann (eds.), Eren, İstanbul, 2004, pp. 181-217, esp. 185-91. Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archives (hereafter BBA-OA), Revenue Office Head Accountancy Probate Inventories [*Defterdarlık Başmuhasebe Muhallefat Kalemi*] (D.BŞM.MHF) 12675, 2-4.

Anatolia (Navplio), one of which was in Ali Pasha's own home.⁷¹ Paradoxically, bequeathing books to a foundation library often meant that the public was deprived of these books, since such libraries frequently refused to lend them out⁷² though book lending between individuals seems to have been a common practice.⁷³

The relative abundance of books in the eighteenth century also affected ordinary Ottomans. Only one statistical study has been done in this context: Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual studied 450 estate inventories from around the year 1700 in Damascus, a city renowned for its high level of education.⁷⁴ While it was rare for a woman to own books, 18% of men owned at least one book, either the Quran or an excerpt from the holy book, such as *Enam-ı Şerif*. This data is not very different from the situation in Europe, where, of course, people owned the Bible instead of the Quran.⁷⁵ The intellectual atmosphere of Damascus was distinctive, but the situation there at the beginning of the eighteenth century shows that even in a manuscript culture, readership could reach high numbers. Establet and Pascual's data matches the anecdotal material cited above: most books were fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works about fiqh and sufism.⁷⁶

Ottoman readership had two different book cultures: one accessible to a majority of male readers of popular subjects and texts, and another, far less open manuscript culture largely restricted to the author and his immediate circle. There was a degree of overlap

71 Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri*, p. 71.

72 There were some extreme cases: The library of Kahire al-Azhar would allow access only to readers from Damascus. See Erünsal, *Türk Kütüphaneleri*, p. 111.

73 Marcus, *Middle East on the Eve of Modernity*, p. 236 quotes an eighteenth-century Englishman who claims the contrary.

74 Colette Establet, Jean-Paul Pascual, "Les livres des gens à Damas vers 1700," *REMMM*, no 87-88 (1999), pp. 143-69.

75 There were fewer book owners among the Muslims living in Thessaloniki in the nineteenth century. In the estate inventories reviewed by Meropi Anastassiadou, only 6-7% owned at least one book. See "Livres et bibliothèques dans les inventaires après décès de Salonique au XIXe siècle," *REMMM*, no 87-88 (1999), pp. 111-41 and "Des défunts hors du commun: Les possesseurs de livres dans les inventaires après décès musulmans de Salonique," *Turcica*, no 32 (2000), pp. 197-252.

76 In a table provided by Establet and Pascual there are more than forty authors from each century, eleven from the thirteenth and sixteenth, and under twenty-five for the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. There were even fewer texts from earlier centuries. Establet, Pascual, "Les livres des gens," pp. 154-64.

between the two: texts about Sufism, for example, were neither fully accessible nor wholly restricted.

The use of Ottoman manuscripts

Books exist, first and foremost, to be read. They can also be used as reference works not intended to be read from start to finish. They can be seen as objects of material and spiritual prestige which provide pleasure to their owner. They can be memorized, as Ottomans often did, unlike the readers of today.

Lists of books in estate inventories reveal that the most expensive book is almost always a Quran with beautiful calligraphy, even in small collections. A beautiful *mushaf* (a written copy of the Quran) was an object of prestige because it was publicly visible in ritual readings⁷⁷. Paradoxically, such books were likely to be little read by well-educated book owners, who would already know the text by heart.

Other aspects of Ottoman book use are less known. We can only guess that it was a widespread cultural practice to read a relatively limited number of texts out loud repeatedly, allowing the reader to memorize the text, edit it, add comments, and select parts for a private journal. This was a dialectical process involving the text, which etched itself in its owner's mind, and the reader, who intervened in the text.⁷⁸ In Ottoman society, a reader truly knew his book when he could write a critical commentary on it.

77 Some of these now controversial ritual readings continue. For a short discussion on reading the Quran at cemeteries, see Hayreddin Karaman, "Ölüm, Ölü, Defin ve Merasimler," *Cimetières et traditions Funéraires dans le monde islamique*, Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Aksel Tibet (eds.), AKDITYK Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1996, vol. 1, pp. 3-15, esp. 13- 14.

78 As manuscripts are private texts, when the reader brings his perception to a written intervention, which may involve a single vowel or whole sentences, he does not make a special addition to the text; but the text changes, or, the reader changes the text. This leads to a reading-writing practice which in semiotics is known as a "message with an open structure." Umberto Eco, *Semiotik: Entwurfeiner Theorie der Zeichen*, Günter Memmert (trans.), 2nd ed., Wilhelm Fink, Munich, 1991, [*A Theory of Semiotics*, 1976], pp. 197-201. For a critique of writing as a form of reading, see Vilém Flusser, *Die Schrift: Hat Schreiben Zukunft?*, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1992, (2nd ed. 1993), p. 71.

At this point it could be useful to focus on the section of Ottoman texts which is now read the least attentively: the preface. Earlier, I mentioned a preface which is stylistically independent from the main body. The style of prefaces can be described as intricate, poetic, artistic, elaborate, and grandiloquent. If Ottoman authors had anything to say about why they wrote, they usually did so in the preface, in accordance with literary tradition.

As far as I can see,⁷⁹ there are three main motives for writing a text, which can be combined in a number of ways. The first is that the author, editor or translator wants everyone to become familiar with his text. He often does not explain why he finds the text to be of significance. How can a person living in a manuscript culture expect everyone to know a text? This motive gains meaning when seen as focusing on the text, rather than on the interlocutor and reader. The writer reviews an extant text to bring it to a wider audience. Even if not everyone can make use of his text, he has taken a step toward them. Here both the book and the reader benefit, which is why this motive is expressed most often in the preface of translations, rearranged texts and exegeses.

The second motive expounded in prefaces is a request by colleagues and students to authors or translators. Here there is both modesty (“It is not for self-aggrandizement that I write”) and an expression of conciliation toward a relatively well-defined group in which the writer has a certain standing (“I am more knowledgeable than you, but we are colleagues”).

The third motive is a request from author to reader, most frequently for the reader to pray for the author. Requests for favors from a certain individual are also found. The writer may also pray to Allah for mercy and grace: Allah, who is omnipotent, is naturally also a reader of the book.

Three Modes of Reading

⁷⁹ I would like to thank Aslı Niyazioğlu (Oxford) who discussed this matter with me on 29 September 2004.

I believe that in the early modern Ottoman age, the three motives which drove a person to write a book were related to the three approaches linked to texts and the knowledge they contained. However, we must lay aside the private journals discussed above. In the realm of texts, these journals are monads. Although they had the potential to evolve into a work, other possibilities exist. They were as varied as their owners and their circumstances. This is what makes them significant, but they cannot be read unambiguously.

A text containing a request or a wish posits, or even constructs, a binary relationship, the writer supposing that the reader can be his benefactor through material gifts, social favors prayer. A text which is written (or which claims to have been written) at the request of a certain group will circulate within that circle and is unlikely to be read outside it in the normal course of events. Why would a Mevlevi read or make use of a text about the Naqshbandi dhikr?

A translated or re-edited text will claim to be of a quality calling for a wider audience. A text belonging to the first two approaches can also be seen in this way and become more accessible, but such exceptional treatment will more often than not be reserved for “tried and tested” texts. Texts written for the general public are truly appropriated by the public domain, i.e. male Muslims who can read the language in question. Such texts are authoritative and respected and their legitimacy is not easily questioned.

The fact that these three modes can be defined does not always mean that the approach outlined in the preface is valid for the whole book. Many prefaces also contain more than one motive. A book which asks for the reader to pray for the author may also wish to address the greatest audience possible, just as a tombstone which asks for the prayers of passers-by usually faces the street.⁸⁰ These three approaches can help us to understand the early modern

⁸⁰ Nicolas Vatin, “Identités lapidaires: Stèles funéraires et cimetières ottomans,” Fondation Européenne de la Science, Programme “*Individu et Société dans le Monde Musulman Méditerranéen*,” Groupe de travail no 3, document de travail no 7 (Seminar für Sprachen und Kulturen des Vorderen Orients, URA D 1540, Strasbourg,

Ottoman culture of knowledge, because all three are perfectly compatible with the production and distribution of knowledge through manuscripts.

One of the problems inherent in manuscript culture is its weakness in organizing knowledge and standardizing texts. The early establishment of the Quran as a permanently fixed text⁸¹ should be lauded as an extraordinary accomplishment by Muslim communities. However, Ottoman society created the broad repertoire of texts it needed by having each community accept a limited number of texts as mainstream. For the Muslim community, knowing the main texts was not only a prerequisite for membership of the Muslim intellectual elite, but also opened the door to the political elite. This perspective sheds light on Evliya Çelebi's joy upon receiving "twenty superb books written for kings."

The fact that production was decentralized made it even more difficult to standardize texts. It would not have been meaningful or realistic to increase the number of scholars to resolve this problem, and such a strategy was doubtless never entertained. Furthermore, the elite had to be dispersed across the empire to maintain its cultural integrity, which explains why the Arabic language was protected by the Ottoman elite and why Arabic texts were indispensable for religious practices.⁸² It also completes the widespread explanations⁸³ which refer to the conservatism of the intellectual establishment and society as a whole.

Heidelberg [approximately 1998]), p. 7.

81 I am not knowledgeable enough to give an opinion about one of the leading questions of Quranic philology: when the Quran gained its definitive form. The question seems to lose much of its importance in the Ottoman context. If we accept, as religious scholars do, that the text has had its immutable "final shape" since the time of the Prophet Mohammed and that Caliph Osman's efforts to codify and later efforts to standardize it served only to protect the original text [*TDVİATDVİA*, vol. 26, pp. 384-86 [art. "Kur'an: II. Tarih," Abdülhamit Birişik], esp. 385], or if we consider (as most philologists of the Orientalist school do) that these efforts were more or less concluded only in the tenth century (*El: sec. ed.*, vol. V, pp. 404b-409b [art. "Kur'an: History of the Kur'an after 632," AT. Welch]), then from the Ottoman historical perspective this would mean that a fixed Quranic text had existed for centuries and that the matter had never been open to discussion.

82 Suraiya Faroqhi, *Kultur und Alltag im Osmanischen Reich: Vom Mittelalter bis zum Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, CH. Beck, Munich, 1995, pp. 37-38.

83 Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300- 1600*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, New York, 1973 (re-edition. 1994), p. 173.

It remains open to discussion whether the internal dynamics of Ottoman manuscript culture, the creation of public libraries and the increasing numbers of dignitaries who collected books led to the expansion of an intellectual elite. Again, the extent to which state dignitaries and provincial administrators, bureaucrats and landed proprietors belonged to this intellectual elite, and upon what categories of knowledge their status was based, remains to be studied. We do not know whether standard texts, for the most part translated and annotated long before, played an important role in these processes or not.

Texts which had no validity or authority within the Muslim community circulated in smaller and well-defined groups. These books, which reached only a limited number of people, had no obligation to strive for the perfection expected of mainstream texts: they did not have to conform to the Sunnite faith, nor be of immaculate style. It could even be argued that these books, accessible only to the initiated, were protected from external influences.

Rhoads Murphey has pointed out⁸⁴ how these multifaceted texts, which were more private and whose language and content were often more non-elitist, can be read as the expression of individuals belonging to a certain profession and geography rather than an abstract and collective general mentality.⁸⁵ The crucial point here is that since these types of texts mostly circulate in certain groups, the individual cannot express himself to a general public. The media used by the Ottoman individual forced him to refer to his own milieu.

84 Rhoads Murphey, "Forms of Differentiation and Expression of Individuality in Ottoman Society," *Turcica*, no 34 (2002), pp. 135-70.

85 It is certainly not Johann Gottfried Herder's fault that his anthology of folk songs was re-published posthumously by his friend Johann von Müller as *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (The Voices of People in Folk Songs): however, von Müller exhibited a very good understanding and reflection of Herder's mentality. This mentality, which attributed popular literature not to concrete persons or communities but to abstract nations, was shared by Köprülü Mehmed Fuad, who in 1919 wrote: "in Turkish literature of Islamic times, the period most deserving of study to understand the national spirit and taste is that of the great mystics, who appealed to a mass audience through the use of popular language and meter and whose work has survived over centuries" (*Türk Edebiyatında ilk Mutasavvıflar*, 5th ed., Orhan F. Köprülü (ed.) [Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Ankara, 1984], p. 1). Herder and Köprülü's concepts of "folk" were very different from one another. Still, both are examples of this kind of understanding of folk culture sacrificing textual context for the political vision of those collecting them.

When conflict arose around certain types of knowledge, it involved books which sought to break out of the circle to become an authoritative, mainstream text.⁸⁶ Evliya Çelebi recorded a highly symbolic legend that eloquently explains the struggle of having a work accepted as mainstream and the results of intellectual conflict in his description of the Gülşenî convent in Edirne.⁸⁷ The main protagonist is İbrahim Gülşenî, who was a spiritual guide based mainly in Cairo.⁸⁸

Evliya refers to a certain *Risale-i Sinaniye*: following Suleiman the Magnificent's accession, Ebu's-Suud Efendi unjustly accused İbrahim Gülşulsheni of being a Shi'ite and a heretic. The Sultan sent a member of his personal guard (*haseki*) to Cairo ordering him to bring the sheikh to his divan, but the sheikh, anticipating the summons, came to meet him in Alexandria. As the group sailed toward Istanbul,

a copy of the Masnavî floated towards them on the water, like a boat with its pages opened like sails. İbrahim Gülşenî took the book out of the water and showed it to the guard. The guard saw that the book was not harmed by a drop of

86 Seen from this perspective, printing was not off to an auspicious start when the first printed books were not in fields of knowledge fundamental to the Ottomans but rather in branches such as history, geography and technics. It was a less problematic choice to try out this new media in marginal fields (which would be noticed by a smaller number of people), because they would not overturn the established hierarchy of books and knowledge pertaining to highly regarded fields. In Latin Europe, the opposite took place, resulting in the printing revolution: from the very start, the presses printed crucial texts, which would deeply affect a high number of readers. For this it is important to note that, while Gutenberg's first printed book was the Bible, in the Ottoman case not only the Quran, but also all books on fiqh, Quran commentary, hadith and kalam were excluded from the permission given to İbrahim Müteferrika, in order to "let them induce the desire to pursue the quest [i.e. by copying them] for redemption for all Muslims until the end of time." For the text of this quote see Ahmed III's edict in Adil Şen, *İbrahim Müteferrika ve Usûlü'l-Hikem fi Nizami'l-Ümem*, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, Ankara, 1995, pp. 57-59, esp. 58. For the fatwa issued by Şeyh ül-İslam Yenişehirli Abdullah which the based of the Sultan's order, see Şen, *İbrahim Müteferrika*, p. 56. The fatwa can also be found in the collection of Yenişehirli Abdullah's fatwas, *Behcet ül-Fetava*. See Mehmed Recai (ed.), *Dar üt-Tibaat ıl-Amire*, [Kostantiniye], 1266, p. 552. While Yenişehirli Abdullah usually indicates authorities as source of his opinions (*nukul*), he does not do so in the case of this fatwa. For a list of Turkish books printed in İstanbul after 1729, see *Yazmadan Basmaya: Müteferrika, Mühendishane, Üsküdar*, Turgut Kut and Fatma Türe (eds.), Yapı Kredi Kültür Merkezi, İstanbul, 1996, and in reply to this, see Kemal Beydilli, *Mühendishâne ve Üsküdar Matbaalarında Basılan Kitapların Listesi ve bir Katalog*, Eren, İstanbul, 1997.

87 Evliya Çelebi *Seyahatnamesi*, vol. 3, pp. 253-54. For a different version of the same anecdote, see *Muhyî-i Gülşenî, Menâkib-i İbrâhîm-i Gülşenî*, Tahsin Yazıcı (ed.) [together with Şemleli-zâde Ahmed Efendi, Şive-i Tarikat-i Gülşeniye], Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1982, pp. 398-400.

88 *TDVİATDVIA*, vol. 21, pp. 301-4 (art. "İbrâhîm Gülşenî," Nihat Azamat).

water. Overcome with awe, he asked “My master, what is this?” İbrahim Gülşenî answered, “My Agha, your agha Sultan Süleyman, at Ebu's-Suud's behest, made a point that Persian books should not be read and has burned hundreds of thousands of volumes by Mevlana along with thousands of other Persian books. When they called one of our friends, tied up just as I am, into the presence of Sultan Süleyman, he took this holy Mesnevi from his chest and said ‘İbrahim, I entrust you with this book. Return it to me again in Sultan Süleyman’s presence,’ then he threw it into the sea, and as you have seen yourself, it has come to me. Testify accordingly!”

İbrahim Gülşenî arrives in Istanbul three days later and is brought before the Sultan. He hands the book to the sheikh of the Kasımpaşa convent, Abdi Dede, who is also present. The Sultan, asking the *haseki* about the incident, closes the investigation despite Ebu's-Suud Efendi's objections. Later, after the dervishes substantiated their spiritual powers in the course of long debates with ulema, Suleiman supported the construction of their convent in Edirne.

The legend cannot possibly be true, as Ebu's-Suud Efendi became *şeyh ül-islâm* only a decade after İbrahim Gülşenî's death.⁸⁹ However, it sheds light on several issues: the reputation of Jalal ad-Din Rumi's *Masnavi* is not decided by direct reference to its contents. Its rank becomes evident after the group which claims it includes elite scholars. İbrahim Gülşeni, who refers to the Sultan as “your agha,” later accepts the patronage of Soleiman Han to construct his zawiya.⁹⁰ The processes of having *Mesnevi* accepted as an authoritative text and being integrated into the Ottoman establishment are shown to be parallel.

89 For the historical context see Nathalie Clayer, *Mystiques, état et société: Les Halvetis dans l'aire balkanique de la fin du XVe siècle à nos jours*, J. Brill, Leiden v.s. 1994, pp. 79-80. See also *TDVİA*, vol. 14, pp. 256-59 (art. “Gülşeniyye,” Mustafa Kara), esp. p. 258.

90 On the Gülşeniye tekkes in Edirne, see Klaus Kreiser, *Edirne im 17. Jahrhundert nach Evliya Çelebi: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der osmanischen Stadt*, Klaus-Schwarz-Vlg., Freiburg i. Br., 1975, pp. 115-21.

Open questions for open texts

I have not written directly about books, knowledge or people in this article. My aim has been to write about the relationship between the three, and the most important aspect of that relationship is reading.

The Ottomans interpreted reading as bringing the reader together with a manuscript. This was inevitably a close and intimate relationship which impact both reader and reading material: the book had comments written in its margins, and the reader came away with knowledge committed to memory. If we describe reading as a relationship between a book and its reader, the healthy continuation of such a relationship depends on the harmony between the two parties. This article suggests that the relationship is built on the value and status given to the text. Reading could take place in three ways: the reader could be faced with a text the author dedicated to him, or the reader could be a member of a group in which the text circulated, or the reader could read a mainstream book. However, it was not solely up to the author to determine how his text would be read; a constantly negotiated societal consensus also affected the status of books.

No one knew who would read these books, or how they would be read. Readers could always intervene in them. Books became open texts, signifying more than their content. Rumi's *Mevlana* was read in one way when in the hands of a mevlevi dervish as his sect's main reference book, and in another way when it was a forbidden text, and a third way when read by an educated Muslim Ottoman as one of the basic texts of Ottoman culture.

Nevertheless, a number of questions remain open. Why did Dervish Ziilli give mainstream books to Evliya Çelebi? What was it about manuscript culture that satisfied the Ottomans to such a degree that they preferred to do without the printing press and the media

revolution which was its potential result? Did individual Ottomans prefer mainstream texts, or those specific to the circles to which he felt he belonged? Which type of knowledge gained value when shared, and which type when hidden?

Asking such questions demonstrates that the relationship which I have been trying to study here is just as much a part of intellectual history and the history of knowledge as of social history. I suppose I should present an apology for having gone beyond my limits – because just as most Ottoman social historians have been happy enough to ignore literary texts, Ottoman literary researchers have, for their part, kept their distance from the social sciences.

Translated by Başak Balkan