Scott Reese

Introduction

One of the last great biases of the Western academy in relation to Islam centres around the issue of mechanical print.1 The first successful Muslim owned printing press dates only to 1727 and the Ottoman grant of a license to İbrahim Müteferrika – a state functionary and entrepreneur – to establish a business devoted chiefly to the publication of works of a secular nature including history, geography, government organisation and occasionally science.2 Because the printing press was established in the Islamic world a full two and a half centuries after Gutenberg, Western-trained scholars have adopted the question ‘why so late?’ as a near mantra. Until recently, the answers to this query have focused almost universally on Muslim shortcomings: Muslim disdain for Western science, a cultural obsession with calligraphy that could not be emulated by type, a fear of ‘defiling’ the sacred texts through the printing process, and the jealousy of the ulama who feared type posed a threat to their religious authority. Indeed, one persistent myth held that the Ottoman sultan, Bayazid II – prodded by the religious elites – banned all printing at the end of the fifteenth century, violation of the firman being punishable by death.3 All of these have been offered up as explanations for the late adoption of mechanical print.4

One by one each has been dismantled. There exists no convincing evidence for a Muslim disdain for print or a belief that a tool of the unbelievers would desecrate the holy scriptures. Most important, there is no evidence for the existence of Bayazid II’s supposed decree.5 Indeed, important evidence exists to suggest just the opposite, that Muslim intellectuals and leaders understood print as a powerful and useful tool. In fact, a Muslim predisposition towards the efficacy of print can be found in the earliest works produced by Müteferrika. Appended to each of the first books in 1729, was a fatwa or religious opinion

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1 This longstanding and misguided trope in modern scholarship dates to the 1950s with works such as Carter 1955, Febvre and Martin 1958, and is perpetuated more recently in Coşan, Miceli and Rubin 2009.
2 See Osborn, this volume.
3 Faroqhi 2000, 94–96; Finkel 2005, 366. Indeed, J.R. Osborn speculates that, if a ban did exist, it may have targeted only certain types of texts rather than establishing a prohibition against print (Osborn 2017, 106–108).
4 See, for instance, Atiyeh 1995; Roper 2013.
given by *Sheikh ül-Islam* Abdullah Effendi, who was tasked with providing official religious blessing to the publisher’s endeavour by the Ottoman Court: ‘If a man undertakes to imitate the characters of handwritten books’, he was asked, ‘[...] by forging letters [of metal] making type and printing books conforming absolutely to handwritten models, is he entitled to legal authorisation?’. The scholar replied: ‘Allahu alim [only God can say]. [But] when a person who understands the art of the press has the talent to cast letters and make type correctly and exactly, then the operation offers great advantages’.6

The 1729 fatwa, cited in two of this volume’s chapters, is critically important for two reasons. First, it shows that Muslim religious authorities, in the Ottoman Empire at least, bore no hostility towards mechanical print for religious or any other reasons. Indeed, as *Sheikh ül-Islam* Abdullah noted, it offered ‘great advantages’. Equally important was the timing of this notice. A growing body of scholarship holds that the eighteenth century was also a critical period for the evolution of print in Europe. Strong scribal traditions continued there well into the 1700s and it was only late in the century that print attained an unchallenged position of pre-eminence across society.7 Perhaps the question we should be asking is not why did Muslim printing appear ‘so late’ following Gutenberg, but where does print fit within the Islamic written tradition? That is the question with which this volume concerns itself.

## 1 Towards an Islamic written tradition

In his brief but influential 1986 work, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Talal Asad proposed that Islam should not be approached as a static set of beliefs. Rather, in his estimation, it is more profitably viewed and explored as a malleable and inherently adaptable ‘discursive tradition’.8 This approach is one that has gained increasing currency among Islamic studies scholars, the most relevant of whom, for our purposes, is Samira Haj. Her book *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition* is a re-examination of the thought of the Arabian and Egyptian religious reformers Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) and Muhammad Abdu (d. 1905) within the context of ‘discursive tradition’. As such, it does not deal directly with notions of writing or print. However, the ideas she posits regarding

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6 Osborn 2017, 117.
8 Asad 1986.
the nature of tradition and its implications for how we comprehend social, cultural and intellectual evolution are instructive for the way we understand the emergence of print. Thus, it is an idea that bears revisiting in some detail.

Although within the last two or three generations, scholars of Islam have managed to drop most of the worst tendencies represented by Orientalist thought, most academics have continued to measure Muslim ‘progress’ using Western yardsticks. So, Haj notes, Muslim reformers are defined as modern ‘only to the extent that they employ modern [European] material and institutional resources’ and ideas. Modern Islamic reform is presumed possible only through the adoption of these.

It does not take a great leap of imagination to see how a similar critique can, and should, be applied to how scholars have spoken about the emergence of print in Muslim society. As Osborn and Nemeth point out in this volume, along with many others throughout the field, the widespread adoption of print by Muslims in the nineteenth century is always portrayed as making up for an earlier ‘absence’, ‘lack’, or ‘failure’. This is in large part due to the application of Western benchmarks as markers of ‘progress’ that results in a kind of technological determinism. If the trajectory of Islamic print does not adhere to the same indicators, it is by definition an aberration from the Western norm.

As Haj has demonstrated, a much more fruitful approach is to engage with Islamic institutions within their own ‘discursive tradition’, a process that consists of ‘historically evolving discourse[s] embodied in the practices and institutions of communities’. ‘Tradition’ she writes, ‘refers not simply to the past or its repetition but rather to the pursuit of ongoing coherence by making reference to a set of texts, procedures, arguments and practices’ that constitute a perceived canon. But, rather than a rigid, unchanging body of knowledge, Muslim communities engage in a continuous reinterpretation of this canon, enabling them, in the words of Adeline Masquelier, ‘to respond to the conditions of a changing world’.

For Haj, the primary focus of the ‘discursive tradition’ is the emergence of ‘modern’ Islamic reform within the context of a much longer history of Muslim intellectual endeavour. But a similar case can be made for understanding the

10 Osborn and Nemeth, this volume; Sajdi 2014 and Schwartz 2015.
11 Sajdi 2014, 122.
12 Haj 2009, 4.
13 Haj 2009, 5.
history of print not as an innovation belatedly adopted from the West, but as a technology and a paradigm that emerges as part of a historically deeper Islamic tradition of writing that evolves and changes to fit the needs of Muslim societies. Ample evidence of such change exists in the secondary literature. However, few scholars discuss such transformations as part of an on-going discursive process that takes place across space and time. One notable exception to this is Ahmad El Shamsy’s recent book, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics*. In an amazing feat of erudite detective work, El Shamsy convincingly demonstrates how a small cadre of Egyptian and Ottoman elite bibliophiles resurrected many of the foundational works of the Islamic classical tradition from what he describes as a post classical malaise. Equally important, his work constitutes an excellent illustration of the evolution of the Islamic written tradition as works moved from manuscript into print within the context of the late Ottoman Empire; a tradition that stretched back more than twelve-hundred years by this point.\(^\text{15}\)

The essays in this volume seek to further complicate this picture. As such, there are several things we must bear in mind from the outset. First, the Islamic written tradition was, and is, a process whose creators included not just those from the so-called Arab heartland but the far wider global *Umma* or community of believers. So, while we can argue the existence of a single Islamic written tradition, it is a whole constructed from many parts. Second, the written tradition is inherently discursive. Writing systems and texts, of course, must be created by people. As such, the various elements of written expression (e.g., scripts, genres, punctuation and accepted conventions to name but a few) only emerge through processes of discourse about what is and what is not acceptable. Finally, participation in the written tradition was hardly the sole purview of intellectual elites. Most studies of reading and writing in Islam – especially those focused on the pre-modern period – have tended to concentrate on the scholarly production of elites. This is due largely to the sources that have survived, as modern scholars readily admit.\(^\text{16}\) In practice, however, it was a tradition of writing from which all Muslims could draw from and contribute to regardless of geographic location or social status. This is a feature that becomes increasingly clear as we move closer to the modern with a larger array of surviving source material available to scholars.

Written Arabic was in its infancy at the time the Prophet appeared in the seventh century. By the eighth century, however, a sophisticated scribal tradition had emerged as the dominant paradigm for the transmission of knowledge.

\(^{15}\) El Shamsy 2020, 4–5.

\(^{16}\) See Hirschler 2012.
Some of the earliest genres to emerge included poetry, based on pre-Islamic models, prose works for courtly behaviour crafted from middle-Persian prototypes as well as bureaucratic writing that served the needs of the growing Islamic state. But at the centre of the written tradition lay what became known as the ‘ulūm al-dīn or the religious sciences. Including Quranic commentary (tafsīr), jurisprudence (fiqh) grammar (nahw), theology (‘ilm al-tawhīd) and mysticism (taṣawwuf), among others, the disciplines developed specific genres of texts that took on particular hallmarks. The question-and-answer format of classical fiqh texts, the marginalia commentary used to annotate classical theological works and augmented five hemistich poems of takhmis collections are all standard forms that date to the height of Islamic learning in the medieval centuries of Islam. In addition, various conventions emerged that served to legitimate and authorize texts as correct, authentic knowledge. The concept of the ijāza, or literally a ‘license to transmit’, is well known, but this was hardly the only safeguard put in place to ensure that not only were those who transmitted texts qualified to do so, but that the knowledge contained therein was ‘correct’ and rightly guided. Dictation, formal public readings, drafts and ‘clean’ copies that were checked and checked again, notifications of which were carefully placed in the final written manuscript.\(^17\)

However, this tradition was hardly stagnant, and changes regularly occur as responses to the needs, demands and difficulties encountered by the authors, as well as the consumers, of written artefacts. Konrad Hirschler has noted, for instance, numerous syntactical and punctuation innovations that appeared in Arabic prose between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries were driven largely by a documented growth in readers and part of an effort to make the written word more accessible.\(^18\) Nir Shafir has demonstrated the emergence of another consumer-driven innovation in the seventeenth century, the appearance of pamphlets as a relatively new genre of writing in the Central Islamicate lands.

Shafir argues that historians of the Islamic book have tended to focus primarily on works produced for the religious sciences. Such books were linguistically and conceptually complex and correspondingly expensive. As such, they were aimed at a very limited, elite audience. From the mid-seventeenth century at least, there began to appear various types of cheap books that included ‘stories and tales (hikāya) and catechismic texts (‘ilm al-hāl), and possibly most important, polemical pamphlets. Inexpensive, brief and written in clear accessible prose, these hand-written booklets – produced in their hundreds,
if not thousands – reveal the presence of a growing reading public outside the religious and political elites, albeit one that was primarily urban.\textsuperscript{19} So, in the mid-seventeenth century, Islamic textual traditions and genres, even in the Arabic heartland, were already shifting regardless of whether print was being utilized or not.\textsuperscript{20}

Manuscript pamphlets represented a relatively innovative element of the written Islamic tradition. Referred to as \textit{risālas} or treatises, they were not only cheap, but enabled and encouraged individuals to read independently outside the madrasa setting.\textsuperscript{21} As such, ‘manuscripts [acted] as agents rather than the ideas inscribed within’. They were written artefacts ‘that ...encouraged superficial and visual reading, a practice outside the traditional social strictures of learned society’.\textsuperscript{22} Equally important, these were not objects that encouraged spiritual contemplation or simple moral self-improvement. Rather, they were ‘purposefully argumentative texts, made to be used by groups of skilled and unskilled readers who wanted ready access to arguments and proofs to deploy in debates’.\textsuperscript{23} Most were devoted to a variety of legal and social debates including the acceptability of certain religious practices and cultural innovations such as the consumption of coffee and tobacco both of which were held by some to be indicative of declining societal morality.\textsuperscript{24}

In many cases, the authors of such tracts were noted scholars. Ibn Taymiyya was an early example, while probably the most prolific among late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century pamphleteers was the Damascene Abd al-Ghani al-Nabalusi (1642–1731), who wrote more than two hundred pamphlets during his lifetime.\textsuperscript{25} But, as readership was beginning to change in the early modern era, so was authorship. In her book, \textit{The Barber of Damascus}, Dana Sajdi discusses the rise of ‘nouveau literacy’ in the Levant from the mid eighteenth-century. A certain level of literacy had long existed in urban settings outside of the religious and political elites.\textsuperscript{26} However, by the eighteenth century, in Syria at least, literary endeavours were being taken up by locals of disparate backgrounds who seemed to have viewed it as a mode of creating their own cultural capital. Mostly through the genre of chronicle, or local histories, people as

\textsuperscript{19} The following is taken from Shafir 2016, 86–97.

\textsuperscript{20} For a detailed discussion of Europe see Johns 1998.

\textsuperscript{21} Shafir 2016, 93.

\textsuperscript{22} Shafir 2016, 87.

\textsuperscript{23} Shafir 2016, 88; also, Terzioglu 2013, 83.

\textsuperscript{24} Shafir 2016, 94.

\textsuperscript{25} Shafir 2016, 120.

\textsuperscript{26} See Hirschler 2012 for a full discussion of this.
varied as Shi‘i farmers, Greek Orthodox priests and a barber from Damascus used writing as a way to lay claim to authority in a political and social landscape that was quickly changing. This occurred, Sajdi notes, as regional provincial elites such as large landowners, merchants and tribal chiefs were rapidly emerging to challenge the presumptive power of the Ottoman state. Driven by economic issues, growing sectarianism and a more general desire for regional autonomy within the Ottoman structure, Sajdi argues that written expression in local Arabic vernacular became one tool of this upward mobility.

Whether or not Sajdi is correct about such works as tools for acquiring social and cultural capital – these were, after all, works with a limited distribution – they do represent the emergence of a new genre within the tradition. The *yam‘iyyat* or daily chronicle were works of history composed by non-elite authors frequently in various registers of Arabic – both literary ‘classical’ and more colloquial language. In these we certainly witness the emergence of a new set of voices often expressing their dissatisfaction with their social and political betters and with sufficient examples to be regarded as a new branch in the written Arabic tradition, one that seems to presage the seemingly explosive growth of readers, authors and written objects in the following century.

## 2 Mechanical print and the Islamic written tradition

In this light, the adoption of print in the nineteenth century should not be understood as a sudden break with the past. Instead, it is more profitable to approach Islamicate print as emerging within the framework of an Islamic written tradition. Rather than a sudden print ‘revolution’, the mechanical production of writing in Muslim contexts developed through various continuities and adaptations to changing circumstances over a long period of time. This is what J.R. Osborn refers to in his contribution to this volume as a ‘long revolution’, a term coined by Raymond Williams. European technological innovation, imperial expansion and Christian missionization are certainly part of this picture. But these were hardly the only determining factors. Local contexts such as

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27 Sajdi 2014, 19.
28 Sajdi 2014, 15–20
29 Sajdi 2014.
30 Osborn, this volume, referring to Williams 1961.
geography, economics, political culture and not least of all aesthetic tastes, also
played a role. But, essential in the decision-making process of Muslims when
turning to mechanical print is an element that has been hitherto neglected: the
previous twelve-hundred years of writing culture and book production.

The papers in this volume seek to push our understanding of the Islamic
written tradition beyond the so-called Arabo-Persian heartland. While two of
our contributors focus on the development of print within the Ottoman realm
and the ‘Nadim memo’ focuses on Arabic reform in Egypt, the remaining seven
contributors all direct their efforts outside this supposed core. Five essays focus
on print in Africa as well as one each for South and Southeast Asia. This region-
al emphasis is not accidental. Indeed, it is intended to illustrate that scholarly
examination of the Islamic written tradition demands a broader geographic
scope. Africa, South and Southeast Asia are as central to this discursive tradition
as the Arab lands, Persia, and Turkey. The distribution of essays pulls the
written tradition outside the so-called ‘heartland’, in a way similar to Clifford
Geertz’s attempt to stretch the examination of Islamic practice from east to west
in *Islam Observed* fifty years ago.\(^{31}\) If we do not embrace the full geographic
diversity of Islamic practice, our scholarship risks reinscribing the same tropes
that we argue against: just as Islamic printing *writ large* should not be measured
by European standards as an outsider looking in, Muslim written practices in
Africa, Asia or anywhere else should not be measured against an imaginary
Middle Eastern core.

The papers in this volume are divided into two – albeit unequal – parts. The
contributors in Part I directly take up the supposed hesitation of Muslims to
adopt print. Both Titus Nemeth and J.R. Osborn hold that rather than an ‘irra-
tional’ aversion to new technologies, the reservations of the Ottomans and other
Muslims were grounded in very real technical and aesthetic issues that rendered
print unattractive even while recognising its benefits.

As Nemeth argues, the poor quality of Arabic type prior to the late eight-
eenth century made print unattractive to readers and, as a result, a poor com-
mercial investment. The earliest experiments with Arabic fonts were carried out
primarily by non-Muslim Europeans who had little experience with a complex
system that rendered them unable to cope with its many intricacies such as
multiple forms for each letter or the super- and subscripted vowels. The result,
he points out, was a product wholly unacceptable to readers. Even the relatively
advanced press established by Müteferrika fabricated an aesthetically inferior
product in comparison to even the most basic manuscripts. As a result, Nemeth

\(^{31}\) Geertz 1971.
holds, there were few incentives for Muslim entrepreneurs to invest large amounts of capital in a venture that had so little prospect of profitable returns.

J.R. Osborn in his contribution echoes these points but argues that it was not simply economics that informed Muslim, or Ottoman to be more precise, views on the value of print. Aesthetics, he notes, played an equally important role driven by what he refers to as ‘structures of feeling’, defined as ‘particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions’, that can come to be representative of a culture in a given period. One such structure of feeling within Ottoman society, he notes, was script variation, ‘a textual practice in which visual and aesthetic differences of script, or styles of script, signify meaningful distinctions of textual genre and audience’. Six classical scripts known as al-aqlām al-sittah, emerged as ‘recognizable and repeatable types’, for use within Ottoman society. Each ultimately became associated with particular kinds of texts and genres and which ‘readers learned to decipher [...] as a secondary code’, encrypting certain meanings. Thus, one script, for example, came to be associated with religious writings while another with royal decrees etc. Initially, print could not hope to replicate this complex code of meanings. Overtime, however, it did find its own niche as a script associated with the bureaucratic state. Osborn argues that ‘the Ottoman shift from a manuscript-dominant society to the adoption of print took time’ and was in effect ‘a long revolution’.

As such, Müteferrika’s effort was a venture that while in the short term might be viewed as only a limited success set in motion a series of processes whereby print would, Osborn argues, emerge as a new genre or style of script that signalled the production of a new kind of written object – the printed book – that was devoted to, among other things, science, mathematics, history and diplomacy aimed at an audience of bureaucrats and state functionaries rather than religious elites. Müteferrika’s press was a beginning – and not an end – that took more than fifty years to bear fruit. He did not revolutionize the Islamic written tradition but he did nudge it in a new direction, setting in motion changes that would develop and spread over time. This long revolution finally took hold with the founding of an Ottoman State press in 1797. Pasha Muhammad Ali of Egypt continued this trend with the establishment of a state press at Bulaq in 1820 with the first books produced in 1822.

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32 Osborn, this volume. Also, Williams 1961.  
33 Osborn, this volume.  
34 Osborn, this volume.  
35 Nemeth, this volume.
So, the Müteferrika interlude notwithstanding, the widespread adoption of mechanical print in Muslim lands dates to the 1820s. But, importantly, Islamicate mechanical reproduction did not follow a single technological trajectory. By the time Muslim states and individual actors turned to print as a means of large-scale production there were two major technologies available. First, of course was ‘moveable type’ or typography invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century and virtually the only means of mechanically reproducing texts for nearly four hundred years. In the late eighteenth century, however, Alois Senefelder (1771–1834) developed a technique for printing that created text – and images – not through the use of individual punch cut letters but by etching on flat, stone tablets and reproducing the image using a combination of grease and acid-resistant ink. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, lithography (literally, ‘stone printing’) was a proven technology with broad applications. In Europe, however, it was used primarily for printing designs on cloth, sheet music and producing pictures as either inexpensive pieces of art or for books. It never emerged as an alternative to typography. But, in the Islamic world, lithography was quickly adopted for the large-scale printing of books. As such the articles in this volume examine cases where both technologies were in play. However, the technology itself is less of a focus, than the ways in which mechanical reproduction fit into and changed the broader Islamic written tradition.

Print, from this point forward, would emerge as an increasingly integral element of the Islamic written tradition. This is evidenced first by the exponential rise in print production over the course of the nineteenth century. From the 1830s print rapidly transcended its place as a medium serving the needs of the state to one with far broader social appeal. It soon became an important new venue for the dissemination of countless new Muslim voices. This included, of course, religious knowledge – both old and new – but also new genres (e.g. political treatises and novels) and types of written objects (e.g. newspapers). But while print in many ways transformed the written tradition – at the very least in terms of volume and accessibility – it was also forced to conform to it. There is no better illustration of this than the continuous efforts to refine the always problematic Arabic moveable type to enable it to fit more easily into the

36 Senefelder 1911; Proudfoot 1997.
37 It needs to also be pointed out that numerous other non-European societies such as those in Persia, China and Southeast Asia also turned to lithography as a means of reproducing the written word.
38 It should be pointed out that some of these new texts were printed, while others were handwritten. Taken together, these new genres demonstrate a shift in the written tradition regardless of medium.
deeper tradition. As Nemeth points out, one of the biggest problems with early Arabic type was that it was ugly and unpleasing to the eyes of the reader. This was an issue with which Arabic typographers never ceased to struggle. Muhammad Nadīm’s Memo to the Royal Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, the volume’s third contribution, provides us with a succinct introduction to script reform up to the era of the Second World War. In her overview of the memo, Kathryn Schwartz highlights the ongoing concern among intellectuals and artisans to make Arabic more ‘user friendly’ and easily readable for a broad public, without betraying the technical and emotional structures of the language. For instance, Muhammad Nadīm noted, ‘the word of majesty (اله) [for God] […] is much in circulation and use and it carries a special value which should be respected and preserved’. As such, he recommended, it should never be broken into its constitutive letters but instead always appear in print as a unified word.

3 Exploring the tradition more broadly

The articles in Part I focus primarily on the development of print and the efforts of Muslims to fit it into the already existing tradition particularly within the so-called Islamic heartland of Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. The essays in Part II cast a broader net in the form of case studies across time, geography and technology exploring the various contours of the evolving Islamic written tradition once print entered the equation. It thus emerges as not the story of Arabic print, but of the Islamic written tradition in its broadest sense.

In Egypt and the Ottoman heartland printed book production was dominated by typography or ‘moveable type’. However, not all Muslim communities found this method of mechanical reproduction equally attractive. Indeed, for some, lithography was ultimately deemed a more appropriate technology. Ulrike Stark illustrates this point in her contribution on Qur’an production in nineteenth-century South Asia. Indian Muslims turned to print nearly as early as their Egyptian and Ottoman counterparts and the Hooghly edition of the Qur’an, produced in Calcutta, appeared in 1829. Stark, however, notes this and other early typeset versions of the scriptures were seriously lacking in aesthetic appeal, and through ‘their rather crude typefaces and sparse use of ornamentation, they display the technical constraints of movable type printing and presumably had

39 Nadīm’s memo, transcription f. 7, this volume.
little visual appeal for Muslim readers’. Compared to India’s sophisticated manuscript tradition, Arabic script works produced with moveable type hardly constituted an advance. For this reason, at least in part, it seems South Asian entrepreneurs – led by the indominable Naval Kishore – soon shifted almost universally to the use of lithography which held obvious advantages not only for printing scripts that were cursive in nature but also enabling greater ornamentation as well as colour (albeit in limited amounts).

Holger Warnk’s contribution, focuses on Cermin Mata (‘The Spectacles’), a journal produced by Christian missionaries in mid-nineteenth-century Singapore. A missionary journal would hardly seem to fit within a collection devoted to the Islamic writing. However, while certainly a publication intended to promote mission work, the journal also highlights the continued importance of the local Islamic written tradition. The journal was produced in Jawi (Malay written in Arabic script) and many of those who wrote for it were themselves traditionally trained Muslim Munsyis, or scribes. As Warnk points out, this led to not only a certain standardization of Jawi handwriting but also promoted Malay-Islamic written culture. While containing numerous pieces that upheld and promoted European Christian values, Cermin Mata featured numerous stories from the local Malay repertoire as well as the unfinished Hajj account of a prominent Malay man of letters, known simply as, Abdullah Munsyi. The stories in Cermin Mata also had a life beyond the mission journal finding their way into the curricula of both mission and government schools of Malaya, as well as the coffee houses of Singapore where copies were read aloud for popular entertainment.

The next several contributors, Scott Reese, Alessandro Gori and Jeremy Dell, all take up the evolution of typographic print among different African Muslim societies and the ways in which local practice had an impact on the larger written tradition. Reese’s ‘The Ink of Excellence’, examines the role of Egyptian publishers in the evolution of local print culture among Muslim scholars in coastal East Africa. But it also tackles the ever-evolving written tradition looking at some of the ways print changed religious composition while also identifying the many ways in which print incorporated the structures of the manuscript tradition; including the shape and content of books, but also markers of scholarly

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40 Stark, this volume.
41 The standardization of handwritten styles and regional styles, either before print or alongside printing, seems to be a key feature of the Islamic written tradition and a feature that is rarely problematized in European-based models of print development. Personal communication J.R. Osborn. See also Bondarev, Gori and Souag 2019.
authority such as chains of transmissions, practices of ‘emendation,’ editing and the resurrection of the medieval practice of the scholarly ‘blurb’ or taqridh. This last practice is particularly instructive as its revival seems to have been driven by the East African authors of printed books rather than their Egyptian counterparts.

Remaining in Egypt, Alessandro Gori’s contribution, ‘Early Ethiopian Islamic Printed Books’ offers a companion view from the Horn of Africa. Following the trajectory of a single book from manuscript to printed form, Gori describes the origins of print production in Ethiopia and the international linkages that made it possible. In addition, his essay also provides some important insights in the continued production of manuscripts among Ethiopian Muslims well into the late twentieth century. Finally, Jeremy Dell’s contribution shifts our view westward to modern Senegal. It recounts the history of early efforts to print the xasida,\(^{42}\) of the Muridiyya Sufi order’s founding saint Shaykh Amadu Bamba (1853–1927). In particular, it tracks the attempts of the movement’s leadership to assert control over Bamba’s legacy following his death by regulating its production in print. It is also a larger Muslim story, however, as he highlights the relationships that emerged between Murids in Senegal and publishers in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt as the leadership sought authoritative outlets for the great Shaykh’s work.

The last two essays in our volume stay in West Africa but take us back to the world of lithography. While, as Dell’s article illustrates, typographic print had its place among Muslim publishers in West Africa, it was not always the preferred mode. The contributions by Sani Adam and Andrea Brigaglia focus on the development of offset lithography\(^{43}\) in the Nigerian city of Kano in the period after World War Two. Adam’s contribution, ‘Technology and Local Tradition’ provides an overview of the development of Arabic and Hausa Ajami print in Kano. Among his findings is that while there were attempts to jumpstart an Arabic print industry in Kano prior to the 1950s the industry only really took off after the introduction of offset lithography. He holds there were several economic and political reasons for the late development. However, among the most important factors were aesthetics. It is this issue that Brigaglia takes up in his contribution, “Printed Manuscripts”: Tradition and Innovation in Twentieth-Century Nigerian Qur’anic Printing’. Much like in South Asia, Brigaglia finds that especially when it comes to the Qur’an, the notion of typeset holy scriptures

\(^{42}\) Pronounced qaṣida, these are praise poems often, but not exclusively associated with Sufism.

\(^{43}\) Sometimes referred to as offset printing.
was wildly unpopular. Instead, even while a market emerged for various kinds of religious texts printed typographically, local tastes continued to prefer hand copied Qur’ans in the local Sudanic Arabic script. This meant Qur’ans remained an expensive, luxury item. The introduction of offset lithography from the 1950s enabled the production of Qur’ans in a medium that local households found appealing. This had two important impacts. First, it made locally copied Qur’ans relatively affordable. While not cheap by any means, adoption of offset lithography meant that more people could potentially afford to purchase a Qur’an reproduced in the local style. It also created something of a renaissance for Kano calligraphers. Prior to the 1950s, calligraphy was a stagnant if not dying profession. With offset lithography the profession experienced a massive revival with the work of masters coming into increasing demand and even injecting much need creativity with the introduction of new styles. As such, the machine age played a direct role in retaining and even energizing an important local element of the written Islamic tradition.

4 Conclusion

As noted earlier, the essays in this volume represent an early and ongoing effort to understand the complexities of the Islamic written tradition as it evolved in the age of print. The contributors and I hope that readers will take several things away from this book. This includes not only the diverse nature of mechanical print in the Islamic world, but also its emergence in dialog with the much longer written tradition.

One of the primary touchstones for this volume is the extension and application of the Asadian notion of discursive tradition in order to illuminate the existence of an Islamic tradition of the written word. The essays in this book argue that the adoption of print among Muslim societies did not represent a break from the past, but the continued evolution of a longstanding cultural practice: writing. The Islamic written tradition incorporated new technologies (e.g. moveable type, and lithography in its various forms) not simply as replacements of earlier scribal practices but in dialogue with and alongside established handwritten and calligraphic traditions. While new technologies dominated certain genres, handwriting and calligraphy did not disappear. On the contrary, these new technologies were just as likely to rejuvenate handwriting and calligraphy as displace them in particular arenas. Lithography, for instance, actually required the retention of advanced handwriting skills as evidence by Naval Kishore’s workshops. Going a step further, as Brigaglia
points out, offset lithography seems to have spurred a renaissance of calligraphic studios in Kano.

Furthermore, Islamic print’s progress was inextricably bound to its hand-written past. The Islamic written tradition employs visual and formal distinctions of genre and regional style. Printing certainly altered stylistic practices of written composition. However, this took place only to the degree that printing could incorporate previous structures of authority, genre, layout and appearance among other things. Thus, as in the case of Egypt and printed books – whether classics or new compositions – we see a continuation of many visual stylistic components of the manuscript tradition but also conceptual elements, such as the imposition of oversight by a qualified ʿālim.

Finally, and possibly most important, the Islamic written tradition was and is hardly a monolith. Instead, it is geographically and regionally diverse, spreading across Muslim societies from east to west. As a discursive tradition, it has not only responded to and incorporated new structures of technology; it has a much longer history of responding to and incorporating diverse structures of culture, politics, and regional knowledge. While Muslim societies certainly adopted many of the central structures of writing that had come to be recognised as part and parcel of the Arabo-Persian written tradition, this still left space for local structures and concepts. The development of the Kinawi script in Nigeria and Jawi (Malay written in Arabic characters) in Southeast Asia are only two of the most obvious examples.

In the end, the Islamic written tradition’s historical success may be due precisely to its seemingly inexhaustible adaptability. The incorporation of printing, in this light, appears as simply the co-optation of one technique among many that has helped retain the tradition’s vibrancy.

Transliteration

Arabic, Persian and Turkish transliteration in the following volume follows that laid out by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). However, some contributions include Islamic languages, such as Hausa and Wolof, that employ characters not appearing in other languages and thus have symbols unique to them. The authors of these contributions have been permitted to use such symbols in addition to those included in the IJMES system. Finally, as the question of transliteration’s utility continues to be debated, authors have been allowed to exercise discretion with regard to the extent to which they use transliteration as long as internal consistency was maintained within each essay.
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As this volume was going to press, our community of scholars was devastated by the sudden loss of Kathryn A. Schwartz. Over the course of putting this book together, all of us came to know Kathryn as a brilliant historian, who was poised to make enormous contributions to the fields of Book History and Middle Eastern Studies. We also got to know a bright, funny and charming person whose insight and wit always inspired us. In her short career, Kathryn had already produced a number of articles and studies of significant impact and import, and we can only guess at the knowledge she would have produced with more time. We are confident that the base Kathryn created will form the foundation of much richer scholarship to come, serving as a reminder of the impact her life had on the field even in such a short time. It seemed only natural that this book should be dedicated to her memory.
References


