

N. G. McBurney  
*early printing & manuscripts  
of the Islamic world*

List VI

*From a Cairo broadside  
with the arms of the Khedivate  
to a lithographed Ottoman juz'  
endowed in the name of a eunuch  
& a Tunis Qur'an printed  
on pink paper*

2021



*Statements of rarity and institutional holdings are not absolute.  
Material in non-European languages frequently falls between the cracks of  
institutional cataloging. Please do take these statements as a guide rather than gospel.  
I am always happy to hear of examples I have missed.*



## Ottoman book culture: Qur'an between manuscript & print

1. [Qur'an.] [**Manuscript title:**] الجزء ٧ واذا سمعوا (Part 7: “And when they hear...”) [Most likely Istanbul, no later than 1879 CE].

Small 8vo (17 x 12 cm), lithographed Arabic text on wove paper, 15 lines of *naskh* per page within double-ruled frames; [ff.9]; catchwords on lower margin, marginal divisions marked by floreated roundels with elaborate extensions, *sura* headings in floral cartouches. Bound in contemporary roan, gilt, over flexible boards, with flap, and pastedowns of thick yellow paper. Cut paper label with manuscript title on upper board. Upper board and flap bowed. Sewing loose but holding. Intermittent stains, a handful of marginal tears, and occasional abrasions, touching the odd letter. Final blank with endowment inscription in the name of al-Hajj Mustafa Agha, dated 2 S[afar] [12]93 AH (26 January 1879), the inscription's ink flecked with mica.

£1,200

### [images](#)

A printed Qur'an, split, bound, and endowed for use by young scholars: this slim octavo is one of the thirty sections into which a single printed book was transformed, mirroring the long-standing practice of copying Qur'an manuscripts in thirty individual volumes, which permitted a wider readership than a single-volume text. The text runs from *al-Ma'idah* (5:83) to *al-An'am* (6:110).

The Ottoman state restricted the circulation of printed Qur'an texts within its borders until 1871, when the first licitly printed Qur'an was issued in Istanbul under imperial auspices. Whole Qur'an volumes and individual parts circulated prior to that date, part of the rising tide of Muslim print within Iran, South Asia, and Russia, a phenomenon which provoked much Ottoman anxiety. Contemporary references often refer to individual printed Qur'an parts but this is the first example I have handled. It was clearly not printed individually: a complete Qur'an was divided into parts. I have not traced any comparable institutional examples from this period, though I suspect that may be both because such Qur'an parts did not attract contemporary orientalist interest and because their use in Qur'an schools ensured a brief but useful life in the hands of studious children. The wear and tear on this copy suggests as much.

The dated endowment inscription places this book at the advent of the Ottoman printed Qur'an. Though I have not traced the edition, the format and calligraphy of the

text suggest strongly that this is one of the early Istanbul editions, rather than an Indian export Qur'an. The endowment was made in the name of the late Hajji Mustafa Agha, the astonishingly powerful and influential 17th-century Chief Harem Eunuch, whose numerous and ambitious endowments persisted for centuries after his death. The inscription does not specify the location of the library: al-Hajj Mustafa Agha endowed schools for the teaching of Qur'an in Cairo, where he renovated, the *Sabil-kuttab* of the Mamluk sultan Qa'it Bay for the purpose; Mecca, where he had made pilgrimage in 1602; and Istanbul, which is the most plausible location for this book's endowment in 1879. This volume speaks to a striking continuity between 17th-century endowment and 19th-century acquisition, smoothly absorbing the new printed Qur'an into traditional charitable and scholastic practice.

No comparable institutional example traced.

For more on al-Hajj Mustafa Agha and his context, see Jane Hathaway's *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: from African Slave to Power-Broker* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).



Late Ottoman lithographed *Dala'il*  
in the hand of a 17th-century calligrapher,  
Şeyh Seyyid Ahmed Hamdi

2. al-Jazuli, Abu Muhammad bin Suleiman. دلائل الخيرات (**Guides to the blessings**).  
*Istanbul, Matbaa-i Amire, Rabi' al-Akhir 1309 AH (November/December 1891).*

Small 8vo (18 x 12 cm), lithographed Arabic text on thin wove paper, 13 lines of *naskh* per page within double-ruled frames, margins with commentary and gloss printed at angles; pp.(1)-32, (1)-204, [1, decorative colophon], [1, blank]; catchwords on lower margin, with elaborately floreated headpieces and chapter headings; full-page illustration of the Tree of Life used as a section title, and 2 full-page illustrations, depicting Mecca and Medina. Bound in contemporary quarter-roan over cloth, pastedowns of green paper. Binding rubbed but sound. A handful of marginal tears. Intermittent contemporary pen and pencil annotation in Arabic.

SOLD

[images](#)

A charming illustrated edition of Abu Muhammad bin Suleiman al-Jazuli's devotional classic, *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, a 15th-century pious compilation, centred on prayers said over the Prophet Muhammad, printed by the Ottoman state press. The heart of the text is an explanation of the virtue inherent in such prayers, a list of the Prophet's epithets, a description of his tomb at Medina, and the bulk, eight sections of prayers intended to span a week. Both in manuscript and print this corpus is often surrounded by paratext and supplementary prayers, as evident in the abundant margins of the present edition.

Abu Muhammad bin Suleiman al-Jazuli (d.1465 CE) was a Moroccan mystic, a member of the Shadhiliyya Sufi order, known to have spent years at Mecca and Medina, though much of his life is shrouded by subsequent hagiography. He was executed by a provincial governor after his piety attracted increasing popular acclaim. This work is his most enduring legacy.

The popularity of al-Jazuli's devotional text extends from the western Muslim world to Southeast Asia: this Ottoman edition echoes centuries of manuscript production, with its paired illustrations of Mecca and Medina. The use of the Tree of Life motif for a full-page section title is more unusual but appropriate enough to the text.

The attractively decorated colophon-page which follows the body text, recording place, press, and date of 1308 AH, contradicts the textual colophon's date of 1309 AH (p.204). The textual colophon gives the text's title and calligrapher, Şeyh Seyyid Ahmed Hamdi, a 17th-century Ottoman poet. The lack of copy-specific detail in the decorative colophon suggests that it might have been used by the press for multiple editions. The penchant of Ottoman presses for lithographing texts after manuscripts copied by admired calligraphers is well-known, though these lithographed editions often tread a fine line between faithful facsimile and unmentioned revision.

No institutional copy traced.

For an engaging study of the tradition of illustrating manuscripts of this text, see:

Witkam, Jan Just, "The battle of the images. Mekka vs. Medina in the iconography of the manuscripts of al-Jazuli's *Dala'il al-Khayrat*", in Judith Pfeiffer & Manfred Kropp, editors, *Technical approaches to the Transmission and Edition of Oriental Manuscript - Beirut Texts and Studien, No. 111* (Beirut, 2007), pp.67-82 & 295-300.



### Khedival broadside of patriotic verse

3. Fikri, Hussein. تهنئة بقدم عزيز البلاد (**Felicitations upon reaching the beloved country**). [*Cairo, no printer, circa 1900.*]

Broadside on wove paper, 4to (34.5 x 22.5 cm), typographically printed Arabic text, with 1 line of *muhaqqaq* and 16 lines of *naskh*, surmounted by the Khedival arms. Fold lines, faint discolouration to paper, and three minute burn marks just touching three words.

£350

[images](#)

A short, elegiac poem printed on fine ivory paper, apparently under the auspices of the Khedivate, hymning Egypt, signed Hussein Fikri. Printed broadsides in Khedival Egypt might suggest populist-agitation more readily than state-sanctioned publication, but the accession of the independent-minded Abbas Hilmi Pasha to the Khedivate in 1892 marked a turn towards increasingly nationalist leadership and growing tension with Britain, culminating in his 1914 deposition.

I have been unable to trace the poet or poem. Perhaps Hussein Fikri was merely a convenient pen-name for a prominent figure in the Khedivate, or simply a minor bureaucrat given opportunity to sing the praises of his beloved country.

Statements of rarity for printed ephemera are hostages to fortune but the disposable nature of broadsides suggests this is rare enough. It is the only example from this period I have seen in the trade, though I suspect uncatalogued comparable examples exist in institutional collections.

Unrecorded.



illustrated broadside  
on the Prophet's letter to Muqawqis  
a treasure of the Topkapi

4. [Anonymous.] [**Letter from the Prophet Muhammad to Muqawqis of Egypt.**] [Istanbul], *Awqaf Matbaasi*, 1344 AH (1925/6 CE).

Broadside on wove paper, 4to (34 x 21 cm), lithographed Arabic and Turkish text in *muhaqqaq*, *naskh* and *ruq'ah* printed in red, green, and black, within an elaborate printed frame of typographic ornaments printed in blue and green; central photo-lithographic illustration in black and white of the letter from the Prophet to Muqawqis. Fold lines, stains, and spots, with a handful of marginal tears, just touching printed frame. Worn but attractive.

SOLD

[\*images\*](#)

A striking relic of the Topkapi's transition from imperial palace to republican museum, depicting and explaining a remarkable letter written in a Kufic script, which bears the seal of the Prophet Muhammad, addressed to Muqawqis, Coptic ruler of Egypt, and remains today part of the Topkapi's Sacred Trust, a treasury of relics.

The broadside opens with the *bismillah* in red *muhaqqaq*, followed by Ottoman Turkish headline in red *ruq'ah*, black and white illustration of the Prophet's letter, parallel Ottoman Turkish translation and Arabic transcription, and finally a brief sketch history of the letter, Ottoman Turkish printed in green *naskh*. In short, this broadside is a splendid display of linguistic and calligraphic code-switching. Its imprint places it shortly after the tumultuous events of 1922-4, which saw the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, Mehmed VI's departure from Istanbul, and the abolition of the Caliphate. Moreover, 1924 was the year in which the Topkapi was transformed from palace to public museum, which makes this broadside, devoted to a sacred relic of the Prophet, intimately associated with the Ottoman assemblage of such artifacts in the imperial palace, all the more striking.

Muqawqis remains an enigmatic figure in the historiography of early Islamic Egypt, with his identification an ongoing debate. This letter was said to have accompanied the Prophet's emissary Hatib bin Balta'a to Egypt in 628 CE. This history

and the letter's text are documented in Arabic sources, though they are not readily matched to any contemporary non-Muslim sources.

In 1850 Etienne Barthelemy, a minor French orientalist based in Cairo, announced his discovery of this letter. Barthelemy seems to have spent much of his time scrounging for early Coptic manuscripts, allegedly to rescue them from oblivion of monastic libraries. Suffice to say the mechanism by which this manuscript letter was abstracted from a monastery near Akhmim remains suspiciously vague in contemporary accounts, though the fragment's physical discovery, revealed beneath layers of pasted-down Coptic fragments, is described in luscious detail.

Shortly after Barthelemy's "discovery" the *Journal Asiatique* published a long article (1854, pp.482-518) on the letter and its discovery, written by François-Alphonse Belin (1817-1877) and dated 10 March 1852. The article included a facsimile of the letter which shows text and seal impression so faded as to be barely legible, and describes the difficulty of transcribing the text. Belin viewed the letter's attribution to the 7th century as dubious, but deemed it sufficiently interesting to suggest its acquisition by the Bibliotheque Imperiale in his conclusion.

But the letter did not go to Paris. By 1858, as this broadside notes, it was in Istanbul, purchased by agents of Sultan Abdulmejid I. It might have taken eight years, but Barthelemy had sold his manuscript. A photograph of the letter was published by the Egyptian newspaper *al-Hilal* in 1904. That illustration was reproduced in D.S. Margoliouth's *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam* (London, 1905): this broadside's illustration appears to have been taken after one of these earlier printed illustrations. By 1904, the letter's text and seal impression were darker and readily legible. More recent images of the letter show the parchment is now so dark as to render the text illegible.

This broadside straddles the transition between Ottoman empire and Turkish republic neatly, mingling pious antiquarianism with nascent nationalism. The caliphate might be gone but the Topkapi's Sacred Trust remained. It is also a vivid example of popular, ephemeral print culture in 1920s Istanbul.

Unrecorded.



### Tunis Qur'an lithographed on coloured paper

5. [Qur'an.] من القرآن العظيم [ - الاخر ] الربع الاول (The First Quarter [ - Final Quarter] from the Magnificent Qur'an). Tunis, printed at the expense of al-Tijani al-Muhammadi, owner of al-Manar Press & Library, 1365 AH (1945/6 CE).

Four parts in one, 4to (23.5 x 16.5 cm), lithographed Arabic text on pink and white wove paper, 11 lines of *maghribi* per page within double-ruled frames, catchwords at bottom; pp.(1)-43, 2-41, 2-41, 2-41, 2-41, 2-47, 2-49, 2-45, 2-43, 2-45, 2-47, 2-45, 2-45, 2-47, 2-9, [1], [6, blank], (9)-46, [1, blank], 2-41, 2-45, 2-44, [1, blank], 2-41, 2-43, 2-39, [1], (39)-45, 2-41, 2-37, 2-43, 2-45, 2-47, 2-41, 2-44, [1, blank], 2-48, 4 [prayers], [1, colophon], [3], [1, blank], [1]; four

full-page decorated section-titles, five double-page openings within lithographed decorated frames, lithographed cartouches for each *sura*, and a variety of endpieces using geometric and arabesque patterns; pagination and *juz'* count printed along top margin, with crescent and star division markers on outer margin, verses marked by numerals within circles, and end of each *juz'* by double asterisks. Bound in original cloth-backed red imitation leather, boards printed in gold, with flap. Edges of binding worn, a few small stains on top- and fore-edge. Paper evenly toned and colours slightly faded. Contents otherwise all but pristine.

SOLD

### [\*images\*](#)

A publisher-bookseller's turn as calligrapher and illuminator, this lithographed Qur'an is a tour de force by al-Tijani al-Muhammadi, printed on coloured paper in Tunis at the close of World War II. The text follows the recitation of Abu Sa'id Uthman ibn Sa'id al-Qutbi (d.812 CE), better known as Warsh, one of the canonical recitations of the Qur'an, and that commonly used in North and West Africa. The 19th and early 20th-century market for printed Qur'an editions was dominated by Istanbul, Cairo, and Bombay, whose texts generally followed the recitation of Hafs, which constitutes the majority of modern printed editions.

This Qur'an is divided into four quarters, each with separate title-page and elaborately decorated double-page opening. The first quarter includes an additional double-page opening for the entire first *sura*, within plainer frames with calligraphic cartouches at top and bottom, one neatly signed "Tijani". The eccentric pagination roughly corresponds to each *juz'* and is continuous, more or less, between the four parts.

Each title-page notes that the printing and vocalisation of the text has been checked by the office of the Imam, whose telephone number is provided. The colophon provides a note on Warsh and his recitation, lists the authorities consulted, and notes that al-Tijani al-Muhammadi studied with 'Abd al-Jawad al-Benghazi, teacher of recitation at the "Great Mosque" of Tunis.

The final page is a majuscule repeat of the imprint, with al-Tijani al-Muhammadi printed in bold, larger than every other word. The format of his name as given throughout leaves off any personal names, unusually, and clearly expects the reader to know both press and bookshop. His calligraphy is clear and efficient rather than elaborate, while the unusual pagination and mixture of decorative motifs suggests an individual labour of devotion. The pride is palpable, from the detailed account of this Qur'an and its preparation to Tijani's signature neatly tucked into the decoration around the first *sura*.

No other copy traced. Harvard hold a 1966 Qur'an edition and Waseda University an undated Qur'an, both with similar imprints. Neither provide a pagination. Harvard note that their copy is "4 volumes in 2", while Waseda describe "various pagings", which suggests some relation to the present edition.

