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The travel of ideas in the age of steam and print: The Ottoman Caliphate versus Wahhabism and Mahdism

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Chapter 7

Censoring the “Pernicious Publications” of Wahhabism and Mahdism

“...The committee began to investigate the book *Fath al-Mannan* today, and it is predicted that the investigation will continue for a week. Although detailed results will be presented at the end of the investigation, it has been understood already that the book contains superstitious statements sourced from Wahhabism. The greatest nonsense in the book, however, is that it describes Muhammad ibn Saud, who occupied and looted the *Haramayn* (Mecca and Medina), as the conqueror of the two holy cities.”

Ali al-Baghdadi, a clerk of the Sultan⁷¹⁰

The travel of ideas was possible not only through the intermediary efforts of missionaries but also published works, whose numbers increased enormously because of the printing press and steam technologies made it much easier to distribute them. State officials were wary about the travel of books, and they investigated suspicious publications to determine whether they were pernicious (*muzir*) or not. Since harmful books and pamphlets that were published abroad could be quickly taken to Ottoman territories via steam-powered transport, the Ottoman custom officials who were responsible for examining goods being brought into the country also kept an eye out for publications. Whenever they came upon a suspicious pamphlet or document, they would immediately send it to the relevant department for closer examination. The Ottoman archives contain a wide range of cases of pernicious pamphlets that were delivered to port cities by steamships. The centre of the state was quickly informed about those pamphlets via telegraph and other provinces were told to prohibit their entry into the country.

For the Ottoman authorities, there were three kinds of pernicious books that are related to this study: Those that were written against the

⁷¹⁰ BOA, Y..PRK.AZJ, 50/15, 2 Teşrinievvel 1320 [15 October 1904].

Ottoman caliphate, those that promoted Wahhabi propaganda and those that praised Sudanese Mahdism. The authorities worked to stop the circulation of all three kinds of works in Ottoman territories. Of those, works of an anti-caliphate nature and those that sought to stimulate interest in Mahdism were generally prevented from entering the state because their places of origin lay outside Ottoman territories. On the other hand, those related to Wahhabism presented a more complicated problem because while Wahhabis and Wahhabi books came from abroad, there were Wahhabi scholars in Ottoman cities as well. Ottoman reactions to works that contained doctrine-oriented messages, namely Wahhabi propaganda, were more varied than the others. After discussing the censorship policies of the Ottoman state, this chapter examines in detail the process of banning pernicious publications in light of certain cases to answer the question of how Ottoman statesmen dealt with the circulation of Wahhabi and Mahdist works and the role that the *ulema* played in that regard.

The Censorship Policies of the Ottoman State

The censorship policies of the state were one of the reasons why the Hamidian period came to be known as the era of *istibdat* (despotism). Some of the strict implementations of this era could be seen as unique to the Ottoman state and explained not only in terms of the Ottoman intellectuals who suffered as a result of the policies of the era but also the writers and academicians who came later in reference to the mistrustful personality of Sultan Abdülhamid II. However, these precautionary measures can also pave the way for evaluating the characteristics of the period of globalization in world history, during which time Sultan Abdülhamid II ruled from 1876 to 1909. In this era, the state had to contend with rapid improvements in transportation and communication technologies, and in the Ottoman Empire and other countries as well, some rulers found the solution in the strict control of all the forms of mobility that had the potential to cause a breakdown in the social order. As a result, policies on prohibition, including the censorship of publications, were characteristic of the age of steam and print, and cannot be limited only to the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II.

In the Ottoman Empire, both before and after the reign of the aforementioned sultan, censorship was a crucial issue. Also, it is an undeniable fact that censorship was applied as a means of maintaining public order in the same years in other states like France, Germany and Austria, and the Russian experience was quite similar to what happened in the Ottoman Empire. In Russia, while censorship practices were also implemented before and after the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, Emperor Alexander III targeted the press as an instigator of radicalism and implemented laws enacting tighter rules for censorship. The Supreme Commission on Press Affairs was set up in 1882 and a preliminary censorship plan was put into practice. Even during the reign of his successor, Nicholas II, despite the so-called “days of freedom” in 1905, censorship continued in the ensuing years.⁷¹¹ For instance, Gaspıralı İsmail, who was a Crimean Tatar writer and a member of an ethnic minority in the Russian Empire, would send his publications from Bahcesaray in the Crimea to Saint Petersburg, and he was only allowed to publish his newspaper once the censorship committee gave its consent, which could take up to four weeks.⁷¹²

Censorship policies can be directly tied to the spread of printing press technologies in the second half of the nineteenth century. Prohibiting purportedly harmful ideas that had the potential to affect the common people required strict control of the carriers of possible threats—in this case, print culture—which presented states like the Ottoman Empire with a problem, as the volume of publications was constantly increasing. Even though the use of the printing press can be seen in earlier centuries in Ottoman cities, especially through the efforts of non-Muslims in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Müteferrika Press in 1729, those efforts produced a limited number of publications. The books of the Müteferrika, for instance, had no market and after the death of the founder, the printing press remained idle. After several decades, the necessity of printing presses increased in the 1790s for military reasons and

⁷¹¹ For more on Russian censorship policies, see Charles A. Ruud, “Russia,” in *The War for the Public Mind: Political Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Robert Justin Goldstein (Westport: Greenwood, 2000), pp. 239-273; Jonathon Green and Nicholas J. Karolidis, *Encyclopedia of Censorship: New Edition* (New York: Facts On File, 2005), pp. 480-485.

⁷¹² Yavuz Akpınar, “Tercüman,” *DİA*, vol. 40 (İstanbul 2011), p. 492.

the Üsküdar Press was established in 1802.⁷¹³ Nevertheless, the major printing houses of the Ottoman Empire only published 142 books until 1838, a period of more than a century. As Hanioglu points out, the institution of the printing press did not manage to transform Ottoman cultural life until the emergence of the age of print in the 1850s.⁷¹⁴

After the middle of the nineteenth century, printing presses spread to the Ottoman provinces and many private presses were established in various cities, not only in Istanbul. Especially in the last quarter of the century, the state gave tax exemptions for some private entrepreneurs and that increased the number of printing presses in the Ottoman Empire. However, this increase in print culture brought with it state control of publications. As one of the most important centres, Cairo had similar experiences with Bulaq Press, which was founded in 1821.⁷¹⁵ Bulaq was freed from the state monopoly in 1850 and then it was privatized in 1862, only to revert back to state control again in 1880.⁷¹⁶ In the following years, the number of print houses increased in the cities of Cairo, Beirut and Mecca, and the printed products of those cities, spread to the Muslim world outside of the Ottoman territories and so played a visible role in the intellectual networks of the Indian Ocean.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹³ For more on the Üsküdar Press and its publication list between 1802 and 1824, see Kemal Beydilli, “Üsküdar Matbaası ve Burada Basılan Eserler Listesi (1802-1824),” *Üsküdar Sempozyumu II*, vol. 1 (İstanbul 2004), pp. 52-62.

⁷¹⁴ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, pp. 38-41.

⁷¹⁵ There is no clear information concerning the date of the establishment of the Bulaq Press. Hijri 1235 [1819/1820] is written on an inscription of the press, but according to an archival document it was officially opened on November 14, 1821. See Turgut Kut, “Bulak,” *DİA*, vol. 6 (İstanbul 1992), p. 388. For a photograph of the inscription, see Ahmed Mansour, “The Bulaq Press Museum at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina” in *Historical Aspects of Printing and Publishing in Languages of the Middle East: Papers from the Third Symposium on the History of Printing and Publishing in the Languages and Countries of the Middle East, University of Leipzig, September 2008*, ed. Geoffrey J. Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 309.

⁷¹⁶ For more on the publications of Bulaq Press during its first period, see Richard N. Verdery, “The Publications of the Bulaq Press under Muḥammad 'Ali of Egypt,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91, no. 1 (1971), pp. 129-132.

⁷¹⁷ Laffan maps the intellectual network of the Indian Ocean specific to the Jawi *ulema* from Southeast Asia to the Hejaz and Cairo from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s. For the effects of printing presses on Southeast Asian intellectual life, especially the study of Arabic, see Michael Laffan, “New Charts for the Arabic Ocean:

In the Ottoman Empire, press liberties that began in 1839 paved the way for printing houses not only for pressmen but also common people who sought to publish books. That, however, brought with it limitations that were arranged as orders (*irade*) to control press facilities and tax issues in various years. Firstly, press affairs were decisively regulated with the *Matbaalar Nizamnamesi*, which had nine articles and was put into practice on February 15, 1857. So, opening a printing press was possible only with permission of the Ministry of Police (*Zaptiye Nezareti*). Moreover, before publications were distributed in the provinces, governors would send a sample book to the Council of Education (*Meclis-i Maarif*), and if the Council determined that a book was not a pernicious publication,⁷¹⁸ it would be sent to the grand viziership for final permission. Also, foreigners could run printing press and publish books but only after the getting a permit from the Ministry of External Affairs.⁷¹⁹

Although some small changes occurred in subsequent times, a more comprehensive regulation was implemented with a new *Matbaalar Nizamnamesi*, which contains forty-one articles, in 1888, and state control over the press increased and became stricter. Punishments were added to the law four years later. As an example of this, the press staff of publications that encouraged people to provoke or incite anarchy could be imprisoned for up to five years while the owners could be punished with one to three years of prison time. Besides this, the punishments were reformulated and increased for press staff, distributors, storers and sellers of immoral works.⁷²⁰ The last detailed regulation before the Second Constitutional Era was implemented on December 30, 1894,⁷²¹ and its

Dictionaries as Indicators of Changing Times,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 159, no. 2-3 (Leiden 2003), pp. 351-387.

⁷¹⁸ “*mülken ve devletten bir guna mazarratı olmadığı*”. See article 3 quoted in Ali Birinci, “Osmanlı Devletinde Matbuat ve Neşriyat Yasakları Tarihine Medhal,” *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, 4, no. 7 (2006), p. 297.

⁷¹⁹ For more on the first *Matbaalar Nizamnamesi* of 1273 [1857], see *Düstur*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1289), pp. 227-228.

⁷²⁰ *Düstur: Birinci Tertib*, vol. 6 (Ankara: Devlet Matbaası 1939), p. 1247, quoted in Birinci, “Osmanlı Devletinde Matbuat ve Neşriyat Yasakları Tarihine Medhal,” p. 298.

⁷²¹ The 1894 regulation contains 47 articles. See *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1316), pp. 170-190. Birinci points out that in terms of the stricter censorship stipulations introduced after the last regulation, the establishment of the Committee of Unity and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) in 1895 must have played a crucial

articles stipulate that printed books that contain hostile or satirical language concerning the sultan, government, administrative institutions and accredited sects would be banned.⁷²²

State administrators saw control of the press as a necessity for public order and to that end many regulations were put into place, and the length of bans increased year by year. In addition, some new institutions and commissions were established. Of these, the Council of Inspection and Investigation (*Encümen-i Teftiş ve Muayene*) was established in 1882 and oversight of publications was referred to a committee based on decisions. A higher degree control commission, the *Tedkik-i Müellefat Komisyonu*, which had the power to make final judgments, was established in 1892 within the scope of the Ministry of Education under the presidency of the minister.⁷²³ All the same, not all books were investigated by the committee; some books, in case of need, could be sent to other ministries by the Ministry of Education for examination, just as investigations of newspapers and journals was done by another institution. Furthermore, the number of members on this committee increased year by year, as its members changed as seen in yearbooks (*salname*)⁷²⁴ and they consisted of *ulema* and intellectuals who knew different languages.⁷²⁵ More

role. See Birinci, “Osmanlı Devletinde Matbuat ve Neşriyat Yasakları Tarihine Medhal,” p. 307.

⁷²² *Zât-ı akdes-i hazreti mülkdâri ile hükümet-i seniyye ve memâlik-i şâhâne müessesesâtı ve resmen tanınmış olan mezâhib-i muhtelif haklarında alenen izhâr-ı adaveti mutazammın siyasî ve dinî hicviyye ve hezeyannameler gibi âsâr-ı matbua... zabt ve müsadere olunacaktır.* For the stress of these statements in the articles of 27, 30 and 35; see *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1316), pp. 181, 183, 186.

⁷²³ As other examples of institutions and commissions that played roles in the controlling of publications, *Meclis-i Maarif, Matbuat Nezareti, Telif ve Tercüme Dairesi, Bab-ı Vâlâ-yı Fetva, Divan-ı Harp ve Tedkik-i Müellefat Komisyonu, Dahiliye Nezareti, Zaptiye Nezareti* and *Rüsumat Emaneti* can be cited. For a detailed history about them and their missions, see Birinci, “Osmanlı Devletinde Matbuat ve Neşriyat Yasakları Tarihine Medhal,” pp. 300-310.

⁷²⁴ For the varieties of *salnames* in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire and more detail, see Bilgin Aydın, “Salname,” *DİA*, vol. 36 (İstanbul 2009), pp. 51-54.

⁷²⁵ While there were 24 members in 1894, that number reached 76 in 1908. For the names, missions and ranks of the members of the investigation committee for different years, see *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1312 [1894]), pp. 412-414; *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1316 [1898]), pp. 484-486; *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1321 [1903]), pp. 35-36; *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1326 [1908]), pp. 528-532.

importantly, some of the *ulema*, along with other new members, were commissioned for a new committee in 1902, and religious books started to be checked by a new committee, the *Kütüb-i Diniye ve Şer'iyeye Tetkik Heyeti* (Examination Committee of Religious and Sharia Books).⁷²⁶

The Role of the *Ulema* in Publication Censorship

The control of publications was carried out intensively, and different commissions were involved in the detailed examination and verification of decisions. As an example of this, one of the main duties of the aforementioned *Tedkik-i Müellefat Komisyonu*, which gathered two times a week, was to crosscheck religious books that were allowed to be published by the *Kütüb-i Diniye ve Şer'iyeye Tetkik Heyeti*.⁷²⁷ Aside from critiques that the investigation committee consisted largely of ignorant people with only a madrasa education or multilingual highbrows,⁷²⁸ the role of the *ulema* in the censorship of religious books became a primary topic of conversation. Which individuals and groups were on the investigation committees? Was their knowledge adequate for determining if a book was political threatening?

The lists of the members of the investigation committees whose varieties and members changed year by year can be seen in the yearbooks. According to the yearbook of the year 1321 hijri (1903), The Examination Committee of Religious and Sharia Books consisted of seven people. Their president is listed as Süleyman Sırrı Efendi, and the members are Abdülkadir Nuri, Ahmed Kamil, Ahmed Tevfik and Mehmed Esad Efendis, and the clerks are Ali Bey and Mahmud İhsan Efendi.⁷²⁹ Three years later in 1906, the number of committee members decreased to five people, with the same figures for the committee in 1903 except Mehmed

⁷²⁶ For the establishment of this committee, see BOA, BEO, 1963/147202, 15 Ramazan 1320 [15 December 1902].

⁷²⁷ *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1321 [1903]), p. 33.

⁷²⁸ For the statements of Osman Ergin on the *Encümen-i Teftiş ve Muayene* and the objection by Birinci, see Birinci, "Osmanlı Devletinde Matbuat ve Neşriyat Yasakları Tarihine Medhal," pp. 304-305.

⁷²⁹ *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1321 [1903]), p. 34.

Esad and Mahmud İhsan Efendis.⁷³⁰ However, in 1908 the committee included seven people again; Süleyman Hulusi Efendi replaced Süleyman Sırrı, who was the first president of the investigation committee of religious books. The other members retained their positions, but Mahmud İhsan Efendi returned to as a member and Mehmed Muhyiddin Efendi was a new member.⁷³¹

In the yearbooks, the ranks of the *ulema* are also noted. Before that, the rank system of the Ottoman *ulema* hierarchy in the nineteenth century should be highlighted. The *Şeyhülislam* position was the highest rank in this hierarchy in the Ottoman state. After that, the *kadı* (judgeship) and *müderris* (teaching) positions represented two groups. From the top down, the *kadı* system is as follows: The Rumelia *kazaskerliği*, Anatolia *kazaskerliği*, Istanbul *kadıluğu*, *haremeyn* (Mecca and Medina), *bilâd-ı hamse* (Edirne, Bursa, Damascus, Egypt and Plovdiv⁷³²), *mahreç* (Jerusalem, Aleppo, Eyüp, Thessaloniki, and the rest), *devriye* (Baghdad, Antep, Bosnia, and the rest) and *paye-i mücerrede* (Edirne and İzmir) judgeships. One person could rise to the top when he got promoted, but firstly he would take the next position's rank and then get appointed whenever the next position became free.⁷³³ The highest four ranks of the *müderris* position were *Darü'l-hadis*, *Erbaa-i Süleymaniye*, *Hâmise-i Süleymaniye* and *Mûsıla-i Süleymaniye*. Those four groups were referred to as *kibar-ı müderrisin* (grand teachers) and then there were lower ranking positions in the hierarchy. If a teacher who held the highest rank of the *müderris* hierarchy in the *Darü'l-hadis*, requested to be judge, he was appointed to one of the cities of the *mahreç* rank in the position of *kadı*.⁷³⁴

⁷³⁰ *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1324 [1906]), pp. 522-523.

⁷³¹ *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1326 [1908]), pp. 528-529.

⁷³² Although Plovdiv was lost in the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-78, the title *bilâd-ı hamse* (five cities) was not changed. See İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilatı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1965), p. 277.

⁷³³ For instance, the *kadı* of Mecca held the equivalent rank of the Istanbul *kadıluğu*, and when the existing Istanbul *kadı* got a promotion to the Anatolia *kazaskerliği*, the *kadı* of Mecca would become the *kadı* of Istanbul and take the rank of Anatolia *kazaskerliği*.

⁷³⁴ Uzunçarşılı presents in great detail the ranks of the *ulema* hierarchy throughout the centuries. See Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlmiye Teşkilatı*, pp. 271-281.

According to the hierarchical *ulema* system, the aforementioned committee members belonged to both the *kadı* and *müderris* groups. The president, Süleyman Sırrı Efendi held the rank of *Bilâd-ı Hamse* in 1903 and was promoted to the rank of *Haremeyn* in 1906. Abdülkadir Nuri Efendi the rank of *Bilâd-ı Hamse*, Ahmed Kamil Efendi held the rank of *Mahreç*, and Ahmed Tevfik Efendi held the rank of *İzmir paye-i mücerrede* in the yearbooks for 1903, 1906 and 1908. Mehmed Esad Efendi⁷³⁵ is noted as the *kibar-ı müderrisin* in 1903. Mahmud İhsan Efendi is mentioned as the *devriye müderrisi* in 1903 and the *müderris* in 1908. Ali Bey, a clerk, had no rank in 1903 must be the same person who is mentioned as Ali Efendi and had the rank of *salise* in 1906 and 1908. Both the new president in 1908, Süleyman Hulusi Efendi, and a new member, Mehmed Muhyiddin Efendi,⁷³⁶ held the rank of *müderris*.

The medals and orders (*nişan*) are another defining title in the yearbooks and it can be seen that only Süleyman Sırrı Efendi had a medal, the silver privilege (*gümüş imtiyaz*). Süleyman Sırrı had a higher privilege than the others and he also had a fourth degree *Osmani* and fourth degree *Mecidi* order in 1903. In the next yearbook he was also considered worthy of a third degree *Mecidi* order on January 11, 1904.⁷³⁷

Süleyman Sırrı Efendi, who was from Ermenek, today's Karaman, was educated at both a madrasa and the *Rüşdiye Mektebi* in his hometown, and then he continued his education in Istanbul. He received the *ijaza* from many different *ulema* and became a teacher at schools, such as the *Beşiktaş Mekteb-i Rüşdiyye-i Askeriyesi* and *Istanbul Sultanîsi* in Istanbul starting in 1876. As a successful scholar, his rank was increased many times, and thanks to his books he was nominated for a silver privilege medal by the Minister of Education in 1895. He became a *fiqh* teacher at the theology faculty (*Ulûm-i Âliye-i Dîniyye Şubesi*) of the university, the *Darülfünun-ı Şâhâne*, in 1900. Süleyman Sırrı, who was an expert in the Arabic language, wrote more than twelve books, mostly about Arabic

⁷³⁵ Mehmed Esad Efendi was one of the teachers (*mukarrir*) of *Huzur Dersleri*. See BOA, İ..MF., 12/3, 9 Muharrem 1324 [5 March 1906].

⁷³⁶ Muhyiddin Efendi was appointed to the committee when he was one of the *Fatih Dersiams*. See BOA, MF.MKT., 1023/11, 15 Ramazan 1325 [23 October 1907].

⁷³⁷ *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1321 [1903]), p. 34; *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1324 [1906]), pp. 522-523.

grammar and Islamic jurisprudence, and he translated three books from Arabic into Turkish. As a high-ranking scholar, as is mentioned above, he became the president of the investigation committee of religious books at the end of 1902 and held that post until he was appointed as a member of *Meclis-i Maarif* in 1907.⁷³⁸

Süleyman Sırrı Efendi's life was that of a model Ottoman *âlim* who had all the qualifications to represent the state in the late nineteenth century. In religious terms, his focus on the Sunni schools is one of the strong points of his books. As it says in a book that was written for students in the theology faculty, "our *mazhab*, Sunnism, is the rightest sect and we should believe that its opponents, heresiarch sects, are definitely superstitious ways".⁷³⁹ In political terms, as a scholar who played a role in his advancement in state affairs over a long period of time, he was a trustworthy official, as summarized with two words on the silver medal that he held: Loyalty and bravery (*sadakat ve şecaat*).⁷⁴⁰ However, the number of loyal scholars was not limited to him and his fellow *ulema* of the Examination Committee of Religious and Sharia Books.

The list of the names of the people on the committee under the management of Süleyman Sırrı indicate that the examination of religious books was undertaken by *ulema* who were sorted according to their ranks. However, the hierarchy collapsed in 1907 under a new president, Süleyman Hulusi Efendi, because his *müderris* rank was lower than that of some other members, such as those holding a *Bilâd-ı Hamse* or *Mahreç* judgeship.⁷⁴¹ Even though Süleyman Hulusi Efendi did not have a higher

⁷³⁸ Musa Alak, "Süleyman Sırrı," *DİA*, Ek-2 (İstanbul 2016), pp. 544-545. For a study on his book entitled "*Kifâyetü'l-müntehî 'alâ kifâyeti'l-mübtedî*," see Mustafa Oral, "Ermenekli Süleyman Sırrı Efendi ve Kifâyetü'l-Müntehî 'alâ Kifâyeti'l-Mübtedî Adlı Eserinin Tahkiki," (Master's thesis, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf Üniversitesi, 2015).

⁷³⁹ Süleyman Sırrı Efendi, *Medhal-i Fıkh* (Kostantiniyye: Matbaa-i Ebuuzziya, 1329), p. 8.

⁷⁴⁰ "*Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmâniyye uğrunda fevkalâde sadakat ve şecaat ibraz edenlere mahsus madalyadır*," see Filiz Karaca, "İmtiyaz Madalyası," *DİA*, vol. 22 (İstanbul 2000), p. 241.

⁷⁴¹ Apart from their ranks, Süleyman Hulusi Efendi's orders also had a lower ranking than the degrees of some of the others. He received fourth degree *Osmani* and fourth degree *Mecidi* orders in 1908 when he was the president of the committee. However, Abdülkadir Nuri Efendi, who only held a fourth degree *Mecidi* order in 1903, was considered worthy of a third degree *Osmani* order on November 24, 1906. Ahmed

rank than the other members, he was the *dersiam* of the Fatih madrasa and more importantly the preacher of the *Huzur Dersleri*, which the Sultan attended. Moreover, he was the president of the Council of Education (*Meclis-i Maarif*) before taking on his new mission, and he had been appointed to that Council upon the death of the well-known scholar Ali Haydar Efendi in 1903.⁷⁴² As an experienced administrator, Süleyman Hulusi maintained his position until the abolishment of the investigation committee during the Second Constitutional Era.⁷⁴³

This detailed account demonstrates how the Ottoman state reacted to the ever-increasing number of publications with new regulations the rigidity of which increased over the years; and the *ulema* class played a crucial role in the examination of publications and the censorship of pernicious texts. However, the members of the Examination Committee of Religious and Sharia Books were not the only *ulema* group to take part in the examination of publications.⁷⁴⁴ The *ulema* examined in detail all

Kamil Efendi had a fourth degree *Osmani* and third degree *Mecidi* orders. It should be noted that the highest degree of orders was the first and it was granted as the top service award. For a comparison of the ranks of orders of the aforementioned people, see *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1321 [1903]), p. 34; *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1324 [1906]), pp. 522-523; *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1326 [1908]), pp. 528-529.

⁷⁴² Büyük Ali Haydar Efendi, who was a high-ranking scholar, had been a pupil with many *ulema* of the time, such as Rusçuklu Mustafa, Hafız Şakir and Tikveşli Yusuf Efendis at different institutions like the Fatih Mosque and Muallimhane-i Nüvvab. He served as a teacher and *kadı* in various parts of the state, because he was famous for his knowledge of *fiqh*. He played crucial roles in the reforms and development of the education system of the Ottoman state. He died on November 27, 1903, during his nineteen-year presidency of the Council of Education. See Mehmed Akif Aydın, "Ali Haydar Efendi, Büyük," *DİA*, vol. 2 (İstanbul 1989), p. 396; Uğur Ünal, "Osmanlı Hukukçularından Büyük Ali Haydar Efendi (1837-1903): Hayatı ve Çalışmaları," *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 26, no. 41 (Ankara 2007), pp. 131-142.

⁷⁴³ For the missions of Süleyman Hulusi as a scholar and officer, see BOA, BEO, 3040/227928, 9 Rebiülevvel 1325 [22 April 1907]; BOA, MF.MKT., 984/70, 27 Muharrem 1325 [12 March 1907]; BOA, Y..PRK.MŞ., 8/95, 1 Ramazan 1326 [27 September 1908].

⁷⁴⁴ The investigation committees whose variety and members' numbers had been changed gradually can be followed in the yearbooks as well as the grades and missions of members. The languages that they know are also noted in the lists. See *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1316 [1898]), pp. 484-486; *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1317 [1899]), pp. 518-521; *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1318 [1900]), pp. 526-528; *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1319 [1901]), pp. 34-35; *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1321 [1903]), p. 34; *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i*

related works and even publications written by committee members were subject to investigation, as was the case with the *Miftah al-Akaid* by the president of the committee, Süleyman Sırrı Efendi.⁷⁴⁵ They collaborated with the authorities, especially the Ministry of Education, in determining the perniciousness of publications and thus played a part in censorship policies, as seen in the example of books that dealt with Wahhabism.

Central versus Peripheral *Ulema*: The Case of Two Wahhabi Books

The *ulema* hierarchy that was summarized above is indicative of its effectiveness in administrative affairs as well as representative qualifications. The *ulema* that were in the pyramid of the system were state officers and they could represent the state through their judicial decisions in courts and scholarly teachings at schools. Since they were appointed by the state administration to a variety of positions, the term “central *ulema*” refers not only to their locations, but also their position acting for the state.

Besides the central *ulema*, there were also peripheral figures that did not belong to the Ottoman *ulema* hierarchy, received an education from local scholars in general and acted as independent scholars at a mosque or madrasa. This independent state of the *ulema* created an assorted environment in the periphery where they were actively engaged in polemics with others who held different opinions. The varying ideas regarding Wahhabism was especially visible in Baghdad, which was close to Najd, and also Basra, where the gate to the Indian Ocean was located. The influence of Wahhabis from Najd and the Wahhabi books published in India could easily reach Baghdad.⁷⁴⁶ Therefore, many refutations, such

Osmaniyye (1324 [1906]), pp. 522-523; *Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye* (1326 [1908]), pp. 528-529.

⁷⁴⁵ BOA, MF.MKT., 693/13, 2 Muharrem 1321 [31 March 1903]. Before this, when he was a member of *Encümen-i Teftiş ve Muayene*, his *Kanz al-Akaid* book had been sent to *Meşihat* for investigation. See BOA, MF.MKT., 265/20, 2 Zilhicce 1312 [27 May 1895].

⁷⁴⁶ As an example, see BOA, BEO, 2519/188852, no. 1-3, 20 Şubat 1320 – 1 Mart 1321 [5 March 1905 – 14 March 1905].

as the *al-Minhat al-Wahbiyya fi al-Raddi 'ala al-Wahhabiyya* of Ibn Jirjis, against Wahhabis by conservative scholars and vice versa were written there.⁷⁴⁷

Like the central *ulema*, which was attached to the hierarchy through family relations, *ulema* families were common in the periphery as well. So, the impact of families on the educational environment of members of the *ulema* who grew up in a strong tradition is one of the key elements to bear in mind when trying to understand the scholarly debates in the Ottoman-Arab provinces. The Alusi family was one such well-known *ulema* family. This Iraqi family had been known for its *ulema* members like Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi (1802-1854), who was an Ottoman Hanafi mufti in Baghdad and travelled to Istanbul in 1850.⁷⁴⁸ His two sons Numan Khayr al-Din and Abdullah were known as *ulema* of different tendencies that can be categorized as *Salafi* and Sufi.⁷⁴⁹ The son of Abdullah, Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, on the other hand, who used the term *salafi* in his correspondences with Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi, was an important figure for the Wahhabi movement in the age of steam and print.⁷⁵⁰

Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, who began his scholarly life with his family and the environment of Baghdad, adopted *salafi* ideas, abandoning the other ways, and so he was deemed a dangerous individual by the Ottoman state. Moreover, his family traditions can be seen in state reports, as he is mentioned as the grandson of Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi in various archival

⁷⁴⁷ This book of Ibn Suleyman was first published in Bombay in 1887-1888. For a list of books against Wahhabism, see Süleyman Sari, "Selefi Vehhabilere Reddiye Eserler," *Marife*, 3 (2009), pp. 327-346.

⁷⁴⁸ Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi first went to Samsun and then to Istanbul by steamship. It is apparent that he spent about four months travelling from Baghdad to Samsun and only four days on the Samsun-Istanbul route. See Süheyl Sapan, "İraklı Alim Mahmud el-Alusi'nin Hatıralarında İstanbul," *Osmanlı İstanbulu IV: IV. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbulu Sempozyumu Bildirileri 20-22 Mayıs 2016* (İstanbul 2016), pp. 52-57.

⁷⁴⁹ Basheer M. Nafi, "Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi: An Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Qur'an," *Int. J. Middle East Stud.*, 34, no. 3 (2002), pp. 465-494. For comprehensive information about Numan al-Alusi as a transitional figure between Hanafi-Sufism and Salafism, as well as between his father Abu al-Thana' and his nephew Mahmud Shukri, see Nafi, "Salafism Revived," pp. 49-97.

⁷⁵⁰ Henri Lauziere, "The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History," *Int. J. Middle East Stud.*, 42 (2010), pp. 369-389.

documents. Shukri al-Alusi, who died in 1924 in the British-controlled, Iraq wrote more than fifty books in addition to articles for newspapers.⁷⁵¹

Despite his initial traditional religious education, Shukri al-Alusi started to reject some practices such as visiting tombs and some Sufi rituals like music and dance. Many complaints were filed by the *ulema* of Baghdad against this scholar, and a polemic debate transpired between him and Yusuf al-Nabhani, who had a close relationship with Sultan Abdülhamid II. In 1904, al-Nabhani wrote a book entitled *Sawahid al-Hak* in which he stressed the spirituality of the graves of the Prophet and criticized the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya on *istighasa* (asking for help).⁷⁵² Mahmud Shukri, who was a follower of the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya, wrote a refutation titled *Ghayat al-Amani fi'l-Radd 'ala al-Nabhani* in 1907, but it was published anonymously, and its publishers added Alusi's name by hand on printed copies of the book during the Second Constitutional Era. In terms of polemics, Shukri al-Alusi discusses the issue of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in ten articles by rejecting the claim that the gates of *ijtihad* had closed. In the first article, he argues that all people in Najd follow the sect of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, so to see them as being in a sect apart from Sunni Islam would be injustice and slander. Alusi says that the Najdian people, along with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, are followers of Sunnism and that the term Wahhabi is an odd and irrelevant adjective because Abd al-Wahhab was the father of the leader of the movement, not the man himself.⁷⁵³

Alusi's statements were a response not only to al-Nabhani but also to the general perceptions of Ottoman scholars and intellectuals who wrote about Wahhabism. Moreover, his pamphlet's anonymous publication illustrates that even in the periphery of the state, Wahhabism was something that needed to be warned against by the authorities. While he could gather his students to teach his "harmful ideas", he could not easily

⁷⁵¹ Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "Alusi, Mahmud Şükri," *DİA*, vol. 2 (İstanbul 1989), pp. 548-549.

⁷⁵² The full title of his book is *Sawahid al-Hak fi al-Istighasa bi Sayyid al-Halk*. See M. Sait Özervarlı, "Nabhani, Yusuf b. İsmail," *DİA*, vol. 32 (İstanbul 2006), pp. 471-472.

⁷⁵³ Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, "Ijtihad and the Refutation of Nabhani" in *Modernist Islam: 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press: 2002), pp. 158-171. Hala Fattah, who evaluates the book *Ghayat al-Amani fi al-Radd 'ala al-Nabhani*, describes the different approaches of Alusi in terms of Wahhabi ideas. See Fattah, "Wahhabi' Influences, Salafi Responses," pp. 144-146.

publish his works within the state; even if he published them in India, they would be carefully examined by the Ottoman authorities. The reason for this must be related to the fact that the mobility of pernicious publications to other lands was easier than the travel of undesirable people.

In this regard, the stance against Shukri al-Alusi's book entitled *Fath al-Mannan* shows the attitude of the state against a publication that purportedly includes harmful doctrines. *Fath al-Mannan* was published in Bombay in 1892 and it was a completion (*tatimma*) of the incomplete manuscript of Abd al-Latif, the son of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's grandson. The Wahhabi scholar Abd al-Latif had died before completion of the book, which was written as a refutation against the *Sulkh al-Ikhwan* of aforementioned Sufi scholar Ibn Jirjis.⁷⁵⁴ Shukri al-Alusi, who completed the book, discussed many issues using evidence based on the ideas of *walema* from times past like Ibn Taymiyya, whom Alusi mentions as *Sheikh al-Islam*.⁷⁵⁵

The book was published in several editions outside of the Ottoman Empire and arrived in Baghdad via steamship on the Bombay-Basra line, where it began to spread among the people. Ottoman officials working for the Educational Management of Baghdad intercepted one copy and translated those "pernicious" articles into Turkish. Both the original copy

⁷⁵⁴ By completing this book, Nafi argues, Shukri al-Alusi showed that he had moved away from Sufi tendencies because he had received an invitation to join the Rifa'iyya tariqa a year before. The invitation had been sent by Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi (1850-1909). See Nafi, "Salafism Revived," p. 56. However, Eich disagrees with Nafi's argument about the break of the relationship between al-Sayyadi and the Alusi family. He says that Shukri Alusi continued to teach as the caliph of Abu al-Huda al-Sayyadi at the Sultan Ali shrine, which belonged to the Rifa'iyya *tariqah* until 1899. He argues that Alusi was disappointed with al-Sayyadi when he came to an agreement with the Baghdadi Kilanis, who were the rivals of the Alusi family, as a result of the changing policy of the Ottoman state in the 1890s. See Thomas Eich, "Rejoinder: Abu l-Huda and the Alusis in Scholarship on Salafism: A Note on Methodology," *Die Welt des Islams*, 49, no. 3-4 (2009), pp. 466-472.

⁷⁵⁵ There is the 1896 Bombay edition of *Fath al-Mannan* at Leiden University in the Snouck Hurgronje collection. Hurgronje made a list of the names of the books and scholars that were mentioned in the book on a separate paper. See Mahmud Shukri Alusi, *Fath al-Mannan: Tatimmat Minhac al-Ta'asis Radd Sulh al-Ikhwan* (Bombay, 1309 [1896]), Leiden University Library Closed Stack 5 (891 A 27).

and the translation of the book were sent from Baghdad to Istanbul on October 3, 1904.⁷⁵⁶

However, besides the *Fath al-Mannan* book, there was another book titled *Al-Din al-Khalis* that was written by an unnamed Wahhabi scholar and published in India and Egypt. Despite the fact that the author's name is not mentioned in the archival document, the writer of the book is the Indian scholar Siddiq Hasan Khan.⁷⁵⁷ When he was alive, Siddiq Hasan Khan had a good relationship with the Ottoman state, and Sultan Abdülhamid II sent him a *Mecidi* order in 1879.⁷⁵⁸ However, he died fourteen years before the examination of his book by the Ottoman authorities, and the book is mentioned in archival documents as one that was written to confirm the doctrines of the Wahhabi movement. In the various volumes of the book, Siddiq Hasan, who was also accused of being a Wahhabi by the British, repeats some ideas such as the imitation of sectarian schools and visiting graves referring to the statements of Ibn Taymiyya.⁷⁵⁹ Those seem to have been sufficient cause to deem it a book of Wahhabi doctrines in the view of the Ottoman authorities.

On October 24, 1904, the *ulema* of the investigation committee in the Ministry of Education gathered to check the books of Shukri al-Alusi and Siddiq Hasan Khan, and they wrote a report on November 1, 1904. The argument was made that the books are entirely pernicious and that their publication and distribution would be unacceptable both religiously and politically (*diyaneten ve siyaseten*). Such books, according to the report,

⁷⁵⁶ BOA, MF.MKT., 814/75, no. 1, 23 Receb 1322 [3 October 1904].

⁷⁵⁷ For the life story of Siddiq Hasan Khan and his Wahhabi ideas, see Alavi, "Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832-90)," pp. 1-12.

⁷⁵⁸ Abdülhamit Birişik and A. Cüneyt Eren, "Siddik Hasan Han," *DİA*, vol. 37 (İstanbul 2009), pp. 92-95.

⁷⁵⁹ Siddiq Hasan Khan mentions many subjects in *Al-Din Al-Khalis*. It has been noted that almost all topics that the Ottoman *ulema* rejected as Wahhabism can be found in the book. He repeats some topics in different parts of the three-volume book. As examples, he identifies and categorizes *tawhid*, *ilah*, *bid'at* and *shirk*; he identifies asking for help at a grave as *shirk*, stresses the mistakes of *madhhab* imitation, the necessity of destroying the domes above graves and he provides various scholars' views about visiting graves. To that end, he quotes many hadiths and statements of traditional *ulema*, especially Ibn Taymiyya, who Siddiq Hasan mentions as *Sheikh al-Islam*. See Siddiq Hasan Khan, *Al-Din Al-Khalis*, vol. 1-3 (Cairo: Maktabat Dar al-'Uruba, 1959-1960).

should be destroyed whenever they are found, or else more people will be drawn into heresy by reading them. Moreover, the investigation committee suggested that certain ministries should be warned against these kinds of publications. The books were copied and one of them was sent to the Sultan, one was sent to the grand viziership and one was sent to the office of the *Şeyhülislam* for review.⁷⁶⁰

In the report that was sent from the Minister of Education, Haşım Pasha, to the Ministry of the Interior on the 14th of December, it was said that the evolution and circulation of those two books was unacceptable, in both religious and political terms.⁷⁶¹ On December 27, 1904, an order was issued for the two books, like other such cases, to be removed from the shelves and destroyed wherever they were found. That order was issued by the Ministry of the Interior and telegraphed to the ministries of foreign affairs and the police (*zaptiye*), as well as to the administration of the municipality (*şehremaneti*), customs (*rüsumat*), post and telegraph services, the press, and all provinces and places that were directly connected to the centre (*elviye-i gayri mülhaka*).⁷⁶² In that way, all of the provinces and related administrations of the state were informed about these two books and their entry into Ottoman lands was strictly prohibited.

After the books arrived in Istanbul, it took almost three months for the order to be finalized. The investigation committee in the Ministry of Education carefully examined the two books that had been written to spread Wahhabi doctrines, and the final decision was announced to all the administrative bodies of the state by telegraph. However, the central *ulema* did not act for the sole purpose of determining the harmfulness of the books; they also went on the attack by crosschecking a refutation that was written against Shukri al-Alusi's *Fath al-Mannan*. That represented the counter-attack of the central Ottoman *ulema*.

⁷⁶⁰ BOA, MF.MKT., 814/75, no. 2, 22 Şaban 1322 [1 November 1904].

⁷⁶¹ "...sâlifü'l-beyan kitapların serâpâ muzır olup intişar ve tedavülü diyaneten ve siyaseten gayr-ı caiz..." See BOA, DH.MKT, 918/15, no. 1, 6 Şevval 1322 [14 December 1904].

⁷⁶² BOA, DH.MKT, 918/15, no. 2, 20 Şevval 1322 [27 December 1904]. Also see BOA, DH.MKT, 2607/26, no. 1, 20 Şevval 1322 [27 December 1904] and 2607/28, 20 Şevval 1322 [27 December 1904].

The *Ulema* of Istanbul Strike Back: A Refutation against Wahhabism

During the investigations of *Fath al-Mannan* and *al-Din al-Khalis*, a surprising development took place in Istanbul. A new committee had gathered with different members of the *ulema* who did not belong to any of the investigation councils of the Ministry of Education. Their aim was to investigate the book *Fath al-Mannan* by al-Alusi. The committee included Tikveşli Yusuf Efendi,⁷⁶³ members of the *Buhârîhan* group, which consisted of about ten people,⁷⁶⁴ and Mustafa Sabri Efendi, preacher of the *Huzur* lessons.⁷⁶⁵ The investigation began on October 15, 1904, and it was estimated that it would last a week to ensure full comprehension of the text. Ali al-Bağdadi, who was one of the clerks of the sultan, noted that despite the fact that a detailed result would be presented at the end of investigation, the first day had already yielded results. It was found that some superstitious statements related to the Wahhabi sect existed in *Fath al-Mannan*. More importantly, the biggest flaw of the book was that it

⁷⁶³ Yusuf Ziyaüddin Efendi was born in 1829 in Tikveş, which is part of Thessaloniki. He went to Istanbul in 1846 and then became a *dersiam* at the Fatih Madrasa. Yusuf Efendi, who bore the title “*Reisu’l-Ulema*,” was appointed as the *Mukarrir* of *Huzur Dersleri* in the presence of the sultan in 1874 and he remained in that position for a long period of time. See Albayrak, *Son Devir Osmanlı Uleması*, p. 533; Kasım Hızlı, “Reisü’l-Ulema Tikveşli Yusuf Ziyaeddin Efendi’nin Huzur Dersi Takririnde Sultan II. Abdülhamid’e Eğitim ve İdareye Dair Yaptığı Tavsiyeler,” *Journal of Ottoman Civilization Studies*, 4, no. 6 (2018), pp. 37-56.

⁷⁶⁴ The famous book of hadiths *Buhârî-i Şerif* was recited in mosques, libraries or other places by licensed people called *Buhârîhân*. They were chosen from among *dersiams* and in the second half of the nineteenth century they began to be selected with exams administered by an *ulema* committee. Ebu’l-Ulâ Mardinî reports that a scholar committee of the *Huzur* lessons also taught *Buhârî-i Şerif* in major mosques on some days. The head of this ten-person committee was Arapgirli Abbas Efendi. For more detail, see Mustafa Celil Altuntaş, “Osmanlı İlim Geleneğinde Buhârîhânlık,” *Hadis Tetkikleri Dergisi*, 8, no. 1 (2010), pp. 33-67.

⁷⁶⁵ Mustafa Sabri Efendi was also the *hafız-ı kütüb* of the library of Sultan Abdülhamid II at that time. He is known as the last *Şeyhülislam* of the Ottoman Empire and he played a crucial role in Cairo as an immigrant scholar during the Republican Period. See Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “Mustafa Sabri Efendi,” *DİA*, vol. 31 (İstanbul 2006), pp. 350-353; Şeyhun, *Islamist Thinkers in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic*, pp. 44-52; Amit Bein, “‘Ulama’ and Political Activism in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Political Career of Şeyhülislam Mustafa Sabri Efendi (1869–1954),” in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: ‘Ulama’ in the Middle East*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 67-90.

mentioned Wahhabi Muhammad ibn Saud, who occupied and looted the holy cities of Mecca and Medina as their conqueror (*fatih al-haremeyn*).⁷⁶⁶

But why did the new committee, which consisted of high-ranking *ulema* like Tikveşli Yusuf and Mustafa Sabri Efendis, gather? The answer of that question should be sought on a refutation that was penned in opposition to *Fath al-Mannan*. The committee did not just check *Fath al-Mannan*, but also another book entitled *Nur al-Sunna*, which affirms Sunnism in refusing the first one. When this refutation, the author of which anonymous, was examined, another Wahhabi publication, *Al-Din al-Halis*, was not on the table of the committee. This high-ranking group of *ulema* was given the task not just for the sake of censorship, which is about determining whether or not a book is pernicious, but also to investigate the value of a refutation—in other words, whether or not it has accurate arguments for disproving a doctrine.

In this regard, the differences between the reports of the committees are worthy of note. While the investigation committee of the Ministry of Education focused on the results, this committee examined the books in scholarly detail. For instance, some parts of the *Fath al-Mannan* were enough for the committee of the Ministry of Education to demand that it be banned, as can be also be seen in other decisions regarding the censorship of different kinds of publications.⁷⁶⁷ The first committee's reports repeatedly stressed that the book was pernicious in its entirety. However, in the report of the high-ranking *ulema*, it was said that the content of the *Fath al-Mannan* was not entirely based on Wahhabi ideas and that it also contained the thoughts of Sunni scholars, but the problem was that it joined falsehood with truth in a sly attempt to persuade readers that the sect was legitimate.

After this statement came the detailed report about the refutation, the *Nur al-Sunna*, which indicates that the new committee focused to a great extent on the arguments that were made therein. It was argued that the

⁷⁶⁶ BOA, Y..PRK.AZJ, 50/15, 2 Teşrinievvel 1320 [15 October 1904].

⁷⁶⁷ In this regard, the 43rd article of the 1894 *Matbaalar Nizamnamesi* was sufficient reason for the committee to ban the book. According to the article, the committee was to ban the book completely if it contained several harmful pages: (...*eserin yalnız birkaç sahifesinin muzır olduğu tebeyün eylediği takdirde... tekml eserin iptaline karar verecektir*). See *Salname-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiye* (1316), pp. 188-189.

Nur al-Sunna contains refutations for parts of the *Fath al-Mannan* that did not need to be refuted, so its statements were deemed to be based on weak arguments. For that reason, the scholars cited the unnecessary and weak arguments of *Nur al-Sunna* with page numbers, not quotes of whole passages, and then explained the contradictions in detail. At times they proposed the addition of words for clarification and syntax checks to prevent misunderstandings, and in other places they correct parts with regard to the intent of the book of Shukri al-Alusi, who is referred to as “the Wahhabi” in the report. They suggested that those statements, which they quoted from forty-nine pages and clarified, should be extracted from the text or corrected, whereupon it would be ready to be presented to the *amir al-mü'minin* (the leader of believers), Sultan Abdülhamid II, to get his opinion on the matter.⁷⁶⁸

However, there is something conspicuous in the report as regards the forty-nine statements and proposals for corrections. According to the report, one statement in particular—on the 105th page of the book—needed to be corrected. They did not quote the whole sentence on that page, but focused on one “incorrect” expression. That statement was as follows: “...the religious and political ruler”. The *ulema* committee proposed that the statement be removed and that “*amir al-mü'minin*” would be sufficient. In doing so, they were clearly referring to the Ottoman Caliph, Sultan Abdülhamid II, as the prayer after the statement for him would be “may Allah support him with victory”.⁷⁶⁹

The corrected statement is critical on several levels. The distinction between religious and political leadership was not necessary in counter-propaganda because *amir al-mü'minin* corresponds with both meanings. The committee was probably trying to avoid confusing the people whom the book targeted in the periphery. Also, they apparently thought of Muslims outside of the state as colonial subjects. The distinction of the ruler as religious and political was perceived as pernicious, because that separation could cause some people to see the Ottoman sultan only as a political ruler or solely as a religious ruler. However, in the Ottoman mentality, the Ottoman ruler, as Caliph-Sultan, was both. All in all, the

⁷⁶⁸ For more on these forty-nine corrections with explanations and the page numbers for the statements in *Nur al-Sunna*, see BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ., 19/103, no. 1-2, undated.

⁷⁶⁹ BOA, Y.PRK.AZJ., 19/103, no.1, undated.

report of the high-ranking *ulema* shows that the central *ulema* not only played a role in the prohibition of the publications of the peripheral *ulema*, but also countered the efforts of scholars who had pernicious ideas that could inflict harm on the public order. It also suggests that the clash of the *ulema* was no longer restricted to a limited circle of people. It had grown in an age in which the centre and periphery were no longer so far apart and its influence was immediately heard in every corner of the state.

Political Reactions against the Anti-Caliphal and Mahdist Publications

Of course, focusing on the role of the *ulema* should not distract us from the fact that the prohibition of harmful publications was a political issue. While the *ulema* played an active role in the determination of the harmfulness of texts and the necessity of censorship, banning books and punishing their owners was carried out by state officials. Although statesmen and the *ulema* collaborated in the control of pernicious books, state administrators sometimes did not feel a need to send copies of publications to Istanbul for investigation; they immediately banned the works whenever they deemed them hazardous.

There are numerous cases about the prohibition of pamphlets and books in the Hejaz, in which a lot of published works were being distributed to people secretly, especially during the Hajj. Consequently, Ottoman officials were diligent about tracking down publications that carried perilous ideas. For instance, during the governance of Osman Nuri Pasha, who was the governor of the Hejaz between 1882 and 1886, Ottoman officials raided a Wahhabi gathering place in Mecca on the basis of a complaint. Forty to fifty Wahhabis were caught during the raid and Osman Nuri Pasha arrested and exiled them. More importantly, thousands of pernicious books, pamphlets and letters were seized at the location, and they were immediately destroyed. In the report on the case, the depravity of the Wahhabis was described as having been eliminated thanks to the

intervention of state officials. Also, the destroyed books and pamphlets were portrayed as works opposing the Ottoman caliphate and sultanate.⁷⁷⁰

While the Wahhabi publications were seen as refuting the Ottoman caliphate, there was also an anti-caliphal struggle independent of Wahhabism in this period. That struggle was a refutation of the Ottomans' caliphal claim and it claimed to prove the illegitimacy of the caliphate of the Ottoman sultans. Ottoman administrators dealt with such oppositional works in the same manner. When some custom officials were examining some goods in the port of Beirut in 1901, for instance, they noticed some pernicious booklets. The booklets had been hidden inside some British newspapers, but the local officials noticed them and informed the capital city by telegraph. Because of the significance of the case, the authorities in Istanbul decided it was necessary to inform all levels of the administration. As a result, the Ministry of the Interior telegraphed an order to the heads of the territories of the Hejaz, Yemen, Benghazi and Tripoli to be vigilant regarding the booklet and to prevent it from entering Ottoman lands.⁷⁷¹

Similar pamphlets were written with the intent of breaking the influence of the caliphate over Muslims and attempts were made to distribute them to Muslims in the Hejaz, but Ottoman officials caught the offending pilgrims in the act.⁷⁷² While officials took precautions when they found copies of such books and pamphlets in Ottoman lands, they reacted similarly when they heard of efforts to smuggle such pamphlets in, as can be seen in the telegraphed reports of the Ottoman embassy in Paris.⁷⁷³ Moreover, such efforts were unveiled not just in Arabia and Africa, but also in Anatolia and Rumelia as well, eliciting similar reactions, as was seen in 1907 in Skopje.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁰ BOA, Y. PRK.UM, 71/13, no. 2, 6 Eylül 1320 [19 September 1904]. It is clear from the information in the anonymous report and the book titles that the report was written by Dr. Kasım İzzeddin, who was the head of medical affairs in the Hejaz. See Kasım İzzeddin, *Mekke-i Mükerrreme'de Kolera ve Hıfzı's-sıhha* (İstanbul: Mahmud Bey Matbaası, 1327).

⁷⁷¹ BOA, DH.MKT, 2474/29, 5 Nisan 1317 [18 April 1901].

⁷⁷² BOA, Y.PRK.UM, 34/50, no. 2, 13 Şubat 1311 [25 February 1896].

⁷⁷³ BOA, Y.A.HUS, 165/154, no. 1-3, 26 Zilkade 1297 [30 October 1880]. For another example, see BOA, Y.EE, 127/23, 9 Eylül 1297 [21 September 1881].

⁷⁷⁴ BOA, Y.PRK.UM, 80/20, 27 Temmuz 1323 [9 August 1907].

At the same time, Ottoman authorities sought to censor news about the Sudanese Mahdi to prevent people from being lured into Mahdism. As was discussed in previous chapters, the newspapers in the Ottoman state were not allowed to publish news about the Mahdi movement and statesmen took secret precautions against Mahdism. Nevertheless, there were some newspapers that did publish news about the Mahdi movement in Egypt under British occupation. As was seen in the case of the newspaper *Abu Naddara*, which published telegraphed news about the Mahdi's biography with complimentary statements in March 1885, the Ottoman authorities took action by banning the circulation of such newspapers in the Ottoman provinces and punishing officials who were neglectful in their duties in that regard.⁷⁷⁵

Moreover, any and all materials that were related to the Sudanese Mahdi movement were strictly prohibited. A number of mahdist declarations in printed form which were sent to Arab tribes were found in the Hejaz and destroyed, as seen in the report of governor Saffet Pasha, which was sent to Istanbul in 1888.⁷⁷⁶ However, such pernicious materials not only included pamphlets and letters but also silver coins bearing the name of the Mahdi, which were struck after the capture of Khartoum.⁷⁷⁷ For instance, in 1888, coins of that sort were located in Sivas in the possession of a merchant from Karahisar-ı Şarkî, today's Giresun on the Black Sea coast, and a steamship passenger going to Bombay was apprehended with the same coins in the port of Basra.⁷⁷⁸ Also, several months later, coins of the Sudanese Mahdi were tracked down in the Hejaz,⁷⁷⁹ and all of them were sent to Istanbul.

At the same time, a print version of a picture of the Sudanese Mahdi was in circulation in the hands of Mahdists and copies of it were also found in Ottoman territories. As seen in the report of the Ottoman division

⁷⁷⁵ BOA, Y.PRK.BŞK, 9/34, 7 Mart 1301 [19 March 1885].

⁷⁷⁶ BOA, Y.PRK.UM, 11/115, 11 Nisan 1304 [23 April 1888].

⁷⁷⁷ Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*, pp. 127-128.

⁷⁷⁸ BOA, DH.MKT, 1508/64, 5 Ramazan 1305 [16 May 1888]. In the archival document, there is no precise statement that indicates if those coins had belonged to the Sudanese Mahdi or not, but the descriptions correspond with a silver coin of the Sudanese Mahdi. See Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*, p. 128.

⁷⁷⁹ BOA, Y.MTV, 36/88, 23 Rebiülahir 1306 [27 December 1888].

commander of Beirut, Mehmed Emin Pasha, one copy, which was drawn in pencil by a French painter and then photographed, was found in Beirut in May of 1885, and it was sent to Istanbul in an envelope together with a detailed report.⁷⁸⁰



Figure 7: Print Copy of Charcoal Portrait of the Mahdi⁷⁸¹

⁷⁸⁰ BOA, Y..PRK.UM., 7/68, no. 1-5, 7 Şaban 1302 [22 May 1885]. Also see Ömer Koçyiğit, "The Picture of the Sudanese Leader in the Ottoman Archives: Le Mahdi," *Sudan Studies Association Bulletin*, 33, no. 1 (2015), pp. 32-34.

⁷⁸¹ BOA, Y..PRK.UM., 7/68, no. 3.

Conclusion

A large number of publications were created in the age of print and they were transported from city to city in the age of steam. In that way, the age of steam and print facilitated the travel of ideas in the form of printed works from province to province. The publication of harmful ideologies that could be passed along from hand to hand were threats for the stability of the centre as well as the periphery. By borrowing Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" in which nationhood is an imagined community that print culture helps to create through novels and newspapers,⁷⁸² it can be said that the Ottoman Empire struggled to prevent the creation of new "imagined religious communities" that threatened the future of the state. As a result of that situation, measures were taken to prevent the spread of pernicious publications, but their mobility was more clandestine than that of people travelling for the purpose of spreading certain doctrines. In that regard, the central *ulema* played a crucial role not only in the assessment and prohibition of such publications, but also in counter-attacking what were deemed to be harmful ideologies. Also, the sphere of influence of the *ulema* expanded in this age, as the ideas of peripheral *ulema* swiftly reached the centre through printed works and the decisions of the central *ulema* affected all of the territories of the state in a short period of time through telegraphed messages. In the eyes of the Ottoman authorities, the doctrine-oriented Wahhabi movement and the person-oriented Sudanese Mahdi movement were prototypical threats for the public order in places under Ottoman rule. For that reason, the Ottoman political establishment took an intolerant approach in reacting to these movements' publications by censoring, annihilating and punishing their carriers, all with the aim of preventing disturbances in the public order.

⁷⁸² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

