

Kemal Beydilli,

İki İbrahim: Müteferrika ve Halefi [*Two İbrahims: Müteferrika and His Successor – Off The Founders of The Ottoman Printing Press*],

İstanbul: Kronik Kitap, 2019, 160 p., ISBN: 978-975-243-0983.

The Ottoman Turks started using the printing press technology for the first time in 1727, thanks to the efforts of İbrahim Müteferrika, a Hungarian convert to Islam. If the history of printing is examined, readers can observe that the wood-block printing in China's Tang Dynasty had been prevalent as early as the 8th century. Over all, Muslims had good relations with Chinese during the Tang Dynasty as they borrowed papermaking technique from them but not the printing tool. Later on, the Ottomans also were not interested in it although they had contacts with China since their early days. In Germany, around 1440, goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, and there were several points of interactions between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. However, the Ottoman Muslims were not interested in this new innovation for a long time, although non-Muslim subjects of their Empire had shown interest early on. As well-known, Gutenberg's important innovation was the development of hand-molded metal printing matrices, thus producing a movable type-based printing system which enabled large number of books, pamphlets and other materials to be printed.

Kemal Beydilli who spent long time researching and then meticulously authoring *Mühendishâne* (The Imperial Engineering School) several years ago recently came up with another mind-boggling but fascinating book, *İki İbrahim: Müteferrika ve Halefi* (Two İbrahims: Müteferrika and His Successor) that will force us not only re-visit the persona of the leading figures who introduced printing press but also re-think certain aspects of the phases of Turkish modernization during the hazy 18th century.

İbrahim Müteferrika received permission to publish non-religious books in 1727 in the Ottoman Empire. He was Hungarian convert who was granted the palace rank of "distinguished service" after a glittering career as an Ottoman official. The second İbrahim in the title is Kadı İbrahim or Küçük İbrahim was the successor of Müteferrika. Beydilli's book grapples with following critical questions and unveils several unknown aspects as far as these two entrepreneurs concerned and corrects a number of certain mistakes by putting these two İbrahims in focus in his research:

- Who was İbrahim Müteferrika really? Did he pursue special duties or agendas while being busy with establishing printing press? It seems he was providing classified information to Vienna, and his secret code apparently was 601.801 or (*Der alte Ibrahim*) 601.801.1.514, as Kemal Beydilli discovered in a critical historical document (dated 1746) that he unveils in page 24, 46 and 47. Some novice students of history may ask more historical documents or evidence to prove the case, then, I would recommend to check Russian archives where certain recent studies unveiled additional evidences.¹ As this critical information is verified by other sources, – of course, how many evidences someone may need to substantiate the case as far as classified information concerned is another tricky issue here – certain phases of the history of Ottoman Turkish modernization surely needs to be revisited, perhaps reconstructed after this significant finding.
- When did he die? The author corrects certain works' fallacies and speculations here. Interested researchers can examine the pages from 34 to 39.
- Who was his successor? This was totally unknown until his book released, and now we know that it was Kadı/Judge İbrahim who replaced Müteferrika by taking over not only his printing press but also his secret duty of providing classified information to the House of Habsburg. Beydilli presents an arduous here by examining relevant archival records in order to discover the identity of second İbrahim. His relationship with Müteferrika, places of appointments as Kadı/Judge in the Ottoman Empire, his activities as the owner of the printing press, his heritage after he died in 1777, number of books as well as 33 fur coats recorded in his estate/tereke and several other critical historical facts and terms as well as their contextual analysis can be traced between the pages 51 and 89.

1 See Constantin A. Panchenko, "The Russian Intelligence Service in the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the 18th Century," *Kitâb-ı Hedâyâ: Studien zum Osmanischen Reich und seinen Nachbargebieten. Zu Ehren von Hedda Reindl-Kiel*, edited by Sevgi Ağcagül & Henning Sievert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht/Bonn University Press, 2020), pp. 178-180. Also examine Mariya Vladimirovna, *The Russian Residency in Constantinople, 1700-1774: Russian-Ottoman Diplomatic Encounters*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgetown University, 2016), pp. 165-166, 216-217.

This 160 page-long book may look short in size, but it is surely rich and mind-triggering with original content and groundbreaking discoveries. It unveils certain unknown aspects of İbrahim Müteferrika and the identity of his successor, Kadî İbrahim as well as his estates (*tereke*) by making references to original archival records, some of which are shown in the appendices.

What books and reading meant for the Ottomans in the early modern period, who the reading public was and what kinds of books Ottoman men and women read are the questions that another research should grapple with. Readers look forward to peruse a comprehensive monograph on Ottoman adventure of printing press in a way Elizabeth L. Eisenstein wrote her major book on the printing press in early modern Europe² although this new technology failed to introduce significant change in the Ottoman world in the 18th century but rather opened up a new page of change and modernization in Turkish history.

To err is human uttered in many cultures and languages from Chinese to English, so does this book in few places. Although the book is well-written and stirringly readable, archival documents and arguments are nicely woven together and analyzed, there are some typos here and there in trivial places. For instance, Selim Karahasanoğlu's name and his works are recorded correctly in number of pages and in the bibliography, but he appears as a different person in certain pages (as Karaosmanoğlu in 93, 120, 121, 122, 159) in the text as well as in the footnotes. Beydilli himself most probably became aware of these minor errors since good scholars can become cognizant of their mistakes on their own when they commit *Schönheitsfehler* from time to time. So, there was no need to mention them here perhaps. I prefer, however, to record them here for the publisher to correct when they decide to reprint.

All in all, Beydilli's *İki İbrahim: Müteferrika ve Halefi* is an outcome of significant scholarship and a must-read for scholars as well as students who are interested in phases of Turkish modernization, printing press in the Ottoman world and early modern Ottoman intellectual history.

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2. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 794 p.