

İRVIN CEMİL SCHICK is an intellectual and cultural historian of Islam with a focus on the early modern Ottoman Empire. His principle areas of research are the arts of the book, gender and sexuality, space and the body, animals and the environment, and the occult sciences. Dr. Schick has a PhD in Applied Mathematics from Massachusetts Insitute of Technology and a second PhD in History from École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. He is currently teaching at the University of Massachussets, Amherst and has previously taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, and Istanbul Şehir University, with brief visiting positions at Boston University, Sabancı University, and Boğaziçi University. Some of the publications Dr. Schick has authored, edited or co-edited are *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse* (London: Verso, 1999); *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); “Some Thoughts on an Early Depiction of the Booksellers’ Market in İstanbul,” in *The András Riedlmayer Festschrift*, ed. S. Smith and K. Leal (Istanbul: Isis Press, forthcoming); “On the Multivalence of Women’s Captivity Narratives,” in *Slavery in the Middle East and North Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, E. Andreeva and K. McNeer, eds. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2024), 25–52; “Islamic Art and Visualities of War from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 71 (2024 [2023]), 14–42; “Between the Abstraction of Miniatures and the Literalism of Photography: Amateur Erotica in Early Twentieth-Century Turkey,” *Journal of the Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia*, 5–6 (2017–2019 [2021]), 1–26; “Three Genders, Two Sexualities: the Evidence of Ottoman Erotic Terminology,” in *Sex and Desire in Muslim Cultures: Beyond Norms and Transgression from the Abbasids to the Present Day*, ed. A. Kreil, L. Sorbera, and S. Tolino (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 87–110; “Chess of the Gnostics: The Sufi Version of Snakes and Ladders in Turkey and India,” in *Games and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, V. Kopp and E. Lapina, eds. (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020), 173–216; “Sultan Abdülhamîd II from the Pen of his Detractors: Oriental Despotism and the Sexualization of the Ancien Régime,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 5, 2 (2018), 47–73; “Illustrative Traditions in the Muslim Context, 1200–1900,” in *History of Illustration*, ed. S. Doyle, J. Grove, and W. Sherman (New York: Fairchild Books, 2018), 54–70.

“The Prophet Muhammad is related to have said, “Whoever builds a mosque, God will build for him a similar place in Paradise.” I want to believe that the same holds for libraries—for those who build them, and for those who maintain and perpetuate them as well. In this age of computers and global connectivity, some may ask, are traditional libraries still relevant? Are high-resolution scans not enough for all but the most inveterate cellulose addict? But nothing can substitute for the materiality of an old book—the experience of holding and beholding a volume that has outlived tens of generations, particularly in the serene silence of a good reading room. The Hafız Ahmed Ağa Library stands as testimony to the persistance of human values against the cultural narrow mindedness that often rears its head on both sides of the Aegean, and I am honored to be part of the Conversation.”

İrvin Cemil Schick

¹This article was originally published in *Routledge Handbook on Turkish Literature* ed. Didem Havlioglu and Zeynep Uysal, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis/Routledge, 2023. Reproduced with permission of The Licensor through PLSclear.

Reading and Writing Practices in the Ottoman Empire*

This chapter focuses on Ottoman-Muslim reading and writing practices, and on the textual media through which those practices were exercised. It starts with the centrality of reading and writing in Islam, followed by a brief discussion of the relationship between literacy and orality, and between writing and performativity, principally in the Ottoman-Muslim context. The role and function of inscriptions on buildings and objects is described in order to highlight the presence of reading and writing in everyday life even in a society with a very low rate of literacy. The importance given to calligraphy is highlighted and the different functions assigned in the Ottoman-Muslim context to various scripts is discussed. The chapter then turns to books as objects, their different formats as well as the respective functions of those formats, and their collection in libraries. Finally, the adoption and popularization of printing is briefly mentioned in the context of Ottoman practices of reading and writing.

According to a saying attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad (d. Medina, 632), known as a *ḥadīth*,

The first thing that God created was the pen. And He said to it: “Write!” It said: “Lord, what should I write?” He said: “Write down the destiny of all things until the final hour.” (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *Sunnah* 42:105)

Moreover, the first few verses of *Sūrah al-‘Alaq*, the ninety-sixth chapter of the Qur’ān, considered the beginning of the Divine Revelation, are as follows:

Read! in the name of thy Lord who has created — created man from a clot. Read! And thy Lord is the most bounteous, Who teaches by the pen, taught man that which he knew not. (*al-‘Alaq* 96: 1–5)

These two remarkable statements tell us a great deal about the centrality of reading and writing in the Islamic cosmology. If God first created the pen and ordered it to write everything that will ever be, then all of creation is fundamentally a written text. The Qur’ān is a “user’s manual” that helps believers read and comprehend that text by explicating the signs that God has placed all around them and, conversely, the material world helps believers read and interpret the message of the Qur’ān. Together, the universe and the Scripture constitute an “intertext” that guides believers in worshipping God with a fuller understanding of His power and grace.¹

The Qur’ān is believed to be the verbatim record of the word of God as revealed to the Prophet, a unique and miraculous text the likes of which could not have been written by mere mortals. It subdivides non-Muslims into those who have received a revelation, known as “People of the Book” (Jews and Christians), and those who have not, the unbelievers.

Although the Qur’ān was revealed to the Prophet gradually, in fact it is generally believed to have pre-existed the Revelation, indeed to be “uncreated.” Verses like “Nay but it is a glorious Qur’ān in a Preserved Tablet” (*al-Burūj* 85:21–22) and “With Him is the Mother of the Book” (*al-Ra’d* 13:39) are taken to indicate that the text of the Qur’ān is conserved, perhaps in archetypal form, by the side of God. Moreover, everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen is recorded on the Preserved Tablet, and this is why Muslims often refer to fate in terms of writing—in colloquial Turkish, for example, “what is written” (*yazgı*) and “the writing on the forehead” (*alın yazısı*).

¹ For a more detailed discussion, see İrvin Cemil Schick, “Text,” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), pp. 321–335, 420–422.

In short, reading and writing are inextricably linked with the Islamic faith, and this fact constitutes the foundation of the Ottoman practices of reading and writing. A revealing anecdote is told about the scholar and Qur’ān commentator Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (d. Istanbul, 1942). When a young boy, so the story goes, he placed a discarded container on the floor to help his elderly teacher step over a high threshold. The latter exclaimed that it would be a grave sin for him to do so, because there were inscriptions on the container. The boy said, “But this is not Islamic writing,” meaning that the inscription was in Latin script. His teacher responded: “Muslims and infidels both have writing, but there is no such thing as Muslim writing and infidel writing. Can what is done with one not be done with the other? All writing deserves respect, provided that it is used not for evil but for good.”²

The Caliph ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. Kufa, 661) is reported to have said, “Knowledge is fugitive; tie it down with writing,” while his contemporary and rival Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān (d. Damascus, 680) similarly said, “He who relies on memory is deceived, and he who relies on the record is contented.”³ These are forceful statements in support of textual practices in early Islam and it is clear that many Muslims took them to heart: bibliographical dictionaries such as *Kitāb al-Fihrist* by al-Nadīm (d. Baghdād, 990) and *Kashf al-ẓunūn ‘an asāmi al-kutub wa al-funūn* by Kātip Çelebi (a.k.a. Hacı Halîfe, d. İstanbul, 1657) list many thousands of titles, underscoring both the importance of scholarship in the Muslim World and the proliferation of written records of that scholarship.⁴

In addition, keeping written records of financial transactions was mandated by the Qur’ān, which declares, in part:

O you who believe! When you contract a debt for a fixed term, record it in writing. Let a scribe record it in writing between you in [terms of] equity. No scribe should refuse to write as God has taught him, so let him write, and let him who incurs the debt dictate, and let him observe his duty to God his Lord, and diminish nothing of it. But if he who owes the debt is of low understanding, or weak, or unable himself to dictate, then let the guardian of his interests dictate in [terms of] equity. [...] Do not be averse to writing down [the contract] whether it be small or great, with [record of] its term. That is more equitable in the sight of God and more sure for testimony, and the best way of avoiding doubt between you. (*al-Baqara* 2:282)

Similarly, the Prophet had ‘Alī prepare a written document to record the terms of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya. (*Şaḥīḥ Bukhārī, al-Jizya wa al-mawāda‘a* 58:26) Such rulings can only have encouraged

² Mahmud Bedreddin Yazır, *Medeniyet Âleminde Yazı ve İslâm Medeniyetinde Kalem Güzeli*, ed. Uğur Derman (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1972–1989), vol. 1, pp. 74–75.

³ Cited in Nefes Zade İbrahim, *Gülzarı Savab*, ed. Kilisli Muallim Rifat [Bilge] (Istanbul: Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi Neşriyatı, 1939), pp. 32, 38.

⁴ See Franz Rosenthal, “‘Of Making Many Books There Is No End’: the Classical Muslim View,” in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 33–55. This is not to say, of course, that everything was committed to writing, immediately and all at once, upon the advent of Islam. On the gradual transitions from oral to written and from aural to read, see Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: from the Aural to the Read*, rev. and trans. Shawkat Toorawa (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). On the persistence of orality, particularly in the context of Shi‘ī Islam, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education: the Spoken and the Written Word,” in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, pp. 57–70; on Mamluk Egypt, see Jonathan Porter Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: a Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 24–31, 59–60.

the maintenance of written records⁵ and that may explain, at least in part, the enormous wealth of Ottoman archival sources available to the historian today.

Received opinion has it that the process of modernization involves, among other things, a definitive transition from oral to written culture. There are good reasons to question this premise, not least because of the persistence of orality in developed societies even today and indeed Ottoman history provides many examples of the continuing imbrication of orality and literacy. In addition to the important place of orality in certain types of specialized training, such as calligraphy⁶ and music,⁷ and in certain sectors of officialdom, such as public administration⁸ and jurisprudence,⁹ literature too continued to straddle the line between oral and written.

In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that reading has not always been the solitary occupation it often is today. Classical poetry, for example, was typically recited and discussed in literary salons known as *meclis* (from the Arabic verb *jalasa*, to sit).¹⁰ In other words, there was not always a clear-cut distinction between reading and performance.¹¹ An important consequence of this persisting orality was that reading inevitably remained an exclusive occupation: women, for example, were generally not allowed in the *meclis* and were therefore largely locked out of such literary pursuits.¹² Likewise, public readings of popular literary works were fairly common, as attested not only by marginal notes scribbled into the manuscripts¹³ but also by some European

⁵ See, e.g., Jeanette A. Wakin, “Introduction,” in *The Function of Documents in Islamic Law: the Chapters on Sales from Taḥāwī’s Kitāb al-shurūṭ al-kabir*, ed. Jeanette A. Wakin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), pp. 1–10. For an interesting study of writing and authority in the modern era, see Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993); note, however, that “calligraphic” in the title is an unfortunate misnomer, as the subject of the book is the written text, not the art of beautiful writing.

⁶ İrvın Cemil Schick, “Bedensel Hafıza, Zihinsel Hafıza, Yazılı Kaynak: Hat Sanatının Günümüze İntikalinin Bazı Boyutları,” in *Nasıl Hatırlıyoruz? Türkiye’de Bellek Çalışmaları*, ed. Leyla Neyzi (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2011), pp. 12–39.

⁷ Cem Behar, *Zaman, Mekân, Müzik: Klâsik Türk Musikisinde Eğitim (Meşk), İcra ve Aktarım* (Istanbul: AFA Yayıncılık, 1993).

⁸ Nicolas Vatin, “Remarques sur l’oral et l’écrit dans l’administration ottomane au XVI^e siècle,” *Oral et écrit dans le monde turco-ottoman, Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 75–76 (1995), pp. 143–154.

⁹ Işık Tamdoğan-Abel, “L’écrit comme échec de l’oral? L’oralité des engagements et des règlements à travers les registres de cadis d’Adana au XVIII^e siècle,” *Oral et écrit dans le monde turco-ottoman, Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 75–76 (1995), pp. 155–165.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Belkıs Gürsoy, “XV. Yüzyıldan İtibaren İstanbul’daki Edebî Muhitlere Genel Bir Bakış,” *Bilig: Türk Dünyası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2 (1996), pp. 188–202. For a useful account of pre-Ottoman Islamic salons, see Samer M. Ali, *Arabic Literary Salons in the Islamic Middle Ages: Poetry, Public Performance, and the Presentation of the Past* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

¹¹ For an interesting account in a pre-Ottoman context, see Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: a Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

¹² Didem Havlioğlu, *Mihri Hatun: Performance, Gender-Bending, and Subversion in Ottoman Intellectual History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2017), pp. 101–114.

¹³ See, e.g., Tülün Değirmenci, “Bir Kitabı Kaç Kişi Okur? Osmanlı’da Okurlar ve Okuma Biçimleri Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler,” *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 13 (2011), pp. 7–43; Elif Sezer, *The Oral and the Written in Ottoman Literature: the Reader Notes on the Story of Fîrûzşâh* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık, 2015), pp. 67–84. For pre-Ottoman examples, see Pierre A. MacKay, “Certificates of Transmission on a Manuscript of the *Maqāmât* of Ḥarîrî (MS. Cairo, *Adab* 105),” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* n.s. 61, 4 (1971); Jan Just Witkam, “The Human Element between Text and Reader: the *ijāza* in Arabic Manuscripts,” in *The Codicology of Islamic Manuscripts*:

travelers’ accounts. For example, Ottaviano Bon, a Venetian envoy who spent some two and a half years in Istanbul during the first decade of the seventeenth century, wrote:

And among the *Turks*, he that can but read, and write, is held a very learned man, and esteemed far above others, by the common ignorant people; insomuch that when a craft fellow hath got a book, which he knows will please their humours [. . .] he forthwith gets him with his book to some *Cahve* house [i.e. coffee house], or other, where there is always great resort, and there, being set down in the middle of them, he falls to reading, the people evermore giving credit to whatsoever he says; and so having spent an hour, or two, he takes their benevolences, which is usually more than the price of his book comes to; such is their simplicity, and such is their delight in hearing a man read fables.¹⁴

In other words, reading was often a collective activity that included audience participation in the form of public comments as well as expressions of approval or displeasure. As coffeehouses—even more than literary salons—were fundamentally homosocial spaces, these public readings too played a role in enforcing the gendered nature of literary activities in the Ottoman Empire.

Another way in which the masses, whether literate or not, interacted daily with written texts was by navigating among the countless architectural inscriptions that dotted the Ottoman urban landscape.¹⁵ Although such inscriptions have been studied for their documentary content as well as their artistic merit, the way in which they were articulated with reading and writing practices has not been given the attention it deserves. It has been suggested, for example, that the difficulty in deciphering complex calligraphic compositions, their sometimes inaccessible positioning, and the occasional presence of textual or orthographical errors together suggest that architectural inscriptions were primarily decorative and not intended to be read.¹⁶ This, however, overlooks the fact that reading and writing are culturally specific activities and that the way an Ottoman might have approached an inscription is not necessarily identical to the way we might today.

In particular, it must be borne in mind that people were far less mobile in the past, so that a given person would have been exposed to the same architectural inscriptions day in, day out, for months or years, and would thus have had ample opportunity to parse even a complex composition or at least ask others for help in doing so; and that many architectural inscriptions contain texts—

Proceedings of the Second Conference of Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 4–5 December 1993, ed. Yasin Dutton (London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1995), pp. 123–136; Stefan Leder, “Understanding a Text through its Transmission: Documented *Samā’*, Copies, Reception,” in *Manuscript Notes as Documentary Sources*, eds. Andreas Görke and Konrad Hirschler (Beirut: Orient-Institut and Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2011), pp. 59–72.

14 Ottaviano Bon, *The Sultan’s Seraglio: An Intimate Portrait of Life at the Ottoman Court*, trans. John Withers, intro. and annot. Godfrey Goodwin (London: Saqi Books, 1996), pp. 143–144. For a survey of Ottoman book culture as described by European travelers, see Engin Cihad Tekin, *Osmanlı’da Kitap Kültürü ve Batı Dünyası: Avrupalı Seyyahların Bakış Açısından Osmanlı’da Kitap ve KütüphaneKültürü (1453–1699)* (Istanbul: Hiperlink Yayınları, 2018).

15 See, e.g., the contributions to *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour and İrvın Cemil Schick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

16 See, e.g., Richard Ettinghausen. “Arabic Epigraphy: Communication or Symbolic Affirmation,” in *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History: Studies in Honor of George C. Miles*, ed. Dickran K. Kouymjian (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), pp. 299–300, 304. For a critique, see İrvın Cemil Schick and Mohammad Gharipour, “Introduction,” in *Calligraphy and Architecture in the Muslim World*, pp. 1–2.

such as certain popular Qur’ānic verses—that would have been familiar to most Ottomans and could therefore be reconstructed once no more than a couple of words had been deciphered. The same may be said for the myriad everyday objects that bore inscriptions, from scarves to swords, from copper bowls to mirrors. The texts with which such objects were inscribed were, once again, often fairly well known, so that a reader would have had no difficulty recognizing them, even if not by actually making out each and every individual letter of which they were composed.

So, one may justifiably ask, if many of the texts inscribed onto objects and buildings were likely to be known by both the writers and the potential readers, what was the purpose of writing and reading them in the first place? The answer lies once again in the various culturally specific meanings ascribed to the acts of reading and writing in Ottoman society. In some cases, books served as vectors for the transmission of knowledge, whether they were read from cover to cover or simply used for reference.¹⁷ In other cases, however, their function could be ritual or devotional and for such objects “reading” meant something quite different. For example, reading (and re-reading) the Qur’ān, popular books like al-Jazūlī’s (d. Āsafī, 1465) *Dalā’il al-Khayrāt* or Yazıcıoğlu Mehemmed’s (d. Gelibolu, 1451) *Muhammediyye*, or one’s favorite book of daily prayers (*evrād/awrād*) was an act of affirmation, worship, and meditation as much as communication or education. Likewise, Qur’ānic verses, *ḥadīths*, or *bon mots* (*kelām-ı kibar*) inscribed on everyday objects were not purely informative. They could also be moralistic, say, or devotional; not least, they were a confirmation of Islam’s religious and cultural sovereignty over the material world.

Most inscriptions by far have always consisted of ordinary writing; only some have been bona fide works of calligraphy, that is, beautiful writing. It is important to distinguish one from the other not only on aesthetic grounds but also functionally. Born of the imperative to preserve the word of God in the most beautiful form, calligraphy is arguably the most recognizably “Islamic” of the arts practiced in the Muslim world. Its abstract nature, moreover, appears to have been found especially appealing by Ottomans, who excelled at writing several scripts and even invented a number of their own. But calligraphy is more than just artistic writing: the form of calligraphy often conveys meanings above and beyond that contained in the text itself.¹⁸ For example, different scripts were sometimes used for different purposes, as were different formats, and readers’ responses to the texts before them would inevitably be influenced by such seemingly purely formal factors.

The most widely used script during the Ottoman period was *nesih* (*naskh*), the “book script” par excellence. Unlike some other scripts, *nesih* can be fully vocalized (that is, diacritics indicating short vowels can be added to the consonants), making the texts easier to read as well as less ambiguous. It was used primarily for texts in Arabic and Ottoman, and for religious and scholarly works, as well as popular prose. By contrast, *ta’līk* (*nasta’līq*) is very seldom vocalized. In the Ottoman context, it was used primarily for texts in Persian as well as for literary prose and poetry in Ottoman. It is an extremely graceful script, but achieves its beauty at the cost of some legibility. These two scripts were responsible for the virtual totality of book production in the Ottoman Empire, at least until the nineteenth century when *rik’a* (*riq’a*) script gained popularity. Designed for speed rather than aesthetics, *rik’a* was initially used in official correspondence but gradually became the standard everyday script of educated Ottomans. Like *rik’a*, *dīvānī* (*dīwānī*) script too was utilized in Ottoman

17 Christoph K. Neumann, “Üç Tarz-ı Mütalaa: Yeniçağ Osmanlı Dünyası’nda Kitap Yazmak ve Okumak,” *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 1 (2005), pp. 51–76.

18 See İrvın Cemil Schick, “The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 53–54 (2008), pp. 211–224; idem, “The Content of Form: Islamic Calligraphy Between Text and Representation,” in *Sign and Design*, ed. Brigitte Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey Hamburger (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016), 169–190.

official correspondence; it was never used by ordinary people, however. Finally, *sülüs* (*thulth*) was principally a calligraphic script. Its large version, *celî* (*jalî*) *sülüs*, as well as the similarly large *celî ta'lik* script, were most commonly used on Ottoman architectural inscriptions. One often encounters references to Arabic script written on objects as “calligraphy;” it is important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that calligraphy is a very specific kind of inscription, one in which certain rules are followed with the aim of producing something that is more than just the record of a particular text: it is a beautiful rendition of the text.¹⁹

Like different scripts, different formats can also sometimes suggest the nature of the texts’ contents.²⁰ For example, vertical oblong albums with horizontally-oriented spines at the top, known in Turkish as *cönk*, were typically used to collect folk poetry. Albums with a vertically-oriented spine on the right, known as *mecmû’a* (from the Arabic for “collected”) were likewise used to compile all sorts of materials, from anecdotes to poetry, from treatises to prayers.²¹ Both formats are highly idiosyncratic in that they contain material that individuals found interesting and worth recording. They also bridged the gap between written and oral: on the one hand, they recorded oral communications such as folk poetry, much of which was orally transmitted; on the other, they served a performative function by providing material to be read in social gatherings.

The word *mushaf* (from the Arabic for “composed of pages”) signified a codex and the construct *mushaf-ı şerîf* (noble codex) meant specifically a manuscript of the Qur’ân. However, the “*şerîf*” part was often dropped, so that *mushaf* is frequently used (albeit inaptly) as shorthand for the Qur’ân. By contrast, *kitâb* (from the Arabic verb “to write”) simply means “book” and often figures in the title of books, as, for instance, in *Kitâb ta’bîr-r-ru’yâ* (Book of Dream Interpretation). Another term that sometimes figures in titles is *risâle*, an Arabic word that means “treatise” or “booklet,” as, for instance, in *Risâle fî’n-nisâ* (Treatise on Women). One also rarely encounters scrolls, particularly in the case of sufi and other genealogies (*silsilenâme*).

19 For useful surveys in English, see Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); idem, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

20 Recent years have witnessed the publication of several imporant works on Islamic codicology, that is, on Islamic books as objects. Although most focus on Arabic manuscripts, much of what they describe applies equally well to Ottoman works. Johannes Pedersen’s *The Arabic Book*, trans. Geoffrey French, ed. Robert Hillenbrand (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) was first published in Danish in 1946 and is a pioneering, if somewhat dated, source. More recent works include: François Déroche and Francis Richard, eds., *Scribes et manuscrits du Moyen-Orient* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1997); François Déroche et al., *Manuel de codicologie des manuscrits en écriture arabe* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2000); Adam Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: a Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2001); idem, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: a Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography – Supplement* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012); idem, *Arabic Manuscripts: a Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012). There are also a number of dictionaries of bookmaking terminology in Turkish, Persian, and Arabic, notably: Mine Esiner Özen, *Yazma Kitap Sanatları Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Fen Fakültesi, 1985); İrvîn Cemil Schick, “Taczâde Risâlesine Göre Sülüs Hattına Dair Bazı Istılâhat,” in *M. Uğur Derman 65 Yaş Armağanı*, ed. İrvîn Cemil Schick (Istanbul: Sabancı Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2000), pp. 457–482; Hasan Özönder, *Ansiklopedik Hat ve Tezhip Sanatları Deyim ve Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Konya: n.p., 2003); Abdülkadir Yılmaz, *Türk Kitap Sanatları Tabir ve Istılahları* (Istanbul: Damla Yayınevi, 2004); ‘Afif al-Bahnasi, *Mu’jam muştalaḥât al-khaṭṭ al-‘Arabî wa al-khaṭṭâṭîn* (Beirut: Maktaba Lubnân, 1995); Mâyil Haravî, *Lughât va-iştilâḥât-i fann-i kitâbsâzi: hamrâh bâ iştilâḥât-i jildsâzi, tazhib, naqqâshî* ([Tehran]: Bunyâd-i Farhang-i Irân, 1353 [1974]); Ḥamîd Rizâ Qilichkhânî, *Farhang-i vâzhagân va iştilâḥât-i khvushnivîsi va hunarhâ-yi vâbastah* ([Tehran]: Intishârât-i Rawzanah, 1390 [2011]).

21 See, e.g., the contributions to *Mecmûa: Osmanlı Edebiyatının Kırkambarı*, ed. Hatice Aynur, Müjgân Çakır, Hanife Koncu, Selim S. Kuru, and Ali Emre Özyıldırım (Istanbul: Turkuaz, 2012).

In the case of works of calligraphy, the most frequently encountered formats—besides books—are small single pieces known as *kit’a* (*qıṭ’a*) and larger panels known as *levha* (*lawḥa*). Often such items served talismanic/apotropaic purposes. Sometimes several *kit’as* were collected together in book or concertina (accordion-like) form; such albums are known as *murakka’a* (from the arabic for “patched”). In addition, disparate pages of calligraphy and sometimes also miniatures were pasted into notebooks to form albums (*mecmû’a*); such manuscripts may have been assembled with educational purposes or simply to preserve collections of specimens.²²

Until the late nineteenth century, books were expensive and few could afford them.²³ Add to that the generally low rate of literacy²⁴ and it becomes clear that large private libraries were rare. Precious collections assembled by sultans²⁵ and by dedicated scholars and bibliophiles such as Veliyüddîn Cârullâh Efendi (d. Istanbul, 1738)²⁶ and Ali Emîrî Efendi (d. Istanbul, 1924)²⁷ are extant, and studies often based on probate registers (*tereke kaydı*) have shed light on the personal libraries of ordinary people.²⁸ In addition to such private libraries, many pious foundations (*vakıf/waqf*) established and

22 See, e.g., Wheeler M.Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents on the History of Calligraphers and Painters* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001); David J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: the Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2001).

23 For a useful brief summary of Ottoman book culture, see Frédéric Hitzel, “Manuscrits, livres et culture livresque à Istanbul,” *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman, Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 87–88 (1999), pp. 19–38.

24 See, e.g., Benjamin C. Fortna, *Learning to Read in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Orhan Koloğlu, *Osmanlıcadan Türkçeye Okuryazarlığımız* (Istanbul: Tarihçi Kitabevi, 2015).

25 See, e.g., İsmail Baykal, “Fatih Sultan Mehmed’in Hususi Kütüphanesi ve Kitapları,” *Vakıflar Dergisi* 4 (1958), pp. 77–79; Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 25–57; Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, and Cornell H. Fleischer, eds., *Treasures of Knowledge: an Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019).

26 Berat Açıl, ed., *Osmanlı Kitap Kültürü: Cârullah Efendi Kütüphanesi ve Derkenar Notları* ([Istanbul]: İLEM Kitaplığı and Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2015).

27 Ekrem Işın, ed., *Ali Emîrî Efendi ve Dünyası: Fermanlar, Beratlar, Hatlar, Kitaplar* (Istanbul: Pera Müzesi Yayınları, 2007).

28 See, e.g., Ali İhsan Karataş, “Tereke Kayıtlarına Göre XVI. Yüzyılda Bursa’da İnsan-Kitap İlişkisi,” *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlähiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 8, 8 (1999), pp. 317–328; idem, “Şer’iye Sicilleri Bağlamında Klasik Dönem Bursa Halkının Kitap Dünyası,” 38. ICANAS/ Uluslararası Asya ve Kuzey Afrika Çalışmaları Kongresi (Ankara, 2007), pp. 119–136; Meropi Anastassiadou, “Livres et ‘bibliothèques’ dans les inventaires après décès de Salonique au XIX^e siècle,” *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman, Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 87–88 (1999), pp. 111–141; Abdullah Saydam, “Trabzon’da Halkın Kitap Sahibi Olma Düzeyi (1795–1846),” *Milli Eğitim* 176 (2006), pp. 187–201; Henning Sievert, “Verlorene Schätze – Bücher von Bürokraten in den Muḥallefât-Registern,” in *Buchkultur im Nahen Osten des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Tobias Heinzelmann and Henning Sievert (Berlin etc.: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 199–263; Faruk Doğan, “Bir Eğitim Tarihi Kaynağı Olarak Giresun Şer’iye Sicilleri: Tereke Kayıtlarına Yansıyan Kitaplar,” *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 9 (2015), pp. 153–168; Asim Zubčević, “Book Ownership in Ottoman Sarajevo, 1707–1828,” unpublished doctoral dissertation, Leiden University, 2015; Ekrem Tak and Bilgin Aydın, “XVII. Yüzyılda İstanbul Medreselerinde Okutulan Kitaplar (Tereke Kayıtları Üzerine bir Değerlendirme),” *Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları* 19 (2019), pp. 183–236. On Ottoman Syria, see Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, “Les livres des gens à Damas vers 1700,” *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman, Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 87–88 (1999), pp. 143–169; Colette Establet, “Les inventaires après-décès, sources d’histoire culturelle (Damas),” in *Etudes sur les villes du Proche-Orient, XVI^e-XIX^e siècle: Hommage à André Raymond*, ed. Brigitte Marino (Damascus: Institut français d’études arabes de Damas, 2001), pp. 81–90. For a wide-ranging survey of Ottoman Egypt, see Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: a Cultural History of Cairo’s Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. 79–103. For an interesting pre-Ottoman list of books studied by an educated Persian Muslim, see A.J. Arberry,

maintained libraries.²⁹ Some of these libraries were located in mosques and dervish lodges, while others were independent. Studies have shown that lending and renting made books available to a wider public than could have afforded to own them. Nevertheless, a relatively brisk book market did exist in Istanbul and other major Ottoman cities.³⁰

Although printing presses were established by non-Muslim Ottomans as early as the 1490s, they did not print books in Ottoman or Turkish; moreover, it was long forbidden to import books printed in the languages of the Muslim world. When the first printing press officially sanctioned to print books in Ottoman was established in 1728 by the Hungarian-born İbrahim Müteferrika (d. Istanbul, 1745), its products were so expensive that manuscript books continued to be produced in large numbers.³¹ Thus, printing did not bring about significant changes until the early part of the twentieth century, when increased literacy, free enterprise (“print capitalism”), and the climate of freedom ushered in by the proclamation of Constitutional Monarchy in 1908 combined to create a whole new set of reading and writing practices.

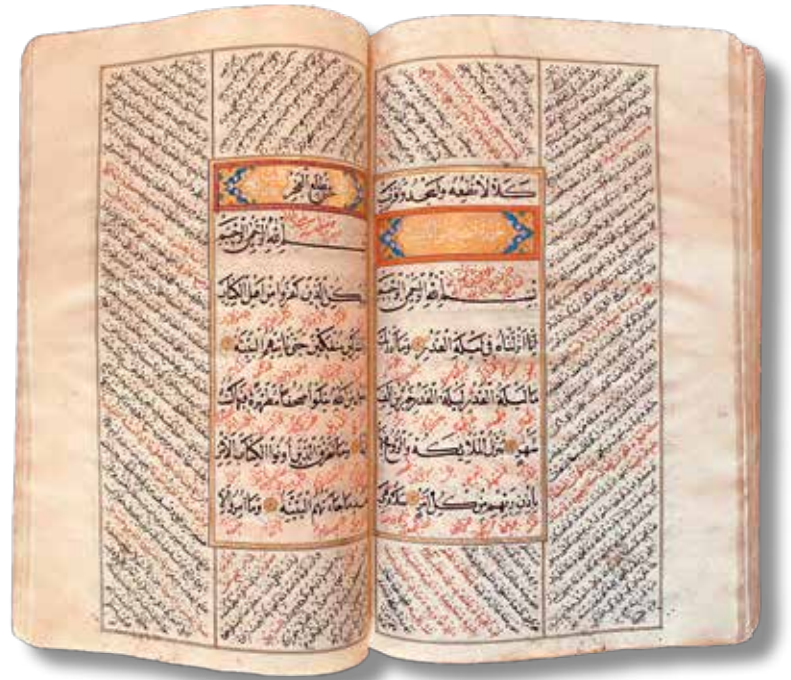


A Twelfth-Century Reading List: a Chapter in Arab Bibliography (London: Emery Walker, 1951).

29 See, e.g., İsmail E. Erünsal, *Osmanlılarda Kütüphaneler ve Kütüphanecilik: Tarihi Gelişimi ve Organizasyonu* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2018); Faruk Bilici, “Les bibliothèques vakıf-s à Istanbul au XVI^e siècle, prémice de grandes bibliothèques publiques,” *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman, Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 87–88 (1999), pp. 39–59. On Ottoman libraries more generally, see Meral Alpay and Safiye Özkan, *Istanbul Kütüphaneleri* (Istanbul: n.p., 1982); Özer Soysal, *Türk Kütüphaneciliği* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Kütüphaneler Genel Müdürlüğü, 1998–1999); Özlem Bayram et al., eds., *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Bilim, Kültür ve Kütüphaneler* (Ankara: Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği, 1999); Mert Ağaoğlu and Ayhan Altundağ, *Osmanlı Devri Müstakil İstanbul Kütüphaneleri* (Istanbul: Cinius Yayınları, 2018). On pre-Ottoman Islamic libraries, see, e.g., Youssef Eche, *Les bibliothèques arabes publiques et semi-publiques en Mésopotamie, en Syrie et en Egypte au Moyen Age* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1967); Houari Touati, *L’armoire à sagesse: Bibliothèques et collections en Islam* (Paris: Aubier, 2003); Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); İsmail E. Erünsal, *Orta Çağ İslâm Dünyasında Kitap ve Kütüphâne* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2018).

30 Ömer Faruk Yılmaz, *Tarih Boyunca Sahhaflık ve İstanbul Sahhaflar Çarşısı* (Istanbul: Sahhaflar Derneği, 2005); İsmail E. Erünsal, *Osmanlılarda Sahaflık ve Sahaflar* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2013).

31 On early printing in the Ottoman Empire, see, e.g., Franz Babinger, *Stambuler Buchwesen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verein für Buchwesen und Schrifttum, 1919); Selim Nüzhet [Gerçek], *Türk Matbaacılığı: İki Yüzüncü Sene-i Devriyesi Münasebetiyle* (Istanbul: Matbaa-ı Ebüzziya, 1928); Aladár v. Simonffy, *İbrahim Müteferrika: Bahnbrecher des Buchdrucks in der Türkei* (Budapest: Dr. Vajna & Bokor, 1944); Osman Ersoy, *Türkiye’ye Matbaanın Girişi ve İlk Basılan Eserler* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Yayınları, 1959); William J. Watson, “İbrahim Müteferrika and Turkish Incunabula,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88, 3 (1968), pp. 435–441; A[khmet] Kh[alilovich] Rafikov, *Ocherki istorii knigopechataniya v Turtsii* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo “Nauka,” 1973); Wahid Gdoura, *Le début de l’imprimerie arabe à Istanbul et en Syrie: Evolution de l’environnement culturel (1706–1787)* (Tunis: Publications de l’Institut Supérieur de Documentation, 1985); Orlin Sabev, *İbrahim Müteferrika, ya da İlk Osmanlı Matbaa Serüveni (1726–1746): Yeniden Değerlendirme* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2006); Fikret Sarıcaoğlu and Coşkun Yılmaz, *Müteferrika: Basmacı İbrahim Efendi and the Müteferrika Press* (Istanbul: Esen Ofset, 2008).



Qur’ān
Hafız Ahmed Agha Library 3
Folios 411b - 412a (above), 412b - 413a (below)
Sūrah al-‘Alaq, the ninety-sixth chapter of the Qur’ān,
Qur’ān and its Translation and Tarcama-i Tafsir-i Abū al-Layth, 1077/1666
Calligrapher: Galatalı Yelkenci Ömer Çelebi - Mustafa bin Hasan
Photos: T. Tuten



Qur'ān

Hafız Ahmed Agha Library 1

Folios 257b - 258a

Sūrah al-'Alaq, the ninety-sixth chapter of the *Qur'ān* (left page)

Calligrapher: Maksūd et-Tabrīzī, 963/1555

Photo: T. Tuten



Qur'an

Hafız Ahmet Agha Library 4

Folio 224b on the right containing Sūrah al-'Alaq, the ninety-sixth chapter of the Qur'an.

Serlevha, the illuminated double page frontispiece (above) with Sūrah al-Fātiha and Sūrah al-Baqara.

Calligrapher: Muhammed bin Ahmed bin Yusuf el Cüşşi, 831/1428, Photos: T. Tuten

