

Takrizât

In the literary and intellectual traditions of Arabic and Ottoman manuscript cultures, *takrizât* (Arabic: *taqrîzât*, singular: *taqrîẓ*) take a distinctive space as paratextual expressions of scholarly approval and social endorsement. More than ornamental praise, these texts served critical functions in legitimizing, disseminating and embedding manuscripts within the scholarly networks of their time.

In the manuscript culture, *takrizât* referred to not so uncommon, brief, often stylistically elevated, refined genre of laudatory commentary penned by respected scholars, jurists, poets, or Sufi masters to praise a work.

Functionally, *takrizât* operated as early forms of scholarly validation. Much like modern academic prefaces, reviews, or endorsement blurbs, they affirmed the intellectual value of a text within an established epistemic community. In a time when authorship, readership, and authority were deeply communal and relational, such endorsements were integral to a text’s reception and its circulation across madrasas, tekkes, libraries, and private collections. A single *takriz* by a prominent figure could grant a manuscript considerable prestige, inviting further readership and replication. *Takrizât* also reflected the collaborative ethos of manuscript production. These clusters of voices transformed the manuscript into a social document—attesting not only to the labor of the author but to a wider intellectual community’s engagement with the work. As such, *takrizât* were not merely marginalia or prefatory ornaments—they were documentary traces of the manuscript world’s communal dynamics and systems of trust.



DOMINIQUE EDDÉ is a Franco-Lebanese writer born in Beirut. A trained historian, she pursued studies in Beirut and at the Université Paris Sorbonne, where she was supervised by Dominique Chevallier. A novelist, essayist, and cultural thinker, she writes primarily in French and is known for her richly layered prose, political insight, and philosophical depth. Her work often explores themes of memory, exile, identity, and the entanglements of East and West.

Eddé has authored numerous novels, essays, and literary portraits, including *Lettre posthume* published in 1989. Subsequent works include *Pourquoi il fait si sombre?* (1998), *Cerfvolant* (2003—translated into English as *Kite*), *La lettre et la mort* (an interview with André Green), *Le crime de Jean Genet*, and *Kamal Jann* (translated by Ros Schwartz), as well as an essay, *Edward Said : le roman de sa pensée*, which was published in 2017 by La Fabrique. Eddé’s most recent novel *Le Palais Mawal* was released by Albin Michel in 2024.

As a public intellectual, Dominique Eddé has regularly contributed political essays to the international press, particularly on the Middle East, identity, and resistance. She delivered the opening lecture at the Institut du Monde Arabe in March 2025 for the “History Days” congress, urging us to remain humane before heroic.

“This book is more than a book. It is a living, breathing space—a site of encounters shaped by the voices of some seventy authors. At its center stands a library, founded around a fountain on the island of Rhodes in 1793 by Hafiz Ahmed Agha, and preserved through time—first by his wife Saliha Hanum and his son Ahmed Fethi Pasha, and then, generation after generation, by their descendants.

Within its thick stone walls, nearly two thousand manuscript volumes have been sheltered and safeguarded to this day. Bound in leather and stored in numbered cardboard cases, these works have endured the passage of time with remarkable resilience.

At the heart lies the genealogy and destiny of an Ottoman—and later Turkish—family. The narrative expands outward: from intimate family memory to collective history, interweaving scholarly archives with private ones. As the pages unfold, a world in motion emerges—through shifting power structures and intercommunal ruptures—culminating in a devastating moment in the Chios Massacre of 1822 and continuing toward the Bosphorus.

This world is restored like an old ancestral house—by a team of craftspeople whose roles and skills complement one another. Some rebuild the structure, piece by piece, placing it back into the broader story of war and peace. Others trace its fault lines, animate its silences with hypotheses, and move delicately through the terrain of perhaps... perhaps not.

Tarık Tüten, the great-great-great-grandson of Hafiz Ahmed Agha, while assuming the responsibility of the Foundation, has conceived this work as a series of thoughtful exchanges—between scholars and enthusiasts, erudition and intuition. He has taken on the role of conductor, with the precision of the engineer he is and an innate sensibility for respect, harmony, and friendship.

One enters this book as one would step into the idyllic courtyard of the library—lingering in places, taking in the expanse of the gardenscape through the smallest detail, watching the past gradually flow into the present and cast new light upon it.

What emerges is a theatrical atmosphere, where we glimpse both the behind-the-scenes labor and the final performance. This book is a vivid illustration of what khatim—the Arabic word for “completion” or “seal”—can mean as a union of rigor and humility, craftsmanship and permanence. It is a model of resistance in a time marked by violent transformations and collective helplessness.

Having had the privilege of being close to his mother, Leylâ Tüten, who passed away during the making of this volume, I would like to evoke her presence here, which quietly permeates the pages of this book.

Until her final days—approaching the age of one hundred—she remained endlessly curious, eager to keep learning. Less conscious of what she already knew than of what she might still discover, she embodied a rare and generous form of intelligence.

She possessed, more than anyone I have known, that deep refinement which lies in never being self-satisfied—in continually listening, observing, learning. A mélomane, a polyglot, and open to all cultures and disciplines, she embodied the very best of both Asia and Europe.

Behind her delicate creations—sculptures, paintings—was an artist who quietly stepped aside, allowing the work to speak. She knew how to balance gravity with lightness, lucidity with harmony, know-how with know-what.

All these qualities—passed down to her son—are present throughout this book. The destiny of this remarkable family is revealed slowly, page by page, like a silver-gelatin photograph coming into focus, just before the blacks and greys settle into their final depth.

I can only imagine the quiet emotion she might have felt—her admiration, free of pride—for a work so aptly named. Muhabbet was the word we used in Arabic, our mutual friend Dina Haidar and I, everytime we visited her: a word evoking affection, intimacy, and meaningful conversation.

From Şemsinur, the former slave who became the first wife of Ahmed Fethi Pasha, and then to their descendants—Güzide, Saïde, Sâmîha, and her daughter Leylâ, whom I have just recalled—this book gives women a space that official history so rarely allows. It is no small achievement.

The fictional portrait of Şemsinur, written by Nektaria Anastasiadou, ends with the image of a balcony. And it is precisely this space—perched between inside and out—that best captures the temporal and spatial dimensions offered to the reader by this book. A sheltered, elevated place, open to the breeze. A time apart, where the ticking of the clock is suspended, where conversation flows, and the past moves gently into the present and back again.

In the troubled history and geography of this region, islands—whether Greek or Turkish— occupy a central place. Here too, they appear as balconies from which the world is observed, as guardians of the rûh, the soul, as the word is known in both Arabic and Turkish.

What better way to preserve the soul of a book than through the presence of the hands that once traced its words in ink? And what more fitting tribute to those hands than to breathe life back into their time—while honoring the mystery that time still holds?”

CHRISTINE PHILLIOU is Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley, where she chairs the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures and directs the Modern Greek and Hellenic Studies Program as well as the Turkish, Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Studies (TOPOS) Program, both of which she founded. Her book, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (2010) shed light on the Greek Orthodox Christian elite of Phanariots and their role in Ottoman governance at the turn of the nineteenth century, in the age of the Greek War of Independence and on the eve of the Tanzimat Reforms. In *Turkey: A Past Against History* (2021), she turned to the closing decades of Ottoman history and the transformation to Republican Turkey and traces the history of the concept of *muhalefet*, meaning both opposition and dissent. This she did through the life and works of Refik Halid Karay, a perennial claimant to the status of *muhalif* who spanned the fall of the Ottoman Sultanate and the construction of the Republic. In both books, she applies a post-national lens to the key eras and origin stories of the Greek and the Turkish nation-states, showing us that there is so much more to the historical experience of Greeks and Turks than their national histories would allow for. More recently, she founded the İstanΠόλις digital collaborative (istanpolis.org), where she and a team of scholars conduct granular analysis of neighborhood-level communities in Ottoman Constantinople/Istanbul between the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence and the end of the Ottoman era (1821-1923). She is a winner of the Sakıp Sabancı Prize, recipient of numerous grants such as a National Endowment for the Humanities Collaborative grant, and publishes widely in academic and popular journals.

“This collection is nothing less than a portal into a forgotten world, leading the reader into a dazzling history and a new kind of imagination for Ottoman, Greek and Turkish history. In one sense, the contributions revolve around an actual library—that founded by Hafız Ahmed Ağa and Ahmed Fethi Paşa in Rhodes—which is already interesting as a relic of the Ottoman past in Rhodes, now finding itself in the modern state of Greece. But it is much more than an interesting study of an Ottoman library stranded on a post-Ottoman island. It offers us a series of lenses, or overlapping vistas, onto the lives and careers of the library’s founders, often provided by their descendants as well as by scholars from a range of specializations. It provides broader contextualization of reading, libraries, and political economy of power in the post-classical Ottoman Empire; offers a focus on one woman who had a fateful relationship to the library, its founders, and the islands of Chios and Rhodes as well as neighborhoods such as Eyüp, Tophane and Kuzguncuk in the Ottoman capital; and detailed considerations of the contents and built structures and spaces of use in the library.

The second volume offers a different kind of wide-angle lens and offers us yet another string of scholarly pearls on the history of Rhodes in the longue durée, from antiquity through the ages and empires that bring us through the Ottoman and Italian eras, and ultimately the Greek present. Each snapshot is as careful, empirically rigorous and thought-provoking as the whole collection is staggering in depth and range. This is a portal onto a dynamic and complex world of people, and manuscripts, and homes and islands, all centered around a microhistory of a library and its founders.

Beyond the specific contribution of this collection to scholarship, which is tremendous, we cannot ignore its contribution, which is perhaps even greater, to Greek and Turkish societies. This is a model of post-national history, attuned to all of the conflicts, contradictions, and meandering lines of interconnection between the supposedly separate Greek and Turkish nations. Muhabbet—conversation, chat, affection—and its not quite exact counterpart of συζήτηση—discussion—together capture both the allure and the challenge of merging Greek and Turkish perceptions of the Ottoman past. And what more beautiful case study of the shared and complex Ottoman heritage of Greeks and Turks than a library?

I congratulate Tarık Tüten for this monumental achievement and for fostering the inspiration that bursts forth from these pages!”

MOLLY GREENE studies the history of the Mediterranean Basin, the Ottoman Empire, and the Greek world. Her interests include the social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire, the experience of Greeks under Ottoman rule and the early modern Mediterranean. After earning a B.A. in political science at Tufts University (1981), Professor Greene spent several years living in Greece and then completed a Ph.D. in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton (1993), where she studied Ottoman history. Upon graduating she joined the Princeton faculty with a joint appointment in the History Department and the Program in Hellenic Studies. Her first book, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (2000), examines the transition from Venetian to Ottoman rule on the island of Crete, which the Ottomans conquered in 1669. Challenging the assumption of a radical rupture with the arrival of the Ottomans, Greene shows that the population of Crete had been drawn into the Ottoman world long before the conquest and that important continuities linked the Venetian and the Ottoman periods. Her second book, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of Mediterranean 1450-1700*, was published in 2010 and was a co-winner of the Runciman Award for that year, given for the best book in English on any aspect of Hellenism. At the center of the book is the relationship between Catholic piracy and Greek commerce in the early modern Mediterranean. In 2015 she published *The Edinburgh History of the Greeks, 1453-1768: The Ottoman Empire*, part of a multi-volume series on the history of the Greek people from antiquity until the present day.

*“Conversation in the Library or Kütüphanede Muhabbet is a highly original contribution not only to academic research but also to academic community. **Muhabbet**, which I think is best translated as convivial conversation, was a key concept in Ottoman structures of sociability. Fittingly, then, these two volumes bring together over sixty scholars to introduce to the world the extraordinary manuscript library of Hafız Ahmed Ağa, as well as the history of Rhodes in its medieval, Ottoman, colonial and Greek contexts. Hafız Ahmed Ağa was a native of Rhodes who inaugurated his library in 1793. The library is the only Ottoman library – whether in Turkey or abroad - which is still in the possession of the founder’s family. Tarik Tuten, who is the seventh generation of the family, is a resident of both Istanbul and the Dodecanese and is the current custodian of the library. He has been instrumental in the production of these two volumes as well as reviving the lost art of **Muhabbet** by bringing so many scholars – from Greece, Turkey and elsewhere – together. From a deep dive into Ottoman libraries and manuscripts to broad reflections on how Rhodiots, and Dodecanese islanders more generally, have understood history, these two volumes bring to light a lost world whose repercussions are still with us today.”*

LOUKAS TSOUKALIS received his doctoral degree from the University of Oxford where he taught for many years. He returned home as Professor of European Integration at the University of Athens and was subsequently elected as the first holder of the Eleftherios Venizelos Chair at the European Institute of the London School of Economics. He was also for long head of the economics department at the College of Europe in Bruges. He has held visiting professorships at the European University Institute in Florence, King's College London, and the Kennedy School at Harvard University. He has advised former presidents of the European Commission and the European Council. He is now Professor at the Paris School of International Affairs (Sciences Po), Emeritus Professor of the University of Athens, and President of the board of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Greece's leading think tank. Author of many articles and books translated into several European languages. In 2021, Oxford University Press published a Festschrift in his honour with contributions by leading personalities from academia and politics across Europe. His latest book *Europe's Coming of Age* was published by Polity Press in 2023.

“An Ottoman foundation with a library in Rhodes that dates back to 1793 and houses a rich collection of old manuscripts. An island with a long history of invasions and foreign occupations, also periods of multiethnic peaceful coexistence. Two volumes containing contributions from scholars from very different backgrounds on a wide range of topics, all the way from the study of Ottoman manuscripts to the massacre of Chios and the Greek war of independence, the history of both the foundation and the library, multilingualism under the Ottoman empire and a Pasha writing poems in Greek, the long presence of the Knights of St John and their strong imprint on the island, Jewish and other communities, Italian rule until the end of the Second World War followed by Rhodes and the Dodecanese becoming part of Greece. All contributions to these two volumes draw inspiration from the rich and highly diverse legacy of Rhodes, of which the Hafiz Ahmed Ağa Library is part.

*A seventh-generation custodian with great respect for the treasure he has inherited and a dream for the future. He opens the doors of the library and invites people in, aspiring to give new life to a historical monument by creating a welcoming space for scholarly work and cultural exchange. Tarik Tüten has been the driving force for this publication. He has brought many scholars together who ended up sharing his dream. The **Conversation in the Library** is a generous offering to mutual understanding, dialogue and cooperation: a true gem.”*

KONRAD HIRSCHLER is Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Hamburg and spokesperson of the Cluster of Excellence Understanding Written Artefacts. His research explores the cultural and social history of the pre-modern Middle East, with a focus on Arabic manuscript culture, libraries, reading practices, and historiography from the 12th to 16th centuries. He previously held academic posts at the University of Kiel, SOAS, and Freie Universität Berlin. His books include *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands and Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library*. He is a section editor for the *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three* and was elected to the Hamburg Academy of Sciences in 2023.

*“This is an unusual book in the best sense of the term. It is dedicated to a very special library, the Hafız Ahmed Agha Library on Rhodes, the only continuously functioning Ottoman library still managed by the endower’s family. **Conversation in the Library** demonstrates that writing a library’s history can be much more than merely chronicling its books. Bringing together a fascinating range of authors, it offers numerous insights and reflections on what this library might have signified throughout its history up to the present day. This book invites the reader to explore the library from many perspectives, including individual biographies, imperial histories, buildings, and books. Lovingly produced and utterly captivating, it comes highly recommended for anyone interested in the entangled past and present of the Eastern Mediterranean.”*

SOLİ ÖZEL is a scholar of international politics, Turkish foreign policy, and comparative democratization. His research and teaching focus on global affairs, the Middle East, and the evolution of political Islam, with a particular interest in Turkey’s place within shifting international orders. He holds a BA in Economics from Bennington College and an MA in International Relations from Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He has taught at multiple academic institutions, including UC Santa Cruz, the University of Washington, Northwestern University, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Johns Hopkins SAIS, Boğaziçi University, and Istanbul Bilgi University. He has also served as a visiting lecturer at Harvard, Yale, Georgetown, and Tufts University. Soli Özel is a former Bernstein Fellow at Yale Law School’s Schell Center for Human Rights and a Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin. He has been affiliated with the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna as a Europe’s Futures Fellow and has participated in research at the Institut Montaigne in Paris and the EU Institute for Strategic Studies. In addition to his academic work, Özel has contributed extensively to public discourse as a columnist and commentator. His writings have appeared in both Turkish and international media, including Foreign Policy, Journal of Democracy, Internationale Politik, and The International Spectator. Özel is a member of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and he continues to engage in dialogues on diplomacy, democratic backsliding, and regional geopolitics, maintaining an active role in both scholarly and policy-making communities.

*“What a comforting, warmly embracing and seductive title these two volumes have! **Muhabbet** is a word that is so much more than its primary and superficial meaning of conversation. It is a word full of undertones and meanings that reflect the core, soul and audacity of this project too. Of course, it means conversation or an exchange between two persons, but this is no ordinary conversation. It is a sharing of views, feelings, thoughts that at its best is deep, meaningful and full of layers. This is why the closeness of a relation between two friends/individuals who are invested in one another is encouraged as in the expression “muhabbetiniz bol olsun” (may your **muhabbet** be deep and rich). Only intimates or close friends can truly have this kind of rapport or communication. The word also means affection and it exudes tenderness. The unearthing of such meanings or putting the accent on those is precisely what this book does. Tarık Tüten, the book’s editor, is the seventh-generation custodian of a unique library that the cosmopolitan Mediterranean island of Rhodes with its rich history, once part of a cosmopolitan empire is lucky to host. If Tarık were not a friend, and had I not known the effort, dedication, patience and love that were invested in its production I would still be in awe of the two volumes that we as readers have in our hands. **Kütüphanede Muhabbet** is a treasure in more ways than one. Its very title along with its content, the **muhabbet** between its texts and authors and perspective puts to rest the clichés, prejudices, frozen dogmas or the distortions that reading history from nationalist perspectives entrap us in. We owe gratitude to Hafız Ahmet Ağa, all the men and women among his descendants for having safeguarded this treasure with deep **muhabbet** for all of us and future generations.”*