The Abdülhamid II Photo Collection: Orientalism and Public Image at the End of an Empire

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Abstract

The Abdülhamid II Photo Collection was originally given as a gift to the United States by the Ottoman sultan in 1893 and is now housed in the Prints and Photographs Division at the Library of Congress. The fifty-one albums containing 1,819 photographs display Ottoman industrial, military, and educational projects. Notably absent from the albums are the familiar scenes of Orientalist painting, literature and photography that were common in Western culture at the time.

The Abdülhamid II collection is one outgrowth of the Hamidian program of public relations, but one that was largely ignored. The albums were shelved and more or less forgotten until the 1980s and the tropes of Oriental exoticism and social backwardness prevailed. Since then there has been some scholarship on the albums, the most detailed of which is a six page article published in the Journal of Turkish Studies by William Allen in 1988. Other authors have cited the albums as part of a larger historical narrative but most ignore their inherent value to the field.

This paper seeks to take a more focused approach and considers the albums themselves. The photography found in the albums is compared to the commercial photography of the period in order to display that neither is a completely “accurate” portrait of the Ottoman Empire near the turn of the century. The Abdülhamid II Collection is a remarkably rich resource not only for students of Ottoman history, but also those considering photography and the global climate at the end of the Nineteenth Century.

The history of the late Ottoman Empire is a narrative of conscious (and self-conscious) modernization and competition with other world powers. The Western European powers—Britain and France foremost among them—were making territorial, military, and technological gains that the Ottoman Empire knew it must keep up with and adopt lest its long history end with colonization. With this in mind, the Ottoman government of the late nineteenth century made a calculated effort to present itself in a progressive light to the rest of the world. That many in Europe and the United States thought of the empire as technologically and socially backward was not lost on the Ottoman elite. In an effort to remedy this, the government enacted policies intended to present itself as an equal player on the world stage. Photography (that most modern of art forms) was the perfect way to broadcast the modernization of the empire that was taking place and to (hopefully) legitimize its claim to status as a great power.

In 1893 Sultan Abdülhamid II sent a set of 51 albums containing 1,819 photographs to the "National Library of the United States" [The Library of Congress]. The photographs included in the albums show scenes of military, industry, schools, hospitals, and famous monuments around the empire but mostly in the city of Istanbul. Notably absent from the albums are the familiar scenes of Orientalist painting, literature, and photography. The stereotypes of Ottoman men as ignorant, bloodthirsty autocrats and Ottoman women as passive, eroticized slaves, along with the vision of the Empire itself as backward and technologically inept is replaced by a vision of a modern, ordered, and progressive state.[1]

These two extremes of civilization and primitiveness coexisted more than the Ottoman government cared to admit. The indolent Turkish peasant smoking a water pipe (fig. 1) found in the catalogues of Istanbul photographers and the upstanding young military officer (fig. 2) seen in the Abdülhamid albums did occupy the same time and place. Similarly, the sprawling, ramshackle wooden houses so prone to fire (fig. 3) could be found only blocks away from multistory stone façades along avenues that would not be out of place in the reorganized Paris of Baron von Haussmann (fig. 4). The Ottoman Empire that Sultan Abdülhamid's government wished the world to see was all too often at odds with the images that made their way to Western Europe and the United States in the souvenir albums and postcards purchased by tourists and armchair travelers. Yet neither are entirely fact or fiction. They both represent a certain view of the Ottoman Empire prepared, packaged, and intended for the same audience but containing a different message. Viewed together, these two types of photographs present the image of an empire in transition.

When Abdülhamid II took the throne in 1876, he inherited an empire that for nearly two hundred years seemed ever on the brink of collapse. The exact nature, cause, and even the very existence of this decline is highly debated, but even contemporary observers noted that the Ottomans were not what they once were. The Ottoman defeat at the siege of Vienna in 1683 marked the point for many at the time (and some modern historians) where what was once the major player in the Mediterranean became the Sick Man of Europe.[2] The Ottomans realized that in order to achieve the level of prosperity enjoyed by their neighbors in Western Europe they would have to adapt (at least partially) to their model of society. The Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century and the actions of groups such as the Young Ottomans may have made some steps in that direction before being mostly countermanded by Abdülhamid II and his government. What Abdülhamid instead envisioned was a strong centralized government with Islam as the cultural unifier of the disparate peoples under Ottoman dominion. This attempt to unify the population (most of whom were Muslim) through shared religion was intended to strengthen the state and give it legitimacy in the eyes of the people. If the government was also the religious authority, then any political opponents or members of any nascent nationalist groups would, by extension, be against religion and therefore the empire.

Abdülhamid also encouraged an overall rejection of the Western culture that had permeated his empire before his reign. In a reactionary move against the Tanzimat era, Westernization was considered alien to the Ottoman system by many bureaucrats and seen by the lower classes as a subversion of the traditional solidarity of the community.[3] This rejection of Western culture did not, however, extend to a rejection of Western technology. The Ottoman government simultaneously rejected what they saw as dangerous foreign cultural influence and enthusiastically accepted foreign technical innovation.[4]

It was Abdülhamid's (and his predecessors') enthusiasm for photography that facilitated its growth in the empire. Discomfort toward the intensely realist figural representation that photography allowed came mostly from the lower classes and some religious scholars. The upper classes, led by the example of the sultan, were ardent patrons of Istanbul's photography studios, the proprietors of which were usually non-Muslim Ottoman subjects. Many photographers were Armenian, Syrian, or Greek Christians whose families had some background in fields attendant to photographic technology—metalworking or chemistry, for example.[5] Cultural and linguistic affinity with Western Europe (in addition a lack of religious discomfort with photography) tended to make these groups adopt the profession more readily. Muslim practitioners of photography were usually graduates of military academies who found practical value in the art by photographing landscape for use in military maneuvers.[6]

Photography was a presence in the Ottoman Empire since its earliest manifestations. Louis Daguerre's invention of 1829 was first announced in the Ottoman Empire on October 28, 1839 in the newspaper *Takvim-i Vekayi* and was followed by a wave of photographers racing to document the Ottoman Empire and the significant Near Eastern sites under its dominion.[7] By 1845 the Italian Carlo Naya had opened one of the first Istanbul-based studios in Pera and offered lessons and sales of photographic equipment.[8] Frederick Scott Archer's invention of the collodion method (which used glass plates instead of the Daguerreotype's metal plates) in the early 1850s made photography faster and cheaper and furthered its diffusion.[9]

The famous Abdullah brothers bought their studio in 1858, also in Pera. The three brothers: Kevork, Viçen, and Hovsep (Armenian in descent), studied photography in Paris and what they learned there made them among the most famous in Istanbul and around the world.[10] Abdullah Fréres was the second studio to be named Photographers to the Sultan, under Abdülaziz and later Abdülhamid II. Their special attention to light and shadow as well as spatial arrangement mark the artistic quality of their photographs. Pascal Sébah, a Syrian Catholic, opened his studio, El Chark, in 1857. El Chark would eventually be known by 1888 as Sébah & Joaillier and by 1934 as Foto Sabah after proprietorship was handed down to Pascal's sons and new partners were brought aboard.[11] While never achieving the official titles held by the Abdullahs, Sébah was one of the most prolific, commercially successful, and long-lived studios (finally closing down after 95 years in 1953). Sébah & Joaillier even bought the Abdullahs' studio in 1900, styling themselves "The Successors of Abdullah Fréres,"—a testament both to Sébah's success and the lasting
reputation of the Abdullahs' work.[12]

All of these studios operated in three main capacities: royal patronage, private patronage, and production of albums and picture postcards for tourists and visitors to the Empire. It is interesting to examine the differences in choice and presentation of subject within each of these categories. Most photographs produced for the sultan are in a rather sanitized, documentary style, while commercial work generally submits to fashion. The government received photography according to its specifications; otherwise photos were produced according to what the public would buy.

Travelers in Istanbul and other areas of the empire wanted to take home reminders of their time abroad. Albums full of views of the city and of various "scenes and types" were available for purchase in nearly every studio. By the 1890s, pre-made souvenir albums and picture postcards, much cheaper than selecting individual photographs, were for sale.[13] Sébah & Joaillier had an especially extensive collection of Turkish peoples and places available for purchase.[14] The persons featured in these photographs were to represent all the various ethnic types to be found in the Ottoman dominions, often all in the same photo (fig. 5). The men and women found in these photographs generally represent the lower classes, as they were more "picturesque" and exotic than the Europeanized wealthy population.

Exoticism is especially evident in commercial photos of women. The "harem beauties" and ethnic types represented reflect the fashion for Orientalism in painting of the nineteenth century. Photos of "typical" Turkish women in indoor and outdoor dress were especially popular. In a photograph produced by Sébah & Joaillier from 1894 (fig. 6), an anonymous Turkish woman stands in what is ostensibly a home environment, accompanied by the typical water pipe. She is unnamed, more an example than a person. Another photo from 1900 displays a woman in street dress (fig. 7). Other ethnic types, such as Albanian "beauties," (fig. 8) gypsies (fig. 9), and Kurdish villagers (fig. 10) are featured.

Though many of these photographs were meant to represent Muslim women, few of them actually did. It was both socially unacceptable and illegal to photograph Muslim women in "inappropriate" poses. The women in many of these photographs are usually prostitutes, non-Muslims, or members of the lower classes in need of the money.[15] The same model was often used multiple times—the woman in figs. 9 and 10, for example, is the same person only in different costume. Sometimes men would even be dressed in women's clothing to get around the law (fig. 11). As long as the model was wearing a veil, who would be able to tell the difference?

Photographs of men in the studio and on the streets of Istanbul follow much the same model of those of women, except that an absence of prohibitive laws allowed for more authenticity. Basile Karopoulo's photographs of street vendors and street performers (figs. 12-13) set the stage for photography in the later decades of the nineteenth century.[16] Men are seen with the tools of their profession and photos are given simple, descriptive titles such as Flower Seller or Bear Performers. Abdullah Fréres took their cameras to the streets of the city, photographing subjects such as beggars (fig. 14) and coffee sellers (fig. 15), among others. Studio photographs of ethnic types, such as "Kurdish Chief" (fig. 16) allow for more refined composition and clearer display. In "A Group of Jewish People" (fig. 17) from 1880, the Abdullahs' skill in artistic composition is clearly demonstrated. Such an arrangement would be at home in the work of any number of European Orientalist artists. Many artists of the period used photographs such as these for inspiration in their work. The perceived authenticity of photography lent a certain credibility to an artist's work that could only otherwise be achieved through direct observation.

As Linda Nochlin points out in her 1983 article, "The Imaginary Orient," reliance on photographs such as these to produce artwork can be problematic. While artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme did travel and include direct observation in their work, they also relied on photographs as models once they returned home.[17] As a new, modern, scientific medium, the photograph was seen as a representation of "truth." Whoever controlled the camera controlled what the viewer understood as reality. Photographs such as those discussed above present a very specific view of the Orient with several notable characteristics in addition to the fact that many of them don't even depict the actual subjects they claim to represent. First, there is an absence of a sense of history: time seems to stand still in these photographs.[18] Though these photographers were known for their panoramas of Istanbul, there is very little suggestion that the people in

these photographs inhabit a world where technology has advanced beyond the medieval. There is little suggestion of the "Western" culture that permeated the empire at the time. In a very cosmopolitan city, there don't seem to be any Europeans, despite the fact that by the 1880s as much as fifteen percent of Istanbul's population consisted of resident foreigners.[19] Where there is work represented, it is of the most menial and "traditional" type—there is no suggestion of industry.[20] The people in these photographs seem to inhabit a world where time stands still, where life is as it has been for hundreds of years, and where the outside world has had no influence. The Orient in these photographs is a place where Europeans go to escape "their" world.

Defined by Edward Said as an effort on the part of Europeans to emphasize the differences between cultures to control and to classify by distilling to a set of stereotypes, photos of Ottoman men and women from studios like Sébah & Joaillier and Abdullah Fréres certainly conform to the set of notions that are today termed "Orientalism." Photographs of the Orient conform to Said's idea of the Orientalist desire to "control, manipulate, and even to incorporate what is manifestly different."[21] Said's thesis is groundbreaking and intensely influential in the field, but is not without complication, especially in the case of the Ottoman Empire, where sometimes his ideas simply do not fit. The problem here is that these photographers were, while for the most part not Muslim, subjects of the Ottoman Empire—the entity their photographs supposedly demean. These photographers probably had as much civic pride as their Muslim neighbors, not to mention just as much to gain from the success of the empire, as a sizeable portion of their revenues came from government patronage. These photographs display what they saw on the streets of their city: the myriad ethnicities and backgrounds, often quite destitute, that made up what is constantly referred to as a "bridge between two worlds." While photographs of indolent beggars were not exactly the type of image the government wished Europeans to have of the Ottoman Empire, they were a part of its society, and these photographs are at once artistic, ethnographic, and commercial. They were produced to sell: they represent what travelers wanted to buy, and photographers were only too happy to fulfill that demand.

Ottoman photographers did not restrict themselves to photographs for tourists. Much of their business was in portrait photography for the Ottoman elite and foreign dignitaries. Upper class Ottomans followed the Sultan's example and also had their family portraits taken (fig. 18). As Photographers to the Sultan, Basile Karopoulo and later Abdullah Fréres had the privilege of photographing the royal family and the Sultan's cabinet. These photographs range from photos of the Sultan himself (fig. 19), to his many children (fig. 20), to his ministers and generals.[22]

Elite Ottoman photographers had no shortage of business from the Sublime Porte. Abdülhamid's personal photo library contained thousands of images of the people and places of his empire that he himself rarely, if ever, saw. Fear of assassination prevented him from making many journeys more arduous than the ceremonial procession to Friday prayer.[23] The sultan employed the photography studios of note in Istanbul (Abdullah Fréres and Sébah & Joaillier chief among them) to produce photographs that would serve the documentary and administrative, rather than expressly artistic, needs of the government. Buildings, monuments, and industrial sites in Istanbul and around the empire were the subject of this photographic documentation. It seems the goal of this project was to photograph every important site in the empire, leaving no area unexamined by the camera's lens.

Thus the camera took on the role of panopticon for Abdülhamid II. The collection, originally in the Yildiz Palace but currently at the Istanbul University Library, contains over eight hundred albums of ten to eighty photographs each.[24] This massive library of photographs provided knowledge (and therefore control) of the empire, at least in the sultan's mind. Abdülhamid was shown what he wanted to see; the photographs in his collection present an

overall sunny and positive view of the state of the Ottoman Empire. Abdülhamid's personal photo collection displays his understanding of photography's role as a reflection of "true" reality. Certainly the medium's newness and mechanical sophistication contributed to its status as documenter of life. The camera did not "lie" the way painting or drawing could; it was merely a chemical process that recorded the reaction of light falling on a photo-sensitive surface. Photography presented the world as it was. Or did it?

In addition to employing photography for this own personal use, Sultan Abdülhamid II recognized the utility of the medium for espousing a positive public image of his empire. Tashin Pasha, Abdülhamid's chief private secretary, recalled that the sultan said that "every picture is an idea. A picture evokes more political and emotional significance than a hundred pages of writing can express. That is why I prefer to have recourse to photographs than written documents."[25] The importance of displaying his empire in a positive light was not lost on the sultan. Public opinion abroad keenly influenced the actions of foreign governments, the most powerful of which were already making territorial gains at the expense of the Ottomans. A positive public image would influence diplomacy in the empire's favor and encourage positive financial interactions. The sultan's program of broadcasting the image of the Ottoman Empire as progressive and modern was manifest in the series of albums sent to the Library of Congress and British Library in 1893.

In total, there are fifty-one albums and 1,819 photographs in the Library of Congress collection. The British collection has only slight variation. The photographs, culled from the Yildiz Palace library, display people and scenes mostly in Turkey and especially in Istanbul, though there are some photographs of monuments around the empire. Albums are organized according to photographer instead of subject matter, though some of the photographers do focus on certain subjects. Each album, which measures approximately 48x64 cm, is bound in black leather with red and blue detailing and gold lettering (fig. 21). The front of each album reads, in English: "GIFT, MADE BY H.I.M. THE SULTAN, ABDUL-HAMID II, TO THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 1893." The back of the album (fig. 22) features Ottoman calligraphy and the albums are assembled in a way that they can be looked at either left to right for English readers, or right to left for readers of the Ottoman script.

All of the albums follow the same basic format with some variation. There is one photograph per page, most printed on gold toned albumen paper, though six albums contain photographs on gaslight paper.[26] Each photograph is contained within a simple decorative border, mostly printed, but some ink drawn. Most have a short title or description handwritten in Ottoman at the top, and a French or English translation at the bottom, also handwritten. Some of the photographs include the name of the photographer or studio.

There are five identified individuals or photography studios associated with the Abdülhamid Albums.[27] The work of Abdullah Fréres makes up most of the collection with thirty-five albums and 1,291 photos. Sébah & Joaillier and the Phoebus studio are second, each with two albums consisting of sixty to sixty-six photos. Ali Riza Pasha, chief photographer to the Ministry of War and the only individual photographer to have his work take up an entire volume, has another two albums of sixty photographs each. The Photographic Unit of the Imperial School of Engineering contributed one album of fifty-five photographs. The remaining nine albums and two hundred eighty-six photos have no identified photographer.

The albums were presented to the United States in 1893, and another set went to the British Library one year later. The exact circumstances of the albums' presentation are unknown, as the Library of Congress does not seem to have any record of receiving them. The idea for the albums may have been planted in 1886 when Abram S. Hewitt, then a congressman from Ohio, visited Istanbul with his family and gained an audience with the sultan. Hewitt's honesty about

the things he disliked of the empire apparently pleased Abdülhamid, and during the course of the visit Hewitt was invited back to the palace several times.[28]

The exact reason for the albums' presentation and circumstances of their receipt is also open to speculation. While the presentation of the albums coincides with the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, there is no record of the albums being displayed there or even intended for display in the Ottoman Pavilion at the fair, though the photographs do conform with the overall public relations policy espoused by Abdülhamid's government. It is possible that because of conversations with Hewitt and what he already knew of the public perception of his domains abroad Abdülhamid sought to remedy what he saw as misconceptions about Ottoman life. Orientalist depictions of the Ottomans as backward and barbaric permeated Western culture. To get away from the image of the "unchanging Orient"—steeped in exotic tradition and counter to Western sensibilities and rationality—was imperative to Abdülhamid. In an internal document possibly referring to studios like Abdullah Fréres, the sultan dictated to his secretary "most of the photographs for sale in Europe vilify and mock Our Well-Protected Domains. It is imperative that the photographs to be taken in this instance do not insult Islamic peoples by showing them in a vulgar and demeaning light."[29]

The subject matter of the photographs falls into three basic categories: landscape, Byzantine and Turkish monuments, and educational, industrial, and military developments. The latter category comprises most of the collection and was probably seen as the most important. There are several albums of schoolchildren and students of government military and engineering academies, sometimes photographed in studio, sometimes outdoors. Industrial sites such as shipyards or factories emphasize the empire's modern methods of production. The sultan's possessions—his palaces, especially the Dolembaçe, his yachts, and the imperial stud farm are also given special attention. The overarching theme of all these photographs is to show the Western powers just how alike they were to the Ottoman Empire. Many of the subjects could, to the casual observer, be just as easily found in London or Paris as in Istanbul. And this was exactly the point.

What is omitted from the albums speaks volumes about their intended purpose. Absent is the trope of the exotic, sensual girl of the harem that was the fantasy of so many artists of the period—and the subject of so many commercial photographs by the same photographers that produced the Abdülhamid albums. The photographs do not dwell on the "backward" occupations that were so counter to the portrait of modernity envisioned by the Sultan even though, again, the same photographers visit the same subject in their commercial work. Beggars and the poor, another popular subject for tourists, do not exist in Abdülhamid's vision. The Abdülhamid albums are a conscious effort to combat these stereotypes. There are no photographs of members of any non-Muslim religious minorities (or at least none identified as such), even though Jews and Christians played a vital role in the administration and culture of the empire. The Ottoman government wanted to make a clear distinction of itself as the prominent Islamic empire on the world stage. The sultan, an ostensibly modern, progressive ruler, was also the Caliph of All Muslims, and no European power need interfere with those under his protection. In short, the civil unrest, reform movements, and intense internal strife that was about to tear the empire apart is completely left out of the Abdülhamid albums, and with good reason.

The rosier vision of the Empire is seen in the photographs of education found in the albums. There is an entire album devoted to the Aşiret School for children of tribes and nomads, compiled by Abdullah Fréres. The Mekteb-i Aşiret was established in Istanbul to educate Arab, Kurdish, and Albanian boys from around the empire in order to "bring civilization to them" so that they could, in turn, bring it home to their families and communities—a philosophy familiar

to the U.S., with its "civilizing missions" undertaken for the "benefit" of the Native American population.[30] The school's mission was to cultivate in the students a sense of Ottoman patriotism and ensure their loyalty to the state in the face of approaching imperialist influence (especially from the British, in the Arab case). Photographs of students at the Mekteb-i Aşiret show students of different ethnicities and backgrounds standing together in traditional costume against a painted backdrop (fig. 23). The students stand as examples of some of the "scenes and types" to be found in the empire—not unlike the "scenes and types" produced by Abdullah Fréres and others for the Istanbul tourist market.

Education for girls was another keen interest of the Western public. The Abdülhamid albums oblige with photo after photo of girls' school buildings (fig. 24) and of the students themselves (fig. 25). The girls in these photos combat the ever-present stereotype of Muslim women as essentially passive and sexual in nature. These photos fight the assumption that Ottoman (and Muslim) women and girls were universally oppressed and denied any chance of education. Here girls are seen as students of primary and middle schools, as well as a school for art education. Many of the girls hold books or diplomas to display their scholarly activities.

Education was a primary concern for the self-legitimization of the Hamidian régime. During Abdülhamid's reign, a conscious effort was made to extend primary education to all subjects of the empire. It was clear to many Ottoman statesmen that one of the main reasons for the empire's troubles was that it was far behind the West in educational standards. In addition to the benefits of having a better-educated and thus more productive population, education by the state was a way to combat encroaching Western cultural influence. Schools run by foreigners could very easily be part of an imperialist plot by territory-hungry outside powers. The Ottoman system had much in common with education in contemporary Russia, Austria-Hungary, Britain, Germany, and Japan, where government-run schools were meant to produce a population that was obedient, patriotic, and conformed to the cultural standards envisioned by the ruling elite. Instruction was mostly in Turkish, even in non-Turkish territories and for non-Turkish students (such as at the Mekteb-i Aşiret).[31]

The same goes for the Galatasaray Lycée (Mekteb-i Sultani). Beginning in the late 1880s, the high school, instruction at which was formerly mainly in French and emphasized the Greek and Roman philosophical tradition, was transformed into an almost parochial version of its former self. Instruction was now in Turkish and Arabic and instead focused on Islamic thought and philosophy. Global history (and the globe itself) was all but banished from the classroom and teachers were often selected based on their patriotism and loyalty rather than academic credentials.[32] An entire photo album is devoted to the Galatasaray Lycée. Its reputation abroad for providing a modern, progressive education made it a model for the image Abdülhamid wished to project. The school building (fig. 26) and several photographs of students (fig. 27), including one of a gym class (fig. 28) are seen. Thus the Ottoman Empire used models from Western Europe to combat the influence of those very same powers, even if the image presented was not a true mirror of reality.

Once the schoolgirls pictured in the albums reach a certain age, they all but disappear from Abdülhamid's portrait of his empire. The only photograph of adult women in the entire collection is of the tuberculosis ward at the Hasköy Hospital for Women in Istanbul (fig. 29). Rows of beds line the walls, patients sitting on most of them, their heads swathed in white cloth and faces obscured by distance. Two female nurses stand at the back, their faces also unclear. That this is the only acknowledgement of women in the albums displays the religious and cultural discomfort with the portrayal of Muslim women. Photographers could dress up non-Muslim women from religious minorities and sell their photographs as "harem beauties," but actual Muslim women were off limits (except in private portraits of upper class women), even

when attempting to counter those very same stereotypes.

While primary and secondary education in Abdülhamid's Ottoman Empire became more and more a tool for broadcasting official ideology, institutions of higher education were established in much greater numbers than before. Students at establishments such as the Imperial Military Medical School (est. 1898) and the Imperial Law School (1878) were seen as the future of the empire. At the Imperial Military Medical School (fig. 30) students and faculty are assembled with the objects of their study. A partially dissected cadaver is displayed on a table in front of them along with various examples of human skeletons and other specimens.

The Abdülhamid albums espouse a profound respect for education in general, as so many of the photographs therein are devoted to it. One image of a scholar studying a volume in the Sultan Beyazit Public Library (fig. 31) bridges the gap between the religious base and secular future of the empire. The man, who based on his dress is a scholar of theology, sits in a very modern-looking library in a converted historic building (the former public kitchens of the Beyazit II Mosque, constructed in 1506), highlighting Islamic respect for knowledge and compatibility with modern ideas.[33] The image of education and knowledge presented by the albums is meant to mirror the state of education in Western Europe and the United States and shows the world that the Ottoman Empire was worthy of inclusion in their ranks.

Along with a world-class education system, a vision of a world-class Ottoman military was another vital aspect of the self-image of the empire. Of the military branches represented in the Abdülhamid albums, the navy is the most prominent. Although (or because) the Ottoman navy is generally accepted to be the most neglected branch under Abdülhamid II, the albums show a modern navy and maritime infrastructure suitable to a great Mediterranean power.[34] The albums show modern ships such as the frigate Hamidiye (fig. 32). Naval firepower is showcased in the example of the ironclad frigate Mahmudiye in pictures of her cannon hold (fig. 33) and artillery exercises on deck (fig. 34).

In the nineteenth century, the city of Istanbul, like the empire at large, was a city in transition. Also like the rest of the empire, Istanbul's transformation was an attempt to present a new, westernized image abroad while preserving the traditional character at home. The Abdülhamid albums are full of images of the new, European-style quarters of the city (and established European quarters like Pera) while largely ignoring the old-style buildings and houses of the mostly Muslim quarters. During Abdülhamid's reign, these older quarters were slowly being transformed into something resembling the new ideal. Istanbul's method of civic improvement held the Paris of Georges-Eugène Haussmann as its model, though in practice the process was much less standardized and produced very different results.

The district of Pera (also known as Galata and today called Beyoğlu) was historically the most European area of the city. Originally a Genoese colony during the Byzantine era, Pera retained its Western character after the Ottomans took control of Constantinople in 1453 and became the designated district for most of the European inhabitants of the city. As such, the culture and architecture of Pera closely resembled that of the home countries of the people who lived there. The view of a Pera street found in the Abdülhamid albums is typical of the period (fig. 4). The tall neoclassical, Beaux-Arts, or Art Nouveau buildings, wide streets and metal rails for horse drawn trolley cars seen here were the ideal of those charged with the civic reform of the city at large.[35]

The contrast between European districts like Pera and the Islamic quarters of Istanbul is seen in the commercial photography of the period and, like so many other subjects, left out of the Abdülhamid albums. Most Istanbul streets were dark, irregular, and quite narrow. The main streets of the city were often no more than 7.6 meters wide, meaning the smaller side streets could be as narrow as two or three meters.[36] The architecture of the Turkish quarters was

predominantly in wood, a quality that in such a densely populated city naturally led to frequent, if not constant, outbreak of fire. Despite its obvious disadvantages, wood was cheaper and faster to build in than stone, making the risks acceptable especially to poorer families.

The photographers of Istanbul readily photographed these winding streets and the conglomerations of timber houses along them. An 1860 photograph from Abdullah Fréres shows a typical Istanbul residential street (fig. 3). Looking at the construction and proximity of the structures to one another, it is not hard to understand the frequency and intensity of conflagration. Though scenes such as this were not terribly different than what could be found in the lower class neighborhoods of cities like London of the same period, it is also not hard to understand why the Hamidian government would rather Europeans see views of places like Pera.

The urgency of promoting a positive public image of the Ottoman Empire and life within it was not unfounded. Since Ottoman military and industrial strength was lacking (despite the image promoted in the Abdülhamid albums) and because of the increasing inability of the government to effectively defend (or maintain order in) its far-flung and geographically varied territories, the empire had to rely on diplomacy in order to survive. Whatever soft power the Ottomans managed to accumulate was complicated by the literature and diplomatic discourse of the period. Negative stereotypes of Turks were not confined to visual culture.

The negative public opinion with which the Ottoman government had to contend was common in the writings of European authors and statesmen. The reports of Ottoman barbarity in governance toward its minority populations are well illustrated in the journalism and writings of European statesmen of the period. Former British Prime Minister William Gladstone, writing in response to the massacres during the 1876 April Uprising in Bulgaria penned a pamphlet entitled *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*. The event Gladstone refers to is the Ottoman response to an uprising that began with the slaughter of around one thousand Muslim inhabitants. In the course of putting down the rebellion, between three and fifteen thousand Bulgarians were killed. The response from British and American observers and the general public was immediate and led to the British refusal to support the Ottomans when war broke out with Russia in 1877. Gladstone calls for Ottoman withdrawal from Bulgaria, saying:

> "Let the Turks carry away their abuses, in the only possible manner, namely, by carrying off themselves… Let me endeavor, very briefly to sketch, in the rudest outline what the Turkish race was and what it is. It is not a question of Mohammedanism simply, but of Mohammedanism compounded with the peculiar character of a race…they were, upon the whole, from the black day when they first entered Europe, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. Wherever they went a broad line of blood marked the track behind them, and, as far as their dominion reached, civilization vanished from view. They represented everywhere government by force as opposed to government by law...Yet a government by force can not be maintained without the aid of an intellectual element... Hence there grew up, what has been rare in the history of the world, a kind of tolerance in the midst of cruelty, tyranny and rapine. Much of Christian life was contemptuously left alone and a race of Greeks was attracted to Constantinople which has all along made up, in some degree, the deficiencies of Turkish Islam in the element of mind!"[37]

Thus Gladstone is not, at root, critical of the actions of the Ottoman government or the Ottoman military. Instead he calls for an end to Ottoman presence in the Balkans because they *as a race* are not suited for the civilized way of life in Europe. Any effectiveness they have had in the past is only because their barbarism has been tempered by the Greek population of Constantinople. The Ottoman government alone is not criticized for the heavy-handed manner in which it dealt with a rebellion that resulted in a terrible loss of life. Gladstone criticized the

Turkish *people* for being "anti-human." A cynical observer would point out that it could be said that the Ottomans responded the same way other contemporary colonial powers would to armed uprising—the British response to the Sepoy Rebellion in India comes to mind. In light of such virulent opposition to the Ottoman government's actions, it is not hard to understand their sensitivity to negative media portrayal.

Thus the conscious effort on the part of the Ottomans to answer back to Orientalist notions about their domains is not hard to understand. The Abdülhamid photo albums display the sultan's eagerness to dispel misconceived notions about the state of the Ottoman Empire. But how effective were these efforts? Did these gifts of photo albums change American and British minds about the history and intentions of the last great Islamic empire?

Despite Abdülhamid II and his ministers' best efforts, the fifty-one meticulously compiled and ornately bound photo albums sent to the United States and Great Britain in 1893 probably had little effect, if any at all. It is impossible to know what the Americans made of their gifts, because there is hardly any documentation relating to them. There is no mention of the albums in the annual reports of the Library of Congress; the only way the date of their receipt is known is that the year is printed on the cover of each album. It is unknown how the albums were displayed, or if they were ever even exhibited in any capacity. No record of the albums in the library survives at all until 1945 in the form of an inter-departmental memo confirming that they had been transferred from the "Department of Orientalia" to their current home in the Prints and Photographs Division. This is the only official document in the United States the author was able to find relating to the albums. The memo also states that there are fifty-six photo albums, when there are fifty-one currently in the collection. Whether this is a typographical error or if there are albums missing is unclear. Interesting to consider, though, is that the Library of Congress' initial count of the photos from 1955 surpasses William Allen's 1981 count by "several hundred."[38] This would support the existence of five additional albums no longer in the Library of Congress for an unknown reason. The U.S. albums were more or less ignored by the scholarly community until 1975 when William Allen, now a professor at Arkansas State University, rediscovered them.[39] The Library of Congress albums fared only slightly better than those in the British Library, which were never even cataloged, much less unwrapped, until 1981.[40]

In light of all this, the Abdülhamid albums probably had negligible effect on their intended recipients. They do speak volumes, however, on the eagerness of the Ottomans to impress upon the rest of the world their program of cultural and physical modernization, not to mention the apparent indifference of the West toward receiving that message. The people and places the photographs document are an invaluable resource for the researcher of the period that provides a visual record of an empire trying to reinvent itself. European writers, painters, and photographers readily played up the image of outdatedness and barbarity that the Ottoman Empire was so eager to avoid. Reclaiming their own self-image through avenues such as photography was paramount to the Hamidian foreign relations program. That the Westernization seen in the photographs did not always mirror the reality on the ground is seen in the commercial photography of the same photographers as the Abdülhamid albums. These two categories of photography highlight the position of the late Ottoman Empire as one caught between East and West, old and new, death and rebirth.

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Illustrations



ıt Smoking Water
ıh & Joaillier, 35.



Fig. 2: Anon., *A Major of the Naval General Staff.* 1880-1893. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. 9522.20.*

**For photos in the Abdülhamid II collection, the Library of Congress catalog number for the album is given followed by the photo's sequential position in the album.*



Fig. 3: *A Street.* Abdullah Fréres, ca. 1860. Pierre de Gigord collection. Reprinted from Özendes, *Abdullah Fréres,* 162.



Fig. 4: *A street in Beyoglu,* Abdullah Fréres, 1880-1893. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 9535.29.



Fig. 5: *Untitled,* Sébah & Joaillier, 1885. Reprinted from Özendes, *Sébah & Joaillier,* 178.





& Joaillier,
llier, 11.

Reprinted from

Fig. 7: *Turkish Woman in Street Dress,* Sébah & Joailler 1900. Reprinted from Özendes, *Sébah & Joaillier,* 22.



Fig. 8: *Albanian Beau*
Fréres, 1890. Reprinte
Özendes, *Abdullah Fr*



Fig. 9: *Gypsy Woman,* Sébah & Joailler, 1890. Reprinted from Özendes, *Sébah & Joailler,* 164.



Fig. 10: *Kurdish Girl,* Sébah & Joaillier, 1890. Reprinted from Özendes, *Sébah & Joailler,* 165.



Fig. 11: *Portrait,* Abdullah Fréres, ca. 1880. Reprinted from Özendes, *Abdullah Fréres,* 84.



Fig. 12: *Flower Seller,* Basile Karopoul
Reprinted from Öztuncay, 198.



Fig. 13: *Bear Performers,* Basile Karopoulo. Reprinted from Öztuncay, 204.



Fig. 14: *Begg*
Fréres, ca. 1
from Özende

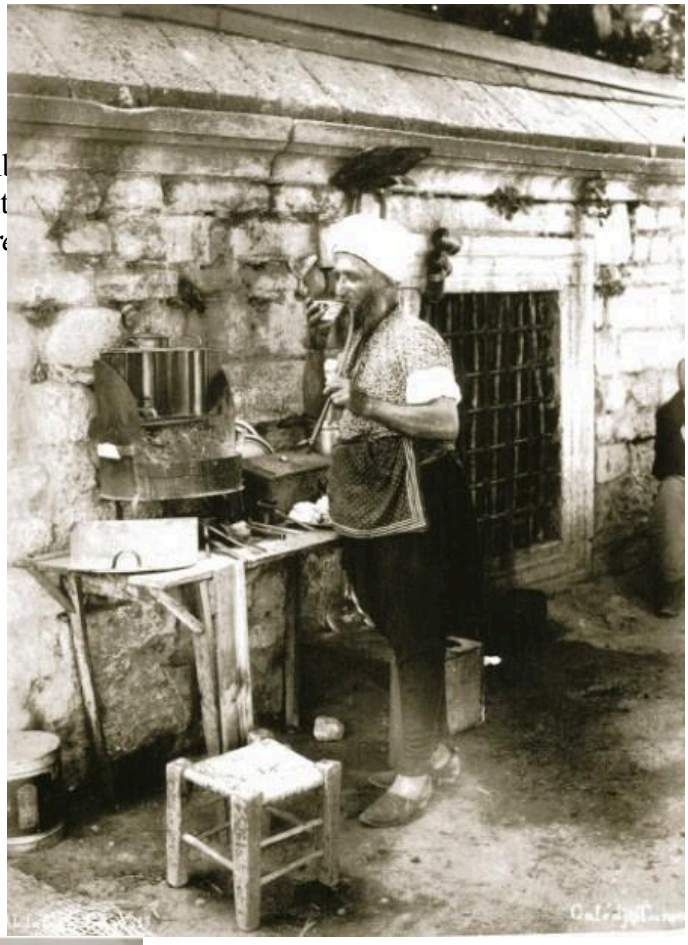


Fig. 15: *Coffee Seller,* Al
Fréres, ca. 1860. Reprint
Özendes, *Abdullah Frére*



Fig. 16: *Kurdish Chief,* Abdullah Fréres, 1865. Reprinted from Özendes, 227.



Fig. 17: *A Group of Jewish People,* Abdullah Fréres 1880. Reprinted from Özendes, *Abdullah Fréres,* 75.



Fig. 18: *Three Brothers and Their Sister,* Sébah & Joailler 1901. Reprinted from Özendes, *Sébah & Joailler* 161.



Fig. 19: *Sultan Abdulaziz,* Basile Karopoulo. Reprinted from Öztuncay, 137.



Fig. 20: *Saliha Su*
Fréres 1873. Repri
Özendes, 88.

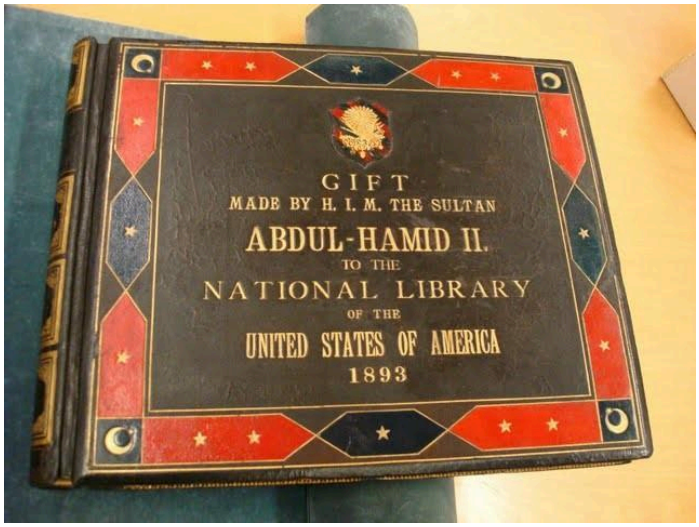


Fig. 21: Album from the Abdülhamid II collection, front view. Photograph of author. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

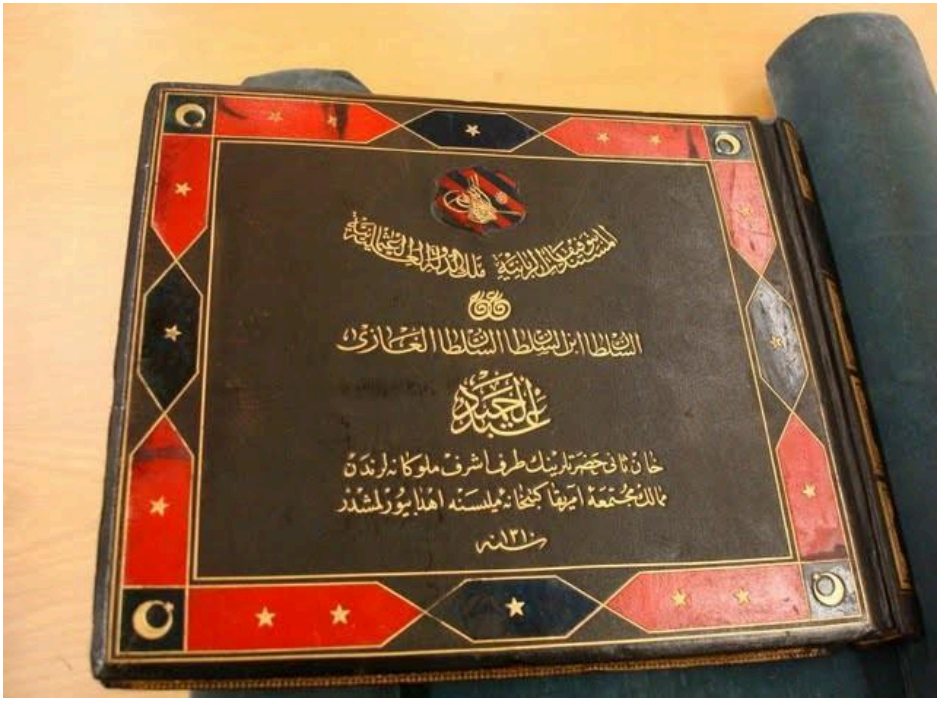


Fig. 22: Album from the Abdülhamid II collection, back view. Photograph of author. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.



Fig. 23: *Si*
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9530.19.

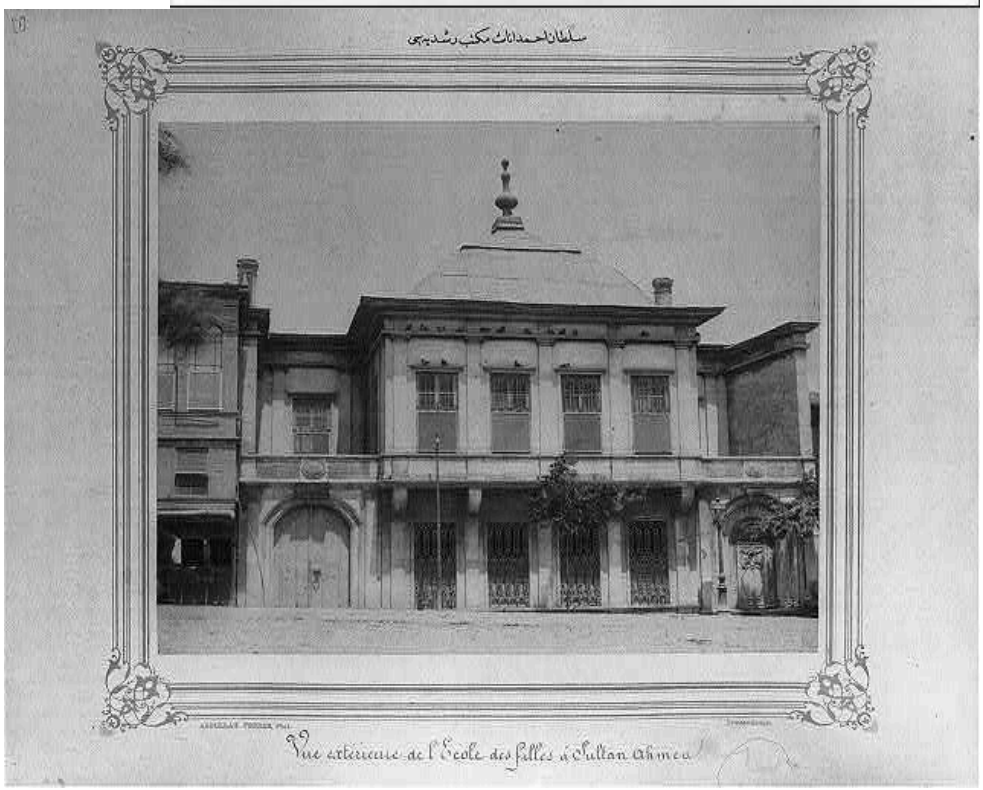
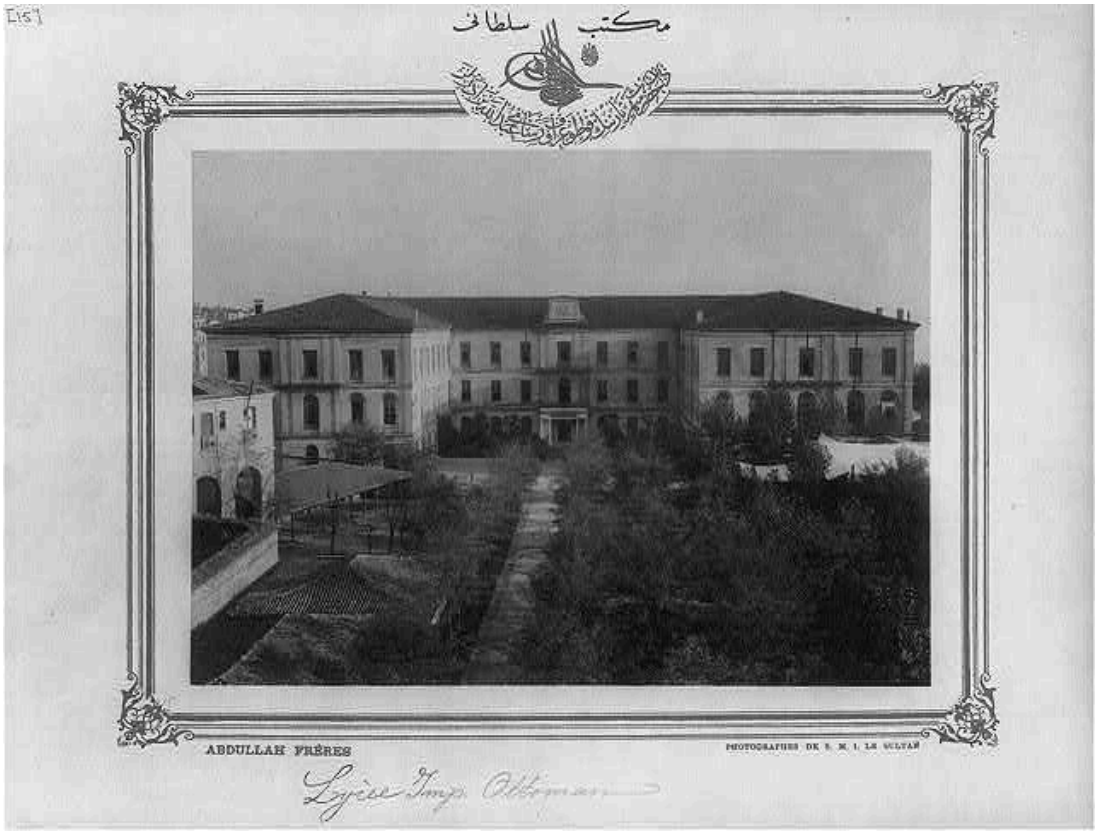




Fig. 25: *Students, middle school Eyüp Rüsdiyesi,* Abdullah Fréres 1880-1893. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 9511.14.

Fig. 26: *Mekteb-i Sultani,* Abdullah Fréres 1880-1893. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 9514.15.



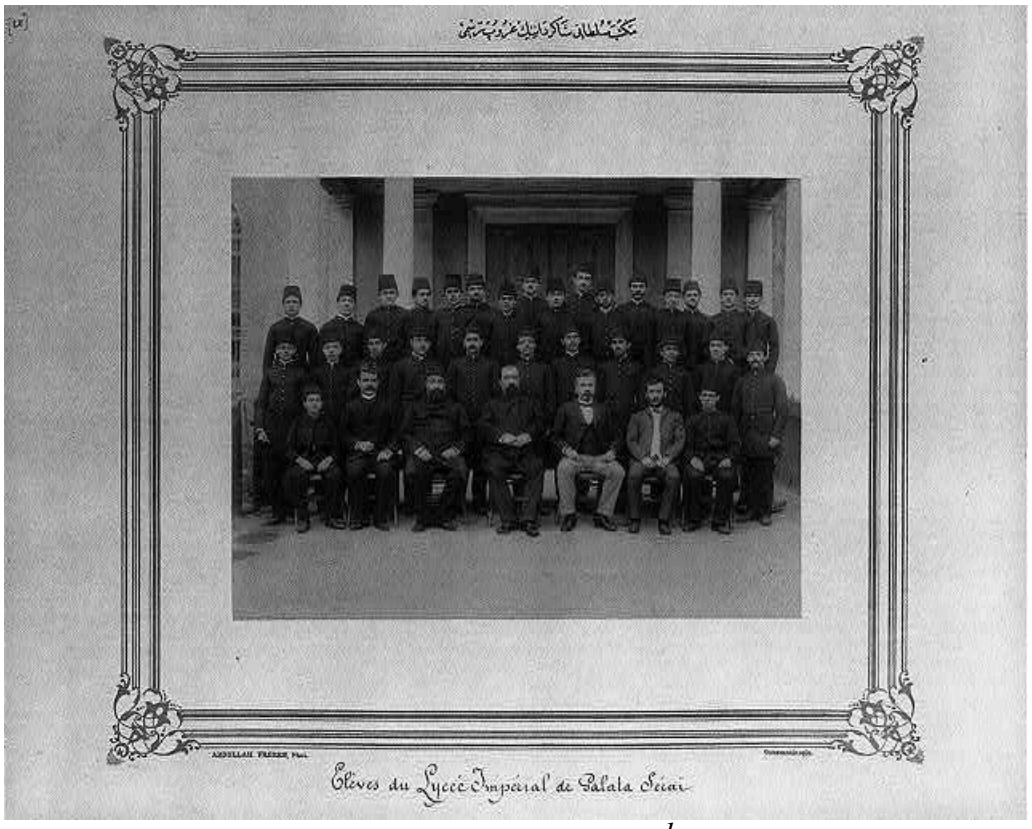


Fig. 28: The gymnastic exercis



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Fig. 27*: Group photograph of the students of the Mekteb-i Sultani*, Abdullah Fréres 1880-1892. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 9544.24.

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Fig. 29: *Tuberculosis ward of the Hasköy Hospital for Women,* Abdullah Fréres, 1880-1892. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 9534.7.



Fig. 30: *A group photograph of the students and the teachers of the Mekteb-i Tibbiye-yi Mülkiye (Civil Medical School),* Abdullah Fréres, 1880-1892. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 9544.30.



Fig. 31: *The interior view of the Sultan Beyazit Public Library,* Abdullah Fréres 1880-1892. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 9544.6.

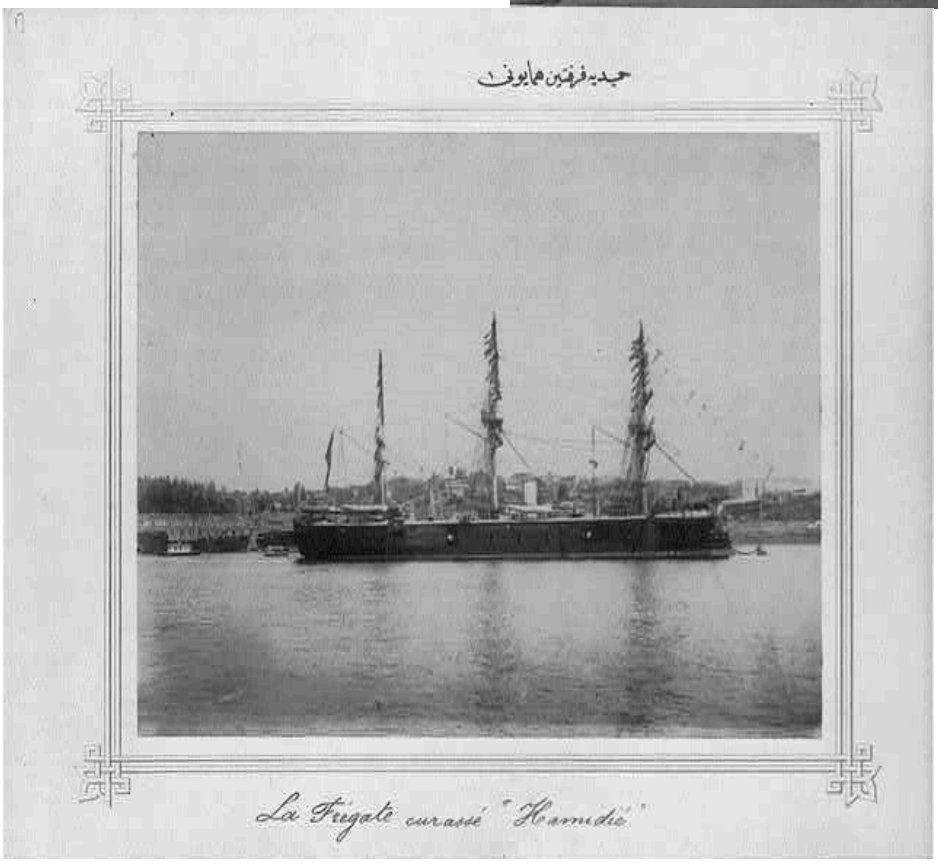


Fig. 32: *The Imperial Frigate Hamidiye,* anon. 1880-1892. Abdülhamid II Photo Collection, 11919.1.

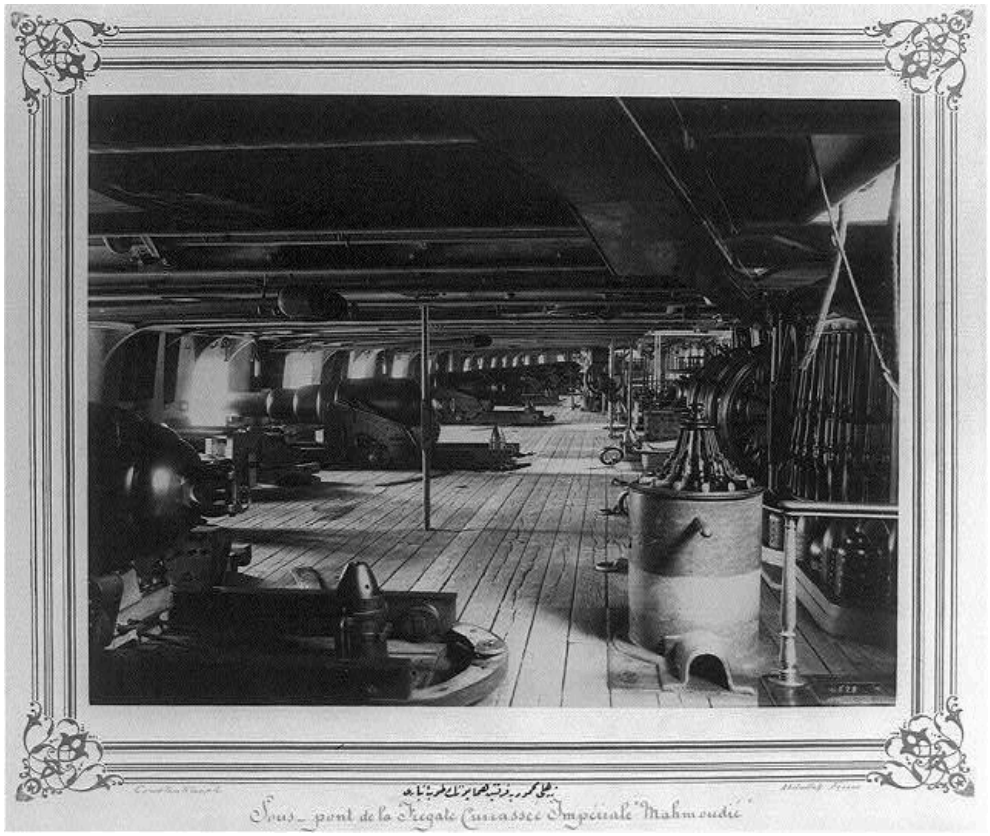


Fig. 34: *The cannon drill on the terrace in 1898*

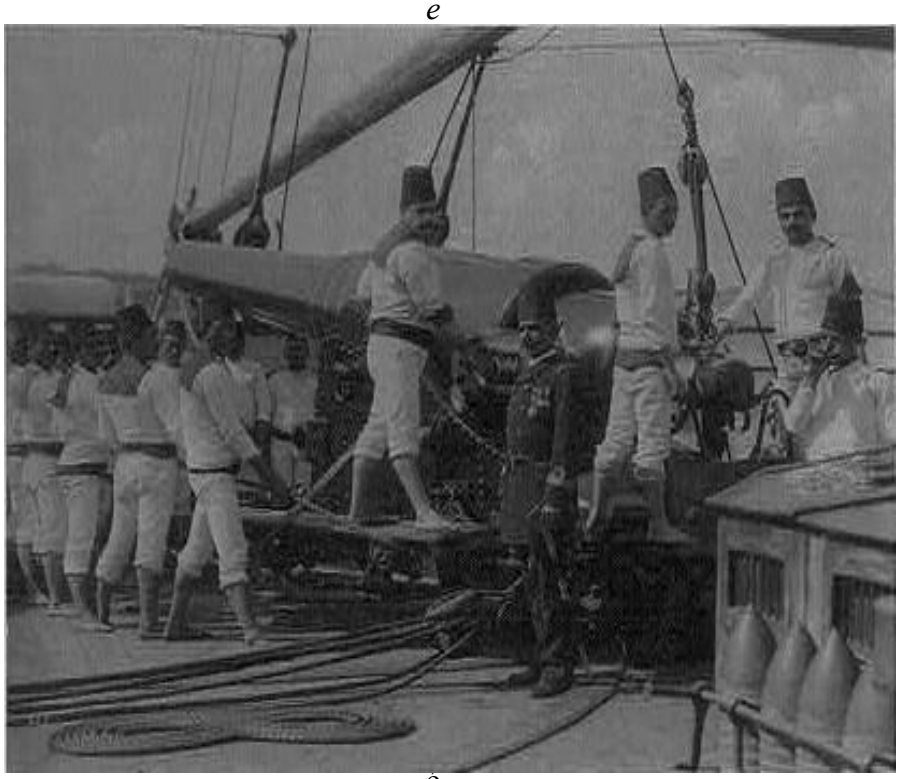


Fig. 33: *The cannon hold on the Imperial Ironclad Frigate Mahmudiye,* Abdullah Fréres 1880-1892.
Abdülhamid II Photo Collection 9540.35.

80-1892.Abdülhamid II Photo Collection 9540.36.

[1] There has been little scholarly work done on the Abdülhamid albums, with William Allen's 1988 article "Analysis of Abdülhamid's Gift Albums" in *the Journal of Turkish Studies* being the most comprehensive. *Turkish Studies* devoted an entire issue to the albums, but the information found within is mostly descriptive. Included in the issue is a cataloging of each photograph in the albums by subject, an endeavor undertaken by Allen in the late 1980s. Other sources mention the albums in passing, but Allen's work is the most complete to date. Engin Özendes has written several books on the subject of nineteenth-century Turkish photography:*Abullah Fréres: Ottoman Court Photographers* (1998) and *From Sébah & Joaillier to Foto Sabah: Orientalism in Photography* (1999). Özendes especially focuses on the photographers responsible for what is found in the albums, which were invaluable to this study, but barely mention the albums themselves.
[2] Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples at the End of Empire: 1856-1876* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.
[3] Serif Mardin, "Super Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," in *Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives,* ed. Peter Benedict, Erol Tümertekin, and Fatma Mansur (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 430.
[4]Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 250.
[5] Wendy M.K. Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 141.
[6] Faroqhi, 258.
[7] Engin Özendes, *Abdullah Fréres: Ottoman Court Photographers,* trans. Priscilla Mary Işin (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 1998), 13.
[8] Ibid., 16.
[9] Bahattian Öztuncay, *Vassilaki Karopoulo: Photographer to His Majesty the Sultan* (Istanbul: Birieşi Oksijen Sanayi A. Ş., 2000), 125.
[10] Despite their Islamic surname, the Abdullah family was Christian. The name was changed during Abdülhamid I's reign, when the brothers' grandfather, Asdvadzadur Hürmüzyan, was encouraged by palace officials to convert. Because, he said, the name meant "servant of God" it would both satisfy the courtiers and free him of having to abandon his religion, preventing Asdvadzadur from angering both the government and his own community. See Özendes, *Abdullah Fréres*, 27.
[11] Engin Özendes, *From Sébah & Joaillier to Foto Sabah: Orientalism in Photography* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 1999), 245.
[12] Ibid., 232.
[13] Özendes, *Sébah & Joaillier,* 238.
[14] Frederick N. Bohrer, "The Sweet Waters of Asia: Representing Difference/Differencing Representation in Nineteenth- Century Istanbul" in Jocelyn Hackforth-Jones and Mary Roberts, eds., *Edges of Empire: Orientalism and Visual Culture* (Malden, M.A.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 130.
[15] Özendes, *Sébah & Joaillier,* 166.
[16] Basile Karapoulo's photographs, for example, made such a lasting impression that some of his photographs taken in the 1870s were being sold to visitors as many as thirty years later (Öztuncay, 25).
[17] Roger Benjamin, *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997), 194.
[18] Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* 71 (May 1983), 120.
[19] William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 14.
[20] Nochlin, 122.
[21] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 12.
[22] Unfortunately, none of the photographs of Abdülhamid II by the Abdullah brothers survive, save one of him as prince. After a scandal in 1878 surrounding the brothers' association with a group of Russian generals near the end of the Russo-Turkish war, the right to display the imperial monogram and possession or sale of photographs of the sultan without permission was prohibited. While the monogram was restored in 1890, all photographic negatives were confiscated and probably destroyed. See Özendes, *Abdullah Fréres,* 85.
[23] William Allen, "Analysis of Abdülhamid's Gift Albums," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 12 (1988), 37.
[24] Nurhan Atasoy, "Sultan Abdülhamid II's Photo-Collections in Istanbul" *Journal of Turkish Studies* 12 (1988),
v. [25] Quoted in Engin Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1919* (Istanbul: Haşet-Kitapevi, 1987),
22. [26] Allen, 33.
[27] Ibid., 35.
[28] Janet Kesterson, "Photos Show Empire," *Jonesboro Sun,* 7 June 1983.
[29] Quoted in Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 156.
[30] Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains,* 101.
[31] Ibid, 94.
[32] See ibid., 94-97.
[33] Zeynep Çelik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse at the World's Columbian Exposition," in Holly Edwards, ed., *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America 1870-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 89.
[34] Allen, 34.

[35] Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 51.
[36] Ibid., 4.
[37] William E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (J. Murray, 1876).
[38] Allen, 33.
[39] "Photos Show Empire."
[40] M.I. Waley, "The Albums in the British Library," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 12 (1988), 31.
[41]