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“Blessings of the Printed Work”: Islamic Scholars (*ulemâ*) and the Mütferrika Press in Early 18th-Century Istanbul

1 Introduction: The Tulip Age

The first Arabic-type printing press for Turkish, opened by Ibrahim Mütferrika in Istanbul, was a product of the so-called Tulip Age (*Lale Devri*), which spanned from 1718 to 1730. It was a relatively quiet period for the Ottoman Empire, having secured peace with its European rivals at Passarowitz.¹ The only major military campaigns occurring in this period were in Western Persia, as the Porte sought easy gains from the crumbling Safavid state. Under the reign of Sultan Ahmet III (ruled 1703–1730), his grand vizier and son-in-law (*Damat*) Nevşehirli Ibrahim Pasha, and the progressive grand mufti Yenşehirli Abdullah Efendi, this stability provided a suitable environment for the flourishing of arts and culture. The lavish celebrations hosted at the sultan’s newly-built Saadabad palace complex in Kağıthane, or “the Sweet Waters of Europe”, were sung in the poems of Nedim and depicted in Levnî Abdülcélil Çelebi’s miniatures. Topping them all was, of course, the Tulip-mania, which engulfed many levels of Ottoman society. Later analysts have also identified this era with a predisposition to the reception of Western cultural and technological influences, a primary example being Ibrahim Mütferrika’s printing press.²

However, this period of relative stability came to an abrupt and, for many, dramatic end in the fall of 1730. Conservatives criticized the extravagant lifestyle of the sultan, grand vizier and other high-ranking officials; the new taxes introduced by Ibrahim Pasha to support the ever-increasing expenditure of the State weighed heavily on the population; finally, the announcement of yet another eastern campaign in Persia filled the cup of social unrest.

1 C. Ingrao, N. Samardžić, J. Pešalj (eds.), *The Peace of Passarowitz, 1718*, West Lafayette, 2011.

2 The modern concept of the Tulip Age can be traced back to Ahmet Refik Altınay’s early 20th-century works. For a historiographical overview and criticism, see C. Erimtan, *Ottomans Looking West? The Origins of the Tulip Age and its Development in Modern Turkey*, London/New York, 2008.

This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 883219-AdG-2019 – Project TYPARABIC).

In late September 1730, disgruntled soldiers and commoners alike took to the streets of Istanbul, under the leadership of one Patrona Halil. In just a few days, they imposed their own administration, paralleling that of the state, and obtained the execution of the grand vizier, the dismissal of the grand mufti and, finally, the destitution of Sultan Ahmet III. The Saadabad palace complex was ransacked, as were the mansions of the nouveaux riches, and many fell victim to the rebels.³ However, when other social and cultural constructs of the Tulip Age came crashing down along with their supporters, the Istanbul printing press and its manager survived. In a previous paper, published in the first volume of collected works of the TYPARABIC project, I argued that the preventive measures taken by Ibrahim Müteferrika to secure his enterprise from potential religious opposition guaranteed the survival of the printing press even after Patrona Halil's rebellion. Many of the leading Islamic scholars (*ulemâ*) of the Tulip Age who had endorsed the printing press also occupied high-ranking posts in the judicial apparatus of the empire after the upheaval of 1730.⁴

In this essay, I continue my analysis of the sixteen *ulemâ* and their approvals written for the Müteferrika press. The prosopographic research will disclose the roles played by these scholars both before and after Patrona Halil's rebellion, while the textual analysis of their endorsements will reveal their arguments in favor of printing. Although these texts mostly contain generic appraisals, some briefly touch upon one or several benefits of the printing press. The most important feature of the endorsements was the identity of their authors, some of the most reputable religious scholars of their time.

2 The Ottoman *Ulemâ*

Ibrahim Müteferrika aptly laid out the benefits and utility of the printing press in a treatise titled *Vesîletü't-tibâa* (*The Means of Printing*), which he published in the preface of his first printed volume, Vankulu's dictionary, in early 1729.⁵ It was cus-

3 Abdi Efendi, 1730 *Patrona İhtilâli Hakkında Bir Eser: Abdi Tarihi*, ed. F. R. Unat, Ankara, 1943; M. Aktepe, *Patrona İsiyanı (1730)*, Istanbul, 1958; R. W. Olson, "The Esnaf and the Patrona Halil Rebellion of 1730: A Realignment in Ottoman Politics?", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 17, 1974, 3, p. 329–344; C. Finkel, *Osman's Dream. The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1923*, New York, 2005, p. 353–357.

4 R. Dîpratu, "Ottoman Endorsements of Printing in 18th-Century Istanbul", in R. Dîpratu, S. Noble (eds.), *Arabic-Type Books Printed in Wallachia, Istanbul, and Beyond. First Volume of Collected Works of the TYPARABIC Project*, Berlin/Boston, 2024, p. 49–68.

5 *Tercümetü's-Şîhâh-ı Cevherî [Lugat-ı Vankulu]*, Istanbul, 1141 [1729].

tomary for aspiring authors to seek some established scholars’ recommendations, to promote their work. Much like today, when the appraisals of reputable writers or influential journals recommend a book and its author on the front or back cover, Ottoman authors would request endorsements (Tk. *takriz*, pl. *takariz*) from senior figures, to be included in the preface of their work. Mütfefferika requested for his treatise on the utility of printing sixteen *takariz* from the leading Islamic scholars of the day. They were written in Arabic, not Ottoman-Turkish, as was the usual norm, and they were printed in the preface to Vankulu’s dictionary under the title *al-Taqārīḍ ilâ al-risâla al-musammât bi-wasîlat al-ṭibâ’a* (*Endorsements for the Treatise Called ‘The Means of Printing’*).⁶

The *ulemâ* represented the collective body of scholars who interpreted and executed the provisions of Islamic law, or *sharia*, in the Ottoman Empire. Much like the *cursus honorum* of Ancient Rome, in which aspiring politicians steadily rose through the military and administrative offices of the Republic, hoping that one day they would reach the highest position of consul,⁷ early modern Ottoman *ulemâ* also had to engage in a sequential order of offices to advance in the scholarly, religious and judicial hierarchy of the Empire. Once he graduated from an Islamic college (*medrese*), a young scholar could become a professor himself (*müderres*). According to his abilities, he would be appointed to a lower or higher-ranking *medrese*, from which he could then be nominated a *kadı*, or judge, in a smaller or larger town or city. The most capable ones were appointed *kadıs* in one of the eight utterly important cities of the empire: Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Bursa, and Edirne; the highest office was, of course, that of Istanbul, judge of the Empire’s capital. These high-ranking *kadıs* were known as *mollas*. Above these municipal positions, there were the two offices of *kazaskers* (military judges): the *kazasker* of Anatolia, i. e., the military judge of the Empire’s Asian provinces, and the *kazasker* of Rumelia, the military judge of the European provinces. From this latter post, the now venerable scholar could finally hope to be appointed to the Ottoman Empire’s highest religious and judicial office, that of the *şeyhülislâm*, or grand mufti.⁸

⁶ I thank Charbel Nassif for his support in deciphering the following Arabic passages. Any mistakes that remain are my own.

⁷ H. Beck, *Karriere und Hierarchie. Die römische Aristokratie und die Anfänge des cursus honorum in der mittleren Republik*, Berlin, 2005.

⁸ İ.H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmîye Teşkilâtı*, Ankara, 2022 (1st ed., 1965); H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300–1600*, transl. N. Itzkowitz and C. Imber, London, 1973, p. 168–172; M. C. Zilfi, “The Ottoman *ulema*”, in S. Faroqhi (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey. Volume 3: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603–1839*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 212–221; A. Z. Furat, “XVIII. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Eğitiminde Dönüşüm: Islah mı? Yenilenme mi?”, in A. H. Furat, N. K. Yorulmaz,

We can trace this early-modern Ottoman-Islamic *cursus honorum* in the careers of Müteferrika's endorsers. Take, for example, Mirzazâde Şeyh Mehmet Efendi, mentioned in his endorsement as a former military judge of Rumelia (*sadr-ı Rum sâbik*). After being *müderriş* at the prestigious *medrese* of the Şehzâde mosque complex, he was appointed *kadı* of Istanbul in 1702, of Mecca in 1707, and once more of Istanbul in 1710. In 1713, he became *kazasker* of Anatolia, and from 1717 to 1719 he held his first office of *Rumeli kazaskeri*, the second being from 1720 to 1722. After being unemployed for eight years, he was appointed *şeyhülislâm* during the first days of Patrona Halil's rebellion, replacing Yenîşehirli Abdullah Efendi. After approving of the rebels' actions at first, he was decisive in their liquidation two months later, in November 1730. He retired in early 1731 and held no other public office until he died in 1735.⁹

3 Appraisals of the Printing Press

Mirzazâde Şeyh Mehmet Efendi's *takriz* on Müteferrika's treaty does not go into any details about the benefits or utility of printing. It falls into what I describe as general praise, meaning that the author states, in elegant language, that Müteferrika has created a wonderful art which has many benefits, but without actually naming these benefits or detailing what the utility of printing is. To give another example of generic praise, Topkapılı Sâlih Efendi, in his capacity as a former military judge of Anatolia (*sadr-ı Anadolu sâbik*),¹⁰ wrote that "This tract (*majalla*) is about the cleverness of printing (*ḥadhāqat al-ṭabʿ*) and strangeness of the art (*gharābat al-ṣanʿa*)". The strange or weird nature of printing is mentioned in many of the texts, as it was also one of the descriptions that Müteferrika used for his newly introduced technology.¹¹

An obligatory element of all sixteen *takariz* is the praise addressed to Sultan Ahmet III, applauded for the introduction of printing during his reign. As Zülâli

O. S. Arı, *Sahn-ı Semân'dan Dârülfünûn'a Osmanlı'da İlim ve Fikir Dünyası (Âlimler, Müesseseler ve Fikrî Eserler) – XVIII. Yüzyıl*, vol. 1, Istanbul, 2018, p. 247–253.

9 A. Altunsu, *Osmanlı Şeyhülislâmları*, Ankara, 1972, p. 119; M. Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, vol. 3, ed. by N. Akbayar, S. A. Kahraman, Istanbul, 1996, p. 1021–1022; M. İpşirli, "Mirzazâde Şeyh Mehmed Efendi", in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 30, Ankara, 2020, p. 170–171.

10 Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, vol. 5, p. 1464.

11 Dîpratu, "Ottoman Endorsements", p. 56. For a longer discussion of the Ottoman perception of printing as a "strange art", see O. Sabev, *Waiting for Müteferrika: Glimpses of Ottoman Print Culture*, Boston, 2018, p. 2–13.

Hasan Efendi, a former judge of Yenişehir, Bursa, and Mecca, and *kadı* of Istanbul at the time,¹² wrote:

فهذه مجلة جليلة جديدة ظهر في زمن سلطاننا الاعظم والخابان المعظم مولى ملوك العرب والعجم خادم الحرمين الشريفين
السلطان بن السلطان السلطان الغازى احمد خان خلد الله خلافته وابد سلطنته

This is an important new tract that became visible during the time of our Great Sultan and Exalted Khan, Lord of the Kings of the Arabs and Persians, Servant of the Two Noble Sanctuaries, Sultan son of Sultans, the Sultan Ghazi Ahmet Han, may God make his caliphate perpetual and his sultanate eternal.

Other texts, such as that of Mirzazâde Sâlim Mehmet Emin Efendi, a former judge of Istanbul, further mentioned Ahmet III as “God’s Shadow on Earth, Sultan of the Two Lands and Two Seas” (*zill Allâh fî al-‘âlam sultân al-barrayn wa-l-baḥrayn*). Put together, these attributes reflect the official titles that Ottoman sultans had carried since Mehmet II’s conquest of Constantinople (hence, master of the “Two Lands” – Asia and Europe –, and the “Two Seas” – the Black Sea and the White, i.e., Mediterranean, Sea) and, especially, Selim I’s conquests of the “lands of the Persians and the Arabs” and “the two holy sanctuaries” of Mecca and Medina (hence, their servant or custodian, and God’s earthly shadow).¹³

In contrast, only a couple of texts give credit to the grand vizier. After blessing the sultan for having introduced the printing press during his reign, the same Mirzazâde Sâlim Efendi wished that God grant success to “his most honorable son-in-law and his greatest minister in organizing the affairs of his kingdom” (*ṣih-ru-hu al-afkham wa-wazîri-hu al-a‘zam fî tanzîm umûr mulki-hi*). Reflecting Ibrahim Pasha’s more official title, Vardârî Mehmet Efendi, to whom we will turn later, wrote that besides the sultan, the printing enterprise was possible “with the endeavor of his grand vizier, most illustrious deputy, most distinguished minister (*bi-himmat wazîri-hi al-a‘zam wa-wakîli-hi al-afkham wa-dustûri-hi al-akram*).” However, his name is never mentioned, even though Nevşehirli İbrahim Pasha was directly involved in the printing enterprise.¹⁴

12 In 1730, after being unjustly removed from this position, Zülâlî Hasan would side with the rebels and use his authority to depose sultan Ahmet III. In return, Patrona Halil secured his appointment as *kazasker* of Anatolia upon the succession of Mahmut I. See Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, vol. 2, p. 627; Aktepe, *Patrona İsiyanı*, p. 126–129, 153–158.

13 Erdem Çıpa, *The Making of Selim. Succession, Legitimacy, and Memory in the Early Modern Ottoman World*, Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2017, p. 102, 237–238, 241–242.

14 Besides the political and financial support, Ibrahim Pasha also provided Mütferrika with books, such as Judasz Tadeusz Krusiński’s account of the Afghan conquest of Persia, which the printer himself translated from Latin into Ottoman-Turkish and published in 1729.

Apart from generic praises such as these, which occupy most of the texts, some *takariz* describe how or why printing is beneficial. An argument found in two endorsements is that printing allows books to be easily copied, without the toil of manual labor.

Damatzâde Ebülhayr Ahmet Efendi, a former military judge of Rumelia and future grand mufti between 1732 and 1733, wrote that: “Its benefits are great because it is a means of multiplying books (*wasīla ilā takthīr al-kutub*) without resorting to the trouble and costs of writing (*mashaqqat al-kitāb wa kulfat al-kitāba*)”. Feyzullah b. Yahyâ Efendi, who was the military judge of Rumelia in 1730, when the rebellion began, and was therefore exiled by the rebels to the island of Lesbos,¹⁵ similarly argued that printing circumvented the “hardships of writing (*mashāqq al-kitāba*)”. Another scholar tried to briefly describe the technology behind the printing press. Biraderzâde Mustafa Efendi, a great-grandson of the famous mufti and chronicler Hoca Sadettin Efendi,¹⁶ had been a *kadı* in Cairo, Mecca, and Istanbul, and was the military judge of Anatolia in 1728¹⁷ when he wrote that Müteferrika’s “arts and wonders (*al-ṣanā’i’ wa-l-badā’i’*) were created by the method of knitting into a mold (*al-uslūb al-mashbūk fī qālab*)”. The printing matrix, a crucial element of the printing equipment, must have amazed the scholar so much that he inserted this reference in his brief endorsement.

Religious validation was necessary if the novel technology of the printing press was to be accepted by Ottoman society. This type of validation was, after all, the primary role of the *takariz* requested by Müteferrika. Besides the practical benefits of the printing press, in an effort to further convince readers that this was a commendable activity, the *ulemâ* authors of these texts presented the new technology as being universally accepted by scholars. For instance, the aforementioned Damatzâde Ebülhayr Ahmet Efendi wrote that “this thing is a marvel (*‘ujāb*), a

15 Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, vol. 2, p. 530; Aktepe, *Patrona İsiyanı*, p. 164.

16 Hoca Sadettin Efendi was grand mufti for only a year and a half (April 1598 – October 1599), but he nevertheless founded a dynasty of high-ranking *ulemâs*, with his sons and grandsons occupying the position of *şeyhülislâm* for many years during the 17th century. Sadettin Efendi’s famous historical work *Tâcü’t-tevârih* (“The Crown of Histories”) was partially translated into Latin and printed in 1591, in Frankfurt, as part of Johannes Leunclavius’s *Historiae Musulmanae Turcorum*. By the middle of the next century, it was also translated into Italian by the Ragusan dragoman Vincenzo Bratutti and printed in two volumes as *Chronica dell’origine e progressi della casa Ottomana*, followed by other partial translations that remained in manuscript versions, including one penned by Antoine Galland. See A. Özcan, *Osmanlı’da Tarih Yazımı ve Kaynak Türleri*, Istanbul, 2020, p. 74–75; E. N. Rothman, *The Dragoman Renaissance. Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism*, Ithaca/London, 2021, p. 222–223; N. Ö. Palabıyık, *Silent Teachers. Turkish Books and Oriental Learning in Early Modern Europe, 1544-1669*, London/New York, 2023, p. 68.

17 Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, vol. 4, p. 1161.

matter esteemed (*yasta‘zimu-hu*) by the people of intellect (*ulū al-albāb*). Such “people of intellect” or “of understanding”, literally “those possessed of minds”, as well as other “possessors” (pl. *ulū*, sg. *dhū*) or people endowed with certain qualities, are frequently mentioned in the Qur’ān.¹⁸ Using similar Qur’ānic terminology, Feyzullah b. Yahyâ Efendi wrote in his *takriz* that printing was appreciated by “those with elegant eyes (*ulū al-anzār al-āniqa*)”.

That the *ulemâ* agreed about the lawfulness of printing was most convincingly expressed by Dürrî Mehmet Efendi. A native of Ankara, he had been the judge of Aleppo (1709), Cairo (1714), Mecca (1717), Istanbul (1720), and the military judge of Anatolia (1726-1727). He was first appointed military judge of Rumelia during the first days of Patrona Halil’s rebellion, and then a second time in 1734, before being promoted to *şeyhülislâm*.¹⁹ In his *takriz*, Dürrî Efendi acknowledged the benefits of printing presented by Müteferrika and, furthermore, mentioned that the *ulemâ* also approved them:

When I saw that it included the benefits of printing (*fawā'id al-ṭab'*), and the distinguished scholars (*al-‘ulamā al-a'lām*) found it most pleasing (*bi-ḥusn al-maqbūl*), I turned the pen to the ultimate goal (*aqṣā al-marām*) of praying for our imam and great sultan.

Correspondingly, the aforementioned Biraderzâde Mustafa Efendi also testified that other “scholars and great men (*al-‘ulamā wa-l-‘uṣamā*)” had given their “acceptance and signature (*al-qubūl wa-l-imḍā*)” to the novel enterprise. In other words, the leading scholars of the time whom Müteferrika chose to write endorsements for him tried to convince readers that it was not only them who found the printing press adequate, but its acceptance was widespread among the wider body of *ulemâ*. Nevertheless, one should be careful in affirming that all Islamic scholars in early 18th-century Istanbul were so appreciative of the printing press; if this had been the case, Müteferrika would have probably not bothered to request so many *takariz*.²⁰

“That strange and dazzling art (*tilka al-ṣinā’a al-gharība al-bāhira*)”, wrote Arabzâde Abdurrahman Bâhir Efendi, “is most unusual and amazing (*aḡrab wa-abda*) ... and is devoid of stain (*‘ārīn ‘an ma’arra*).” Abdurrahman Efendi, Sultan Ahmet III’s preacher (*imâm-ı şehriyârî halâ*) and tutor to his children, is a most interesting character: not only was he a distinguished scholar, previously

¹⁸ For example, the *ulū al-albāb* are said to be the only ones who acknowledge God, in contrast to the ignorant ones (Qur’ān 39:9). See E. M. Badawi, M. Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur’anic Usage*, Leiden/Boston, 2008, p. 65.

¹⁹ Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, vol. 2, p. 424; Altunsu, *Osmanlı Şeyhülislâmları*, p. 125–126; M. İpşirli, “Dürrî Mehmed Efendi”, in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 10, Istanbul, 1994, p. 35.

²⁰ Dipratu, “Ottoman Endorsements”, p. 58–63.

kadı of Mecca and Istanbul, but he was also an accomplished poet and musician, composing several pieces for the stringed instrument *saz*, also known as *bağlama*. Moreover, he befriended the French Ambassador, Villeneuve, another important promoter of the Istanbul printing press.²¹ Exiled by Patrona Halil's rebels to the island of Chios, the former imperial preacher later returned to the capital and was appointed military judge of Anatolia (1738) and then Rumelia (1745), but he died before reaching the final position of grand mufti.²²

Nevertheless, the most interesting *takriz* is probably that of Vardarî Şeyhzâde Mehmed Efendi.²³ Rising from an important family of scholars, Vardarî Mehmed Efendi began his career as a professor at the prestigious Eyüp *medrese*,²⁴ then steadily rose through the judicial ranks, holding the offices of judge of Edirne (1719), Medina (1724), and Istanbul (1727). He must have written his *takriz* in late 1728, after being dismissed from his position of judge of Istanbul.²⁵ Vardarî Mehmed Efendi was again appointed judge of Istanbul during the critical months of October and

21 In the mid-1730s, after obtaining Abdurrahman Efendi's support in reinstating Castagnier as French consul in Milos, Villeneuve boasted of having befriended "someone who has the sultan's ear five times a day", cf. A. Vandal, *Une ambassade française en Orient sous Louis XV. La mission du marquis de Villeneuve 1728–1741*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1887, p. 106–108; S. Kunalalp (ed.), *Les rapports de Louis-Saveur Marquis de Villeneuve Ambassadeur du Roi de France auprès de la Sublime Porte Ottomane (1728–1741)*, vol. 1, Istanbul, 2019, p. 312. For the role played by Villeneuve in Müteferrika's printing press, see my article "French Ambassador Marquis de Villeneuve and the Beginnings of Ottoman Print in Istanbul", in M. Kuru, M. Cornelissen (eds.), *Proceedings of the first EMOS Conference held in Ankara, 12–14 June 2023*, Ankara (forthcoming).

22 N. Özcan, "Abdurrahman Bâhir Efendi", in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1, Istanbul, 1988, p. 158.

23 Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, vol. 3, p. 1024–1025. Not to be confused with his poet namesake, who lived a century earlier; see B. Kesik, "Mehmed, Vardarî Şeyh-zâde Mehmed Efendi", *Türk Edebiyatı İsimler Sözlüğü*, <https://teis.yesevi.edu.tr/madde-detay/mehmed-vardari-seyhzade-mehmed> (accessed March 15, 2024).

24 A suburb of Istanbul on the Golden Horn, where one of Prophet Muḥammad's companions, Ayyūb al-Anṣārî, is said to have died and been buried during the Arab siege of Constantinople of 674. The grave site was famously rediscovered by Sultan Mehmet II's preacher Akşemsettin during the siege of 1453, and a mosque complex (*külliye*) was built soon after. From the reign of Selim II (1566–1574), this also became the site where new sultans were girded with the sword of Osman I, founder of the dynasty. See H. İnalcık, "Istanbul: An Islamic City", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1, 1990, p. 2–4; N. Vatin, G. Veinstein, *Le Sérail ébranlé. Essai sur les morts, dépositions et avènements des sultans ottomans (XIV^e–XIX^e siècle)*, Paris, 2003, p. 305–319.

25 Vardarî's entry in Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, vol. 3, p. 1024–1025, mentions the date of his dismissal as AH 1141, corresponding to AD August 7, 1728–July 26, 1729. Considering that *Lugat-ı Vankulu* came out of the printing press in January 1729, it appears that Vardarî wrote his *takriz* almost a year later than 15 Safer 1140/October 2, 1727, which is the date indicated by F. Sarıcaoğlu, C. Yılmaz, *Müteferrika: Basmacı İbrahim Efendi ve Müteferrika Matbaası/ Basmacı İbrahim Efendi and the Müteferrika Press*, Istanbul, 2008, p. 147.

November 1730; he was the official representative of the Ottoman government, at a time when Patrona Halil’s rebels had appointed their own *kadı* of Istanbul.²⁶

But let us now turn to what Vardari Mehmed Efendi had to say about the printing press.

The blessings (*ni'ma*) of the printed art (*al-şan'a al-maṭbū'a*) are invisible (*ghayr mar'ya*) in our lands [but] its benefits (*fawā'idu-ha*) are heard. Cut [and] chopped (*majzūma maqtū'a*), it bears lots of fruit (*fākiha kathīra*), which are neither cut nor forbidden (*lā-maqtū'a wa-mamnū'a*). Thank God, its artisan (*şāni'u-hā*) proceeded and afterwards succeeded in the same manner (*bi-amthāli-hā*). Time was ungenerous (*bakhīl*) with it and hid it (*khaba'a-hā*) under the canopy of concealment (*fī ḥajalat al-ikhfā*), but the veil of disdain (*ḥijāb al-istighnā*) was lifted from its face with the blessing of our sultan... and with the endeavor of his grand vizier.

In short, the former judge of Istanbul considered that the introduction of the printing press to the Ottoman Empire was long overdue. And this is a most interesting point of view, considering that recent scholarship tends to perceive the question of “why did Ottoman Muslim culture adopt printing so late” as being too Euro-centric.²⁷ At least one of the Ottoman *ulemâ* seems to have been bothered by the same question.

While the other *takariz* published in the preface of Mütferrika’s first volume do not seem to be of much value to this analysis, the careers of their authors certainly are. However, since presenting all sixteen *ulemâ* would require at least another separate paper, I will allow myself to present only one more.

Ebuishakzâde İshak Efendi was not only an endorser of the printing press, but also one of the experts called upon by the sultan to proofread the books coming out of Mütferrika’s press. Having become the judge of Istanbul in 1723 and *kazasker* of Anatolia in 1729, he was an important representative of the cultural development of the Tulip Age, being involved in several translation projects and composing odes to the sultan and the grand vizier. Self-exiled after their deposition, İshak Efendi returned to the capital and was appointed *kazasker* of Rumelia, and then grand mufti, from October 1733 until his death one year later.²⁸

²⁶ The previous official *kadı* of Istanbul, Raşid Mehmed Efendi, was exiled to the island of Kos, and replaced by the rebels with Deli (“the Mad”) Ibrahim Efendi, a low ranking (*hariç müderris*, who was happy to issue *fetvas* legitimizing their actions. See Aktepe, *Patrona İsiyanı*, p. 141–142, 154, 164.

²⁷ S. Reese, “Introduction”, in S. Reese (ed.), *Manuscript and Print in the Islamic Tradition*, Berlin/Boston, 2022, p. 3.

²⁸ M. N. Doğan, “İshak Efendi, Ebûishakzâde”, in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 22, Istanbul, 2000, p. 530–531.

4 Final Remarks

Patrona Halil's rebellion lasted a couple of months, and it succeeded in profoundly shaking Ottoman society, apparently halting the trend, viewed as progressive by some, too extravagant and costly by others, that the government had followed since 1718. Although the sultan, grand vizier and grand mufti were deposed, important positions in the upper echelons of the empire's administration were occupied by endorsers of the Müteferrika press even during the crucial months of the rebellion. Moreover, once the situation began to settle, from 1731 until Müteferrika's death in 1747, many of his endorsers held the important offices of military judges and grand muftis. Following a brief hiatus in 1731, when the only volume to come out of the printing press was the French *Grammaire turque*, in 1732, Müteferrika published an original composition about the necessity for reforms, based on his observations of the recent insurrection.

At least two other volumes were published with direct support from one of the original endorsers. Müteferrika states in his prefaces to Kâtib Çelebi's *Cihannümâ* (*Cosmography*) and *Takvîmü't-tevârîh* (*Historical Calendars*) that Damatzâde Ebûlhayr Ahmet Efendi, grand mufti by then, had given him suggestions and encouragements to publish those books.²⁹ While Patrona Halil's rebellion was mainly directed against the ruling class, many high-ranking *ulemâ* of the Tulip Age survived those hectic months and their *takariz* were valid after 1730, and, therefore, permitted the printing press to continue its activity even after the deposition of its main political supporters.

A similar episode, but with a different outcome, had unfolded some 150 years earlier. The Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmet Pasha was the patron of the astronomical observatory erected in Galata in 1574, run by the Egyptian-born scientist Taqi al-Din. However, after Sokollu was murdered in 1579, the observatory was closed and demolished due to religious concerns expressed by the *şeyhülislâm* of the time.³⁰ In contrast, the Istanbul printing press was able to continue operating even after the assassination of the grand vizier who supported it, as the authors of the *takariz* examined in this essay still held the highest religious and judicial authority in the Empire.

While some of the *takariz* only praised Müteferrika's initiative in general terms, others mentioned some practical benefits, such as the possibility of reproducing books faster and easier than manually copying them. In several instances,

²⁹ Sarıcaoğlu, Yılmaz, *Müteferrika*, p. 107, 252, 321.

³⁰ A. Sayılı, *The Observatory in Islam and Its Place in the General History of the Observatory*, Ankara, 2016, p. 294–310.

the assessment was elegantly wrapped in religious terminology that would have resounded with the more pious readers, whom it was trying to convince that printing was generally approved by the *ulemâ*. However, the very fact that all the texts were written in Arabic is evidence enough that the targeted audience was educated, possibly including low-ranking scholars who may have been reluctant to accept yet another innovation introduced during the rule of Sultan Ahmet III and his Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha.

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