

EROL AHMED

PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUST,
PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUTH IN
THE HAMIDIAN PERIOD

ADVISED BY PROFESSOR GOTTFRIED HAGEN

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To Nasut & Ayten Uzman



fig. A An anonymous city gentleman passes by the sea-side residences of İstanbul.
PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami
From Çizgen, *Photographer/ Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 84-85

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*“If we think of all the images which we would like to
keep we can realize what a valuable invention this is.”*

Announcement in *Takvim-i Vekâyyî* on the invention of photography.
In Çizgen, Photography in the Ottoman Empire, 21

INTRODUCTION

Dismembered Stories

1839 was a peculiar year. Two seemingly unrelated advances occurred: Talbot and Daguerre formalized the process of photography in England and France,¹ and the Ottoman Empire proclaimed the edict of *Tanzimat* (“reorganization”) in the capital of İstanbul. These two outwardly dissimilar inventions — one a means of reproduction, the other a modernizing thrust — would become intimately embedded in the final decades of the Ottoman state. It would be during the reign of Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II that the imperial center would embrace the photographic medium as a powerful tool for the governance of the realm. Uncovering photographic practice during his reign must deal with the meanings and purposes of the photograph for the Hamidian government. But photography gained the interest of many in the capital. The social arena that emerged around the photograph outside the governmental sphere can be partially understood through the photographs of Ali Sami. Ali Sami was a pioneer in some regards, but also perfectly comfortable in his current condition.

Simply put, the adoption of photography transformed aspects of governance and visual culture under the Hamidian government based on the values of trust and truth in the photographs. Trust and truth will occupy the most substantial framework in the analysis of this study. Understanding Ottoman photography situates the modern viewer against a transition in

¹ William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photography Era* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 3.

society. People began to record their lives with increased reality and precision. But the place of photography in the Ottoman Empire is not a mirror onto the lives of that time period. Nor was it merely a cultural artifact or an art form that pleased the upper classes. Rather, photography in the Hamidian era was a storm of construction and imagination, reality and communication.

But above all, the photographic image was discreet knowledge adapted by the public and the individual. These two categories of public and private, overlapping and effusive, serve as our point of investigation, but their usefulness will come into question. Our clues will be limited but focused: Part One details an album of waterworks from Abd ül-Hamid II and the material of the government bureaucracy. Part Two investigates in detail the “private” photographs of Ali Sami. Finally, Part Three begins with another set of photographs from Sami, but puts Part One and Part Two in dialogue over photographic meaning in the Hamidian state. This study hopes to uncover social workings of truth manifested in photographic practice. The role of trust, of preconceived cultural meanings and technological facts of the photographic medium coalesced into a profound transition in Ottoman visual culture. The process was a cascading effect: each level of meaning carrying and depositing into the next. The importance then of photography in explaining the Hamidian state must not be neglected in what became “increasingly an Ottoman obsession with their public image.”²

OTTOMAN PHOTOGRAPHY & HISTORIOGRAPHY

The state paper-of-record *Takvim-i Vekāyi*⁶ announced the invention of photography on October 28, 1839.³ Quickly, savvy photographers opened up the first photographic studios throughout the old city around Topkapı Palace. By the time of Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II’s reign, over thirty studios were operating in the fashionable European district of Péra.⁴ The first

2 Selim Deringil, “The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, NO. 1 (1993): 13.

3 Engin Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1919* (İstanbul: Haşet Kitabevi, 1987), 20-21.

4 *Ibid.*, 26-27.

photographers were Frenchmen and Englishmen.⁵ Local Armenians, Greeks, and other Christian minorities in İstanbul would establish studios in the following decades. There were no guilds, but photographers published books, traveled abroad, exhibited work and formed professional groups.⁶ Photographers like the Abdullah Frères⁷ traveled most often to Paris to study, where their worth increased in the international class of photographers.⁸

The more religiously minded of Muslims and Jews were opposed to photography. They cited that such creation of “graven images” was against their holy texts. This statement was only officially printed in a book dating from the 1920s but was indicative of earlier proclamations.⁹ The Muslims and Jews on the whole excluded themselves from photographic production as a result, though they still purchased and consumed photographs. Indeed, the Ottoman Sultan, caliph of Islam, employed photographers.¹⁰ It was only in 1910, however, that Rahmizade Bahaeddin established the first independent, Muslim-run studio,¹¹ more than a decade after the great photographic productions of the Hamidian state in the 1880s and 1890s.

A fundamental shift in the use of images in public, government spaces occurred around 1836, when Sultan Mahmud II had a painted portrait of himself in Western-style clothing hung in the newly-constructed Selimiye Barracks.¹² The sultan realized the political power of his image, especially in a climate where the sultan rarely ventured from the confines of his palace into the

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- 5 Such as the Frenchman Kompa in 1842: Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 64; Engin Çizgen, *Abdullah Frères: Ottoman Court Photographers* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür, Sanat Yayıncılık, 1998), 14. Another photographer was Prangey around 1843: Bahattin Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları: 19. Yüzyıl İstanbulunda Fotoğraf: Öncüler, Stüdyolar, Sanatçılar*, VOL. 1 (İstanbul: Aygaz, 2003), 69-74.
- 6 For an excellent catalogue of photographic publications in the Ottoman era see Seyit Ali Ak and Alberto Modiano, *Türkiye Fotoğraf Yayınları Kataloğu* (İstanbul: Bileşim Matbaacılık, 2004), 49-55. Many of the books were published in the Hamidian period, with only a few foreign editions. An exhibition in 1863 consisted of an international jury: Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları*, 175.
- 7 Fuad Paşa to Sultan Abd ül-Aziz once said regarding the Abdullah Frères: “In our own country, we also have artists who are every bit as skillful as the foreign artists. Indeed their work has been praised even in Europe.” Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 53.
- 8 Çizgen, *Abdullah Frères: Ottoman Court Photographers*, 31-33.
- 9 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 15.
- 10 Bahattin Öztuncay, *The Photographers of Constantinople: Pioneers, Studios and Artists from 19th Century İstanbul*, VOL. 1, (İstanbul: Aygaz, 2003) 335-343.
- 11 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 15.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 13.

public space. The image represented his presence in the public sphere, his concern and physical visage to the places in which it appeared. The sultans after Mahmud II, especially Abd ül-Aziz, in the 1840s-1870s, were the early patrons of photographs, awarding medals and creating the post of “Court Photographer.”¹³ The culmination of court patronage occurred under Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II (r. 1876-1909), who was impressed by what this new technology offered.¹⁴ Abd ül-Hamid commissioned the extravagant album of 1,891 photographs presented to the United States and Britain.¹⁵ When distributed to foreign governments like those in the United States, Britain, Germany and France, the photographs signaled concise examples of success in the modernization of Ottoman military, health, education and infrastructure across Western lines. Thus, it welcomed Europe to continue its support and investment in the Empire. Photography understood through content categories, however limiting, has dominated this way of delineating photographic types in the Ottoman Empire.

In that sense, photography had to cast individuals and groups into the limitations of its format. Rather than textual description, things would be described by sight. In this transitory period, a desire for fixity and knowledge also meant the necessity to find clear and significant ways of depicting identity. The popularity of photographic “typologies” attests to a European and Ottoman epistemology of people. These images were sold in large numbers by the photographic studios, mostly to tourists and Europeans. But the government also produced such typologies as well. “Turkish” ladies, city porters, Circassian hunters and an endless litany of Ottoman “types” inundated the photographic market and the Ottoman government. Consequently, the main typologies produced by the Ottomans were of ethnicities, professions, rural life and city folk. But the idea of “types” can easily apply more subtly in the Ottoman case. As we begin Part Three, it will become evident that unintentional typologies produced fixity and truth for the élites. Namely, bureaucrats, the imperial court of Abd ül-Hamid II and the educated İstanbul citizens in

13 Çizgen, *Abdullah Frères: Ottoman Court Photographers*, 14.

14 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 188.

15 See Carney E. S. Gavin, ed., “Imperial Self-Portrait: the Ottoman Empire as Revealed in the Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s Photographic Albums,” *Journal of Turkish Studies* 12, (1988).

the ritual of photography (cascading from capture, display, trust, consumption, to memorization) cast themselves as a type. It was part of a larger positivist trend in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ By the time of Abd ül-Hamid's reign, "modern science' began to usurp the authority of religious constructs in the traditional Ottoman thought."¹⁷ People became categorized and fixed.

But science is only part of the meaning. The images — for they are no longer merely mechanistically a photograph — relied on their meaning to resonate with the viewer. This occurred through what can be called a trust to truth process. The argument unfolding follows this paradigm: a desire to trust the realism of the photograph-as-truth gives the photograph its truth-bearing qualities. Islamic theology, traditional Ottoman visual culture, modernization and the novelty of the image all influenced how trust was conceptualized. It could be called propaganda of the state and self, even going as far as self-indoctrination. Rather than seeing photography as hegemonic, which can happen in a focused analysis such as this, photography can be both "hot" and "banal," to borrow an idea from Billig.¹⁸

But why focus on the "little-known social life of photographs in the Ottoman Empire"?¹⁹ Technological determinist arguments, as well as those based on the cultures of Orientalism and Westernization become inadequate by themselves. Focused analysis on specific photographs, rather than the large, encyclopedic works or bric-a-brac assemblages on photography is necessary.

Various works discuss Ottoman photography as important in the historiography of the late Ottoman Empire. Engin Çizgen and Michelle Woodward have begun nuanced analyses into broad and detailed "portraits" of Ottoman photography, while Ze'evi and Faroqhi have revealed a wider spectrum of the cultural and personal world of the Ottomans. Methodologically, for these authors and this study, the photographs become legitimate and crucial "texts" for the analysis that

16 See especially Mehmet Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10-13; Erol Köroğlu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity: Literature in Turkey During World War I* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 65; Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 132.

17 Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, 11.

18 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 37-46.

19 Michelle L. Woodward, "Between Orientalist Clichés and Images of Modernization: Photographic Practice in the Late Ottoman Era," *History of Photography* 27, NO. 4 (2003): 373.

will uncover aspects of “how conceptions of selves (of subjects and their identities) are produced” and how truth is materialized.²⁰ Most importantly, the study aims to historicize photography in the Ottoman landscape so that its meaning and use is not static, but is seen as changing, contingent and dependant on the people and history of the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire.²¹

The field of Ottoman studies is expanding for both its value as an interesting historical phenomenon and the relevance to regional issues today. No attempt can ever recreate a historical moment completely, nor did the people of that time understand their situation fully. The photographic analysis underway will help supplement and enrich the discourse on Ottoman history by giving a detailed analysis of a small set of photographs. This current study will add to the monumental and minute studies that further the Ottoman narrative.

Ultimately, however, photographs are problematic sources. Even today, photographic truth still holds sway, especially in the arena of photojournalism and documentary photography.²² It is because “we assume that the camera should present an unmediated image of reality, and that dishonesty is being practised if it does not do so.”²³ The implications of viewing photography for the İstanbul bureaucrats in the empire operated at different levels of truth. For the Hamidian government itself, the photographic image was reality, and one that was both powerful and mundane, which based itself on the “inherent” qualities of the photographic image. But for Ali Sami, the photographic image offered a heightened sense of realism for an ultimately constructed purpose. And yet, the government photography, as will be seen, needed this constructive power as well.

Reality and imagination sway back and forth in photographic meaning. Concurrently

20 Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 6; Quotation from Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, NO. 4 (1991): 782.

21 Suraiya Faroqhi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 204-205. Nancy C. Micklewright, “Personal, Public, and Political (Re)Constructions,” in *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922: An Introduction*, ed. Donald Quataert (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 283.

22 Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17.

23 Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), 78.

too, the narratives of time of space were at stake. If the photographic moment existed literally as a few seconds of exposure, the real power of the image came from its “ability to capture a moment and preserve it.”²⁴ Reality as based on experience through time was disrupted by such a fixity. This was an awareness the photographers exploited — intentionally or not. But these are both current issues and historical ones that should interest not only the historian but also the individual who lives in a visually saturated society. For when the Hamidian government embraced photography, they put themselves in a dramatic shift in their perceived world through sight. If anything, the Hamidian state existed in a transition. Photography was an important force in the development of identity, sight and even power in this state. Photography in the *Weltanschauung* of the government provided a “relationship between image and narrative,” and ultimately truth.²⁵

What was it like to live in a moment of tremendous change in the construction of knowledge and reality? Does this not reflect on the technological changes of today, where new media forms both guide and are guided into the societies, governments and people that create them? And today, how does the modern Turkish Republic regenerate ideas of its history and the experience of post-industrial modernity through the montage of photographic images plastered throughout the country? Even during its “legitimacy crisis,” photography added to the reasons of the relative stability the Hamidian state maintained for over thirty years.²⁶ Traditional forms of capturing ideas and information were (and are today) being supplanted — even replaced — by new technologies. They take the burden of becoming new conduits of meaning. Photography may capture a moment in a literal sense, but its ability to make permanent the momentary becomes a central paradox of its meaning: something both temporary and fixed. The photographic image persists.

24 Micklewright, 262.

25 Morris-Suzuki, 78.

26 Selim Deringil, “Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23, NO. 3 (1991): 353-354.



fig. 1 Tophane fountain, source water from Kâğıthane.
 Kanburoğlu, *Dersa'adette Hamidiye Menba' ve Çeşmeleri Suyu*

PART ONE

Distance Bureaucracy from İstanbul

The Ottoman Empire endured for centuries. Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II would be one of its last sultans but believed fully in the imperial mission of his empire. Still consisting of large domains when he ascended the throne in 1876, Abd ül-Hamid II enacted wide scale reforms that curtailed full-fledged constitutional modernization. Yet, modernization through technology was essential to how he maintained traditionalism and power, while secularism, liberalism and constitutionalism eroded his popularity. The photographic albums of Abd ül-Hamid II were part of this interesting sphere of Hamidian governance. The albums were committed like “Abd ül-Hamid and those who worked under him to further elaboration of a rational-legal framework for the imperial system” that brought “a new period in the regularization of administration.”¹ The ascendancy of technology was at the service of an state pursuing seemingly traditional ideologies. Photography could provide the precision and regularity Abd ül-Hamid desired in maintaining the rigid system of information and panoptic surveillance his regime needed.

Hamidian photographic albums were essentially the main format photography would assume for this role. Amassing to nearly 34,879 photographs and roughly 800 albums during his reign, the content of each was comprehensive but also repetitious.² Under review in Part One is the album of waterworks projects titled *Hamidiye Source and Fountain Water in İstanbul*. The

¹ Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: the Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 228.

² Micklewright, 278.

ideological messages of the Hamidian government were channeled through the work.³ These were messages that relied on history, tradition and technological modernity that rotated around the environmental trope of water as a starting point. This album fits into the narratives of imperialism and technological modernity espoused by Abd ül-Hamid. The marriage of science and art provided the mechanisms to make true these powerful claims of the Hamidian state. But at the level of the mundane, photography gained even more legitimacy as a document. The bureaucracy as it used photography will also be analyzed. Thus, the Hamidian photography under review can be split into two analytical parts: the meanings they created in the waterworks album, and the meanings we extract from how the government utilized photography in the everyday.

The format of the album became the most complete and discrete format utilized by the Ottoman government in presenting visual “portraits” of itself. An exhibition of photographs of the Ottoman Army in 1915 attests to the attempts at creating visual dialogues or exhibitions between Western European nations and the Ottoman Empire.⁴ A lack of material stopped this particular exhibition. Both feeding into European fascination with foreign cultures during a startling period of imperialism, these Hamidian portraits also convinced foreign governments of the efficacy of their investments. There exists then a categorical difference between those albums meant for foreign show and those meant for internal consumption. But the effect was ultimately the same: to create a narrative of ideas about the empire.

The album of waterworks was published in 1319 Hijri (1902) by Ahmed Ihsan Publishing Corporation in the main street surrounding the old imperial palace in İstanbul.⁵ Its subject was

3 I use the designation album for a bound collection of thematically related photographs that predominate over textual material. This album was published by A. Kanburoğlu, *Dersa’adette Hamidiye Menba’ ve Çeşmeleri Suyu* (Bab’ali: Matba’a Ahmed Ihsan ve Şüreka’sı, 1319/1902) [BA, Y.MTV, 256, 65, 2].

4 BA, HR.SYS, 2416, 52, (a letter explaining why the exhibition was cancelled).

5 Kanburoğlu, title page. “*Bab’ali caddesinde herke fabrikaya hümayun şu’besi fevkânda — Matba’a Ahmed Ihsan ve Şüreka’sı.*” Babali was one of the original districts of photographic production in İstanbul (the other two important successors being Péra and Kadıköy) as well as a site for book publishing. Publishing and photography were mutually supportive industries: Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 94, 130. For an excellent catalogue of photographic publications in the Ottoman era see Seyit Ali Ak and Alberto Modiano, *Türkiye Fotoğraf Yayınları Kataloğu* (İstanbul: Bileşim Matbaacılık, 2004), 49-55. Most books were published in the Hamidian period.

the presentation and investigation of the artesian (literally source, *menba*^c, water) and pumped water within the empire. The *Hamidiye Source and Fountain Water in İstanbul* focused solely on the capital city.⁶ Dr. Kanburoğlu, who was a director of the German hospital in the capital, wrote the lengthy introduction, which will be of interest to us later. Another individual translated the introduction into French. The entire album was a bilingual edition with a French introduction on one end and an Ottoman-Turkish introduction on the other. The eighteen photographic plates occupy the middle, with bilingual captions for each.

The expensive production and visual decor made the waterworks album a lavish form of display. Each page was decorated with Victorian-style, curvilinear frames. The photographs are tinted red, blue, green, grey and orange and are printed individually on their own page. The production, naturally, was befitting an imperial album: dark red leather binding with a gilt monogram of the Sultan on the cover and European paper end sheets enclosing the semi-gloss laid paper.

The album operated as propaganda for both the government and those viewing the album. It is necessary, the author wrote, that the emperor, "*Personne Auguste*," should promote public hygiene for his citizenry.⁷ And it is through the building of waterworks that such an end can be met. The author reminded the reader that it was the long history of aqueducts dating from ancient Rome and Byzantium that brings the unique "Constantinoplean water" to the inhabitants of the city.⁸ Various charts on water quality and water distribution, including the fact that the water in the city is of excellent quality occupy parts of the introduction. The new pumping stations and waterworks would curtail the rampant fires that swept through İstanbul in the nineteenth century.⁹ The government guaranteed the cleanliness and safety of the city.

Water was no longer mundane and entered the realm of imperial dogma. It provided

6 "*Dersa'adette Hamidiye Menba' ve Çeşmeleri Suyu*," hereafter, "waterworks album."

7 Kanburoğlu, 1. This wording is from the French introduction. French became a language of the élite Ottomans. The French portion thus served both a local, cosmopolitan and international audience.

8 Kanburoğlu, 13.

9 Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of İstanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 55-57, 64, 67.

protection from calamity, sickness and thirst. In the florid language of the album, it was the imperial structure of modernization that created these benefits for the citizenry. The building of fountains throughout the Ottoman Empire was an old practice of the government and traditional religious foundations or *vakfs* in Islam.¹⁰ It was based mostly on the value placed on water both as a scarce resource in the Islamic regions and as an important cleansing product in the five daily ritual prayers obligatory for most Muslims. The Romans and the Byzantines built an extensive system of aqueducts and cisterns that were actively used during the Ottoman Empire for these purposes. Thus, the album claimed both an Islamic and secular-historical legacy. Water became conflated with the narrative of the Hamidian state, as if both were indispensable, life-protecting resources infiltrating all aspects of life.

The introduction creates a lineage between the past and present, which grounds the history and legacy of the current waterworks. The photographs that corroborate the text do not only depict old waterworks and traditional fountains but also the new technologies of water transportation brought from contemporary Europe such as the water-pumps. Overall, the album provided a synthesis of three different nodes of understanding: the legacy of past imperial powers,¹¹ the Ottoman-Islamic practice of public institutions and finally the modernizing attempts of the current regime informed by the wave of European interest in hygiene.¹² It is neither quite possible nor appropriate to consider one of these three nodes as always dominating the others. Rather, each one slips in and out of prominence and emphasis in the album, depending on the viewer. Yet each message still implicated the Hamidian government as both beneficial and necessary. One was a historical narrative of legacy and power; another was the moral and ethical trappings of Ottoman-Islamic public works. The final node emphasized a method or “science” to new ways of

10 The fountain in the context of this album and current study refers to a publicly accessible faucet for drinking. It is not related to decorative fountains with pools.

11 Ottoman desires to consider themselves as the descendants of Imperial Rome were not new. Sultan Süleyman in the sixteenth century included the title of Caesar and emperor to Rome as an epithet. Yet the link created a modern “nation” much like Western Europe, which would claim the histories of Greece and Rome for their foundational myths.

12 See Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

achieving and upholding the historical and Ottoman-Islamic legacy of the empire. It grounded any present change as in harmony with the past.

Modern meant complex. The photographs of the pumping stations fixated on the machines and not people as the metaphor of modernity (*fig. 2*). Science became aesthetically buttressed, beautiful and wonderful. The failure to fully adopt the models of rationalism and science was considered one of the “true causes of backwardness” in this modernizing state.¹³ There was a solution to the conundrum experienced by most Westernizing governments hoping to advance but without drastic ideological change: adopt the technology, but keep an essence of the culture. The water pump bridges these desires. The intricate machinery was offset by the decorative frames and bright tints of the photograph. A fetishism was attached to these objects of modernity that was grounded in solutions for this issue of modernization.

The viewer could not escape the messages encoded in the photographs, which mimic the text, and aesthetic considerations of the album’s design and contents. Imperial authority was ever present in many of the photographs. In the album, the fountain at Tophane was flanked by two soldiers (*fig. 1*). The angle of the photograph emphasized the monumental scale of the fountain in relation to the Ottoman *subjects*, not yet citizens in this photograph. The sultan had a duty to provide these resources but also the power to control and remove them. This contradiction was unsettling in the two photos that depicted the fountains with soldiers but underlined (or tried to convince the viewer of) the state’s ultimate authority.¹⁴

A little less than half of the photographs, then, depict people, none of which were actually active in using these waterworks for their intended purposes. The other half paid homage to the objects and buildings themselves. But these people are not the ragged, Orientalized peculiarities of İstanbul. Rather, they were either soldiers or the modern well-to-do in their fezzes, parasols

13 Kemal H. Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, NO. 3 (1972): 279-280.

14 In the many photographs of fountains, it is rare to see soldiers guarding the structure. In fact, the scenes try to be more idyllic. The other two photographs in this album follow this idyllic approach.

and suits. The photographs are making a claim as to who exactly the citizens of İstanbul were that could be associated with the waterworks (*fig. 3*). The urban person was the citizen of this modernity. Similar to the soldiers guarding “the people’s water,” the cosmopolitan people delineated the *type* of citizen the Hamidian state espoused.

Barrages and dams are not parks, fountains are not military outposts and people do not usually find pumping stations as a comfortable place to rest their eyes. Rather, the main focus of the images, which departs from the text, was on the technological aspects of the waterworks. The photograph itself was part of this mechanical revelry. It had an ability to capture in relentless detail everything the human eye could only hope to see. It was hard to distrust something more accurate than phenomenological reality. For instance, the photograph of the interior of the pumping station (*fig. 2*) was connected to loans taken by the government from Europe to improve the capital; city planners from Europe arriving in İstanbul; tremendous costs to ship these large ironworks from the country of origin (Switzerland); and the schools set up within the Empire to train a consistent workforce to maintain and build these structures in the future. This was a resonance the government envisioned, as the photographs existed within the political context and events of the time. These machines were positioned in their decorative borders and tinted colors so they could be seen as valuable and magnificent. This helps clarify why the government would go to any trouble to visualize these waterwork projects. It is no wonder that the topic of faucets and pumps is not the dry, uninspiring subject it appears to be.

The album of waterworks presented an optimistic and uncomplicated view of the late Hamidian state. It worked to congratulate the bureaucracy and imperial court, while letting others know of the importance of the city, its water and its people. For all the rhetorical introductions and placid photographs, eventually something rose to the surface. Clarity can be achieved on what the viewer’s gaze entailed for the making of meaning and the understanding of this moment encapsulated in the photograph.

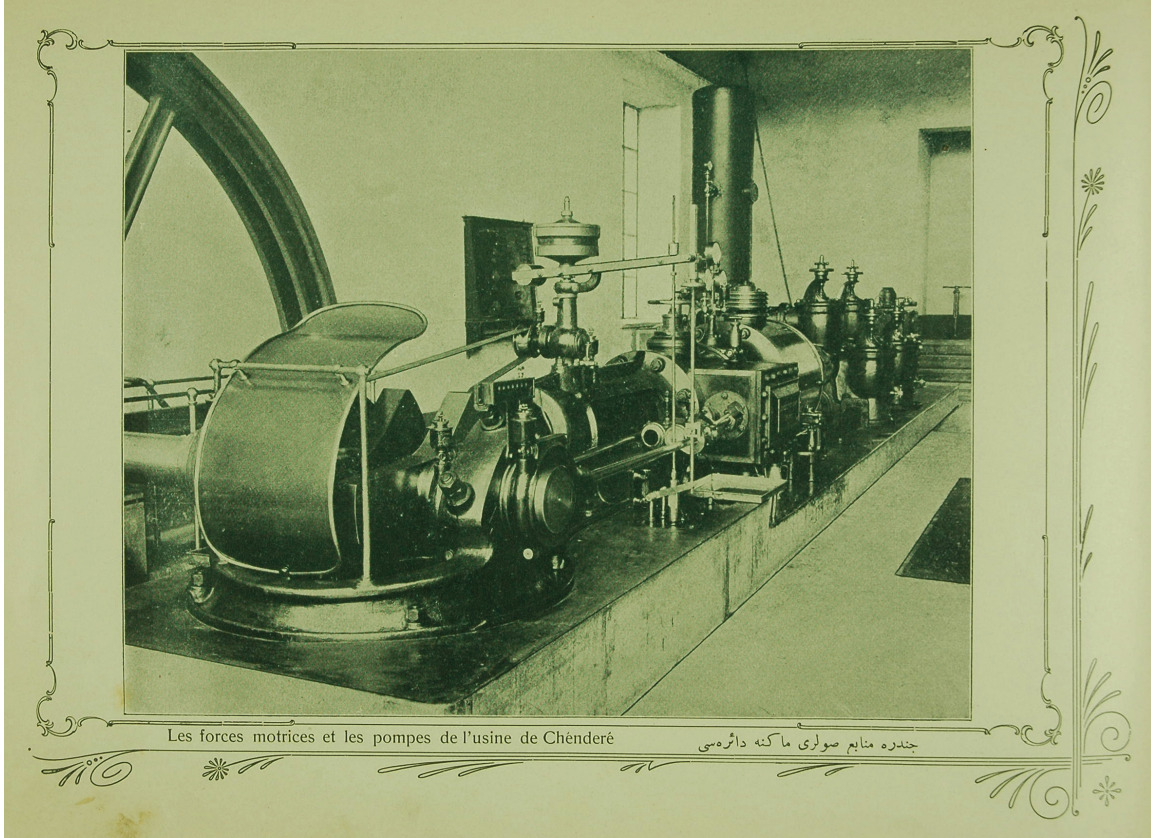


fig. 2 Water pump station, source water from Cendere.
Kanburoğlu, *Dersâ'adette Hamidiye Menba' ve Çeşmeleri Suyu*

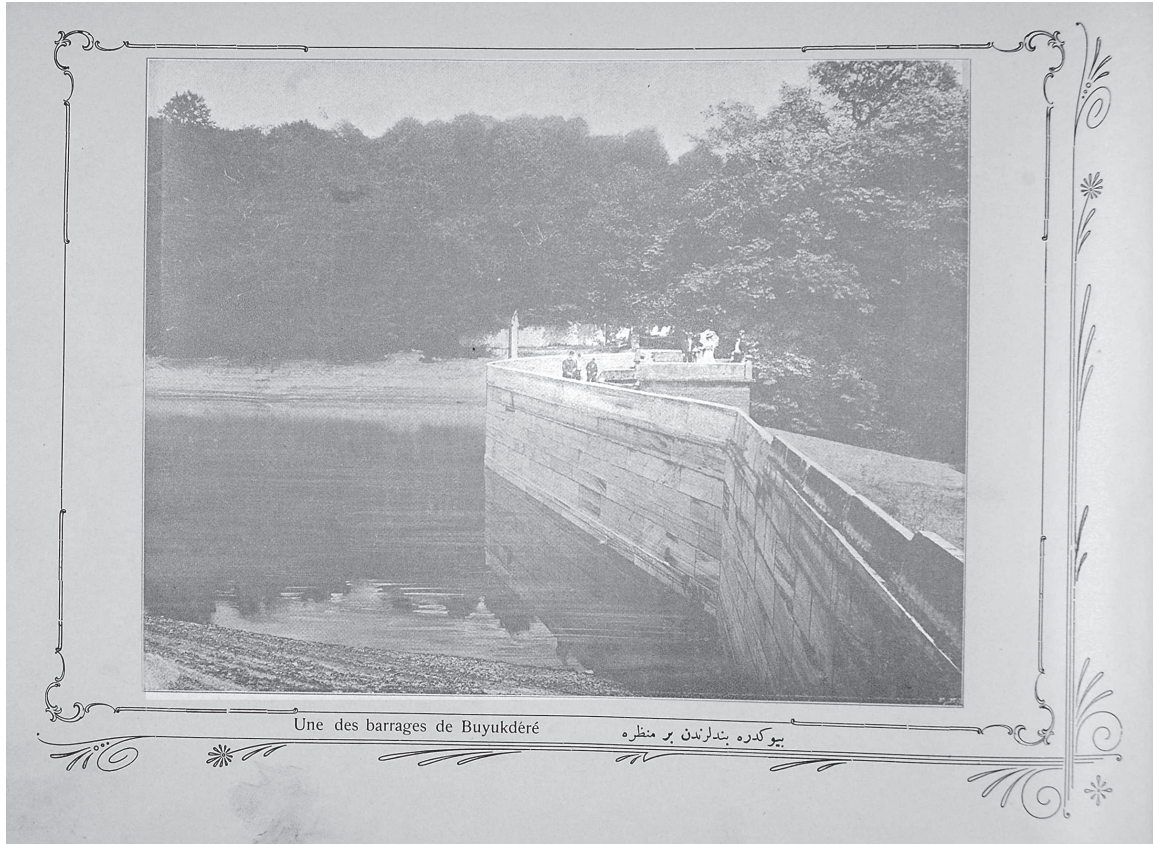
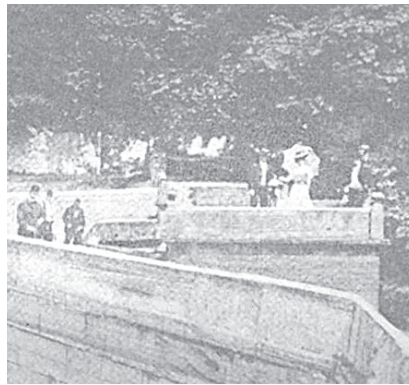


fig. 3 Strolling through the barrages of Büyükdere.
 Kanburoğlu, *Dersa'adette Hamidiye Menba' ve Çeşmeleri Suyu*



DETAIL
 City-strollers and their attire

THE VIEWER'S GAZE

Holding the photographs, the viewer of the album began a process of meaning-making. This process depended not merely on the act of seeing, but more importantly, on the objects being seen. The perspective from which the images were taken was built to a human scale. Each vantage point mimicked a line of sight a standing person would possess. There are no aerial or elevated shots. The viewer moving through the album is also performing a virtual journey through the İstanbul environs. In the sense of the *flâneur*, the urban city-gazer, the album constructed a walking narrative of a citizen passing by and casually inspecting the different achievements of the empire (for a visualization see *fig. A*, page i). The album lacked any scrutinizing, close detail shots. And judging by the shadow, each image was photographed slightly before or after noon, a time for a stroll perhaps. Only two photographs depicted scenes within a water-pumping station, which provided a glimpse where the traveler would normally not have any privilege to see. Originally impressing the reader with the importance of this subject and topic in the introduction and first few images, the album now created a tour of these items firsthand, to satisfy the pleasure in seeing. Gone are the soldiers. In their place, there are parks and points of interest for the viewer.

What evolved in this album and in many others, then, was a narrative of an active gaze, fixated on meaningful objects. The album was the surrogate for the action of wandering through İstanbul and learning about what was going on within the city and empire. It attempted to place practical, local knowledge of the environment with selective Hamidian ideas. Most importantly, all the modernizing efforts — barracks, bridges, waterworks, religious and institutional renovations — were highlighted again in the album's text. If the viewer was to notice anything in their passive stroll, it should be what the photographer decided to capture. The photograph of the fountain at Tophane is the building of one such idea (*fig. 1*). First, military personnel are placed around the fountain. The focal point of the image is the fountain itself, which occupies the entire middle section of the photograph with a linear perspective terminating in the center of the fountain. Likewise, in order to see the underside of the fountain roof, the tilt of the person's head must be set back and would make the person look-up toward the fountain. Not only is the

viewer of the photograph clearly focused on the centrality of this guarded fountain, but in the virtual environment of the armchair *flâneur*, he or she is looking up in awe. Power is not only mediated through content and text, but even through the mental positioning of the body in a subordinate position to the imperial state.

At this point, the notion of uni-directional messages must be tempered. The viewer certainly had control over the ultimate reception of the album. That is why there is a difference, however difficult to ascertain, between the messages within the album as hoped by the government, and the messages as received by the viewer. The former is the dominant aspect of analysis: the latter almost impossible to fix. Needless to say, individual choice in accepting and manipulating photographic meaning was essential for the photography of Ali Sami, which will be discussed in Part Two. The concept of the *flâneur* as part of the nineteenth century experience is helpful in complicating the uni-directional message of the Hamidian state.

In the sense of what Walter Benjamin referred to as the “dialectic of flânerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all ... and ... the man who is utterly undiscoverable ... Presumably, it is this dialectic that is developed in ‘The Man of the Crowd?’”¹⁵ The usefulness of “gaze” in analyzing photography becomes bifurcated. Is the Ottoman government, who produced the album, the incessant follower in Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” who stalks the unaware viewer of the album? Or is the arbitrary nature of album viewing typical of a casual gazer, unconcerned and unattached to what he or she is viewing, merely reveling in some sort of modern, urban experience of the *flâneur*?¹⁶ He remains disengaged and thus undiscoverable. Where is knowledge and meaning constructed in a multi-directional compilation of views? Yet, instead of hoping to achieve certainty at the ephemeral moment of viewing, one should focus on

15 Walter Benjamin, “The Arcades Project,” in *Philosophies of History: From Enlightenment to Postmodernity*, eds. Robert M. Burns and Hugh Rayment-Pickard (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 139.

16 İbrahim Hakki Paşa was a man immersed in the new bureaucratic and urban space and would often go to “open-air coffeehouses” to simply “sit among the people [and be] like one of them.” Carter V. Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) 198-199.

what different viewers and producers expected out of the photographic medium. Of course, the government could never know what exactly happened at the moment of sight, but it consoled itself with the expectations it had. It adopted a new technological method, photography, to match the changing terrain of modern statecraft. Aspects of history and state collapsed together. This album's dialectic becomes one between a gaze in the past and one toward the future hinged on the apparatus of imperial power.

As a corpus, the albums represented a large part of a new form and format of visual culture utilized by the state. These photographic and textual compilations operated as a circulation of ideas that reproduced arguments of legitimacy and significance in this Hamidian schema. Ultimately, the albums served to reinforce an object-based epistemology that relied on scientific rationalism to achieve trust in the message.¹⁷ For not only in other parts in the world, but in the Ottoman Empire as well, the photograph became the recorder for object-based information. The explosion of museums and archaeology, of nation building and history-construction, was largely dependant on visual displays in this context. World fairs, exhibitions, monuments and memorials all embodied messages mostly about the nation and empire through sight and site. And the industrialized process for circulating these spatially and chronologically exponential objects was through the photograph and not through text. The viewer's gaze was built on the object in sight. The Hamidian albums anticipated this gaze as a photographic aesthetic to create authority.

THE HAMIDIAN GAZE

The most crucial office for Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II was the palace secretariat. "Charged with the transmission of communications to and from the sultan, this soon became the most important bureaucratic agency of the Hamidian system."¹⁸ The goal of the secretariat was to move information from the centralized and inaccessible sultan to all the ministries and agencies

17 Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 6-15.

18 Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 230.

throughout the empire — and then send the replies back again.¹⁹ At the heart of the “Hamidian system” was an absolute dependency and ideological necessity for reliable documentation. This was a time for the rise of statistics in policy and statecraft.²⁰ At a very fundamental level, the photographic truth²¹ operated well within this system and indeed was utilized systematically. It augmented the textual reliance the Ottoman bureaucracy depended on for centuries.

Control through sight became part of a larger ideological schema of the Hamidian bureaucracy. Sight was not only a legacy from the Western tradition but was deeply grounded in the Ottoman and Islamic history. Sight occupied a foundational part of the Islamic legal and moral tradition. It was certainly dangerous, in fact, forcing a whole set of visual culture practices around limiting sight. Depictions of forbidden or dangerous people were channelled through sight into the mind. Just as empiricism and the gaze of perspective were so fundamental in constructing European ways of knowing and seeing, the eye occupied equal importance in Islam that had more to do with the object in view than the view itself. The gaze was a source of power and knowing, but also of misfortune and sexuality. In Islam, “the look, the last entrenchment of the frontier of the sexes, was to become the object of strict religious recommendations ... The confrontation of the sexes, as conceived by Islam, transforms each sexual partner into an ‘être-regard’, being-as-a-look, to use Sartre’s term.”²² The Islamic literature focused heavily on the danger of objects that drew the viewer’s sight, which overcame the mind — or in another sense, irrationality overcoming rationality.²³

The focus on Muslim populations became significant during the reign of Abd ül-Hamid

19 *Ibid.*, 231.

20 *Ibid.*, 286.

21 Sturken, *Practices of Looking*, 16-19.

22 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 37, 38-39.

23 Al-Ghazālī, in *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: A Translation of al-Ghazālī’s “Book on the Etiquette of Marriage from the Ihya’*,” trans. Farah Madelain (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1984), 48, 86, 101. “Fornication of the eye” is a major issue in Al-Ghazālī: Al-Ghazālī, *On Disciplining the Soul & on Breaking the Two Desires, Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences*, trans. T.J. Winter (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995), 172-176.

II, as part of many larger attempts at integrating disparate populations.²⁴ This included the building of foreign schools in the capital and schools aimed toward particular ethnic and religious groups.²⁵ The photographs taken of Mecca and Medina were a key part of the new state, occupying an important role for the sultan himself, who never left the capital of İstanbul. It allowed him to see the vast empire he commanded while extending his “sultanic gaze.”²⁶ The albums of Mecca and Medina are an entry point into this surveillance system. Photography was not only a Western experience imported elsewhere, but photography was something that derived meaning from Islamic and Ottoman practice.

Ottoman visual culture also placed a premium on gaze. In the production of Ottoman miniatures before the widespread use of photography, the importance of the sultanic gaze figured into the depictions of towers of imperial importance. Both the now destroyed palace in Edirne and the palace in İstanbul (Topkapı) had one central tower in their architectural layout. In Topkapı, this tower was located above the imperial council (divan), which was for centuries the highest site of officialdom. The tower was an extension of the projecting of their gaze in a symbolic edifice.²⁷ The decrees and adjudication discussed in that chamber affected the entire empire. But this was an empire that could never be seen in its entirety. Dolmabahçe Palace was constructed in the mid-nineteenth century as a modern replacement to the “medieval” and labyrinthine Topkapı. It did not have any central tower — the government perhaps had conceived of new ways of projecting its gaze and authority. The new bureaucracy, telegraph lines, railway systems and photography allowed the government to keep watch on the imperial realm and envision its entirety.

The sultanic gaze operated strongly in the photographs of the Mecca and Medina albums. In many ways they can be seen much like the waterworks album as a powerful Hamidian

24 Deringil, “Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State,” 350.

25 İlnur Polat-Haydaroğlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Yabancı Okullar* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 95-97.

26 Gottfried Hagen, conversation with the author, May 2008. The term “sultanic gaze” was brought to my attention here.

27 Gottfried Hagen, “Justice, Cartography, Perspective: Thoughts on Ottoman Visual Culture,” Near Eastern Studies, University of Michigan, (Ann Arbor, MI), April 7, 2008.

gesture. The albums depicted the restoration and expansion of some of the holiest sites in Islam. The albums were both presentational and systematic. Most telling was the practice of having communication rely on the photograph-as-proof. When the government would request photographs of sites across the empire, as it did for Mecca and Medina, it would receive the technologically and scientifically accurate depiction of what was there. In the construction of a guesthouse in Mecca, photographs of the completed structure were sent to Abd ül-Hamid II to confirm that the building was indeed built.²⁸ Ultimately, the government in İstanbul would realize that the material support and official decrees they sent were being followed. The “tower” of the sultan’s imperial gaze received immediate notification of its effectiveness. And even the bureaucrats became dependant on photography for their own proof. Ebu Bekir Hazım Tepeyran, a civil servant to the sultan, remarked that “had I not known the art of photography and ... been unable to present this album to the Sultan I would, no doubt, have been condemned as a troublemaker due to the reports of certain others.”²⁹ The sultan’s gaze could be appeased with sufficient visual evidence.

Perhaps then, the photographic technology did indeed help cause a shift in imagining power in the Ottoman empire. The sultanic gaze before photography was a one-way conduit that never expected a glance back. During the era of photography, the idea was that the gaze was being materialized and fixed in the paper. As a result, the construction of the gaze was circulated repeatedly between different parties. This constructed gaze included the power of knowing and of being watched. Each person’s vision through the photographic viewfinder was deemed accurate and precise. This was then communicated back and forth within the bureaucracy.

This use of photography accentuates not only power but the precarious position of authority. These decrees needed to be consistently confirmed with photographic proof. In this case, with the dwindling of Ottoman-ruled provinces, the state needed some way of grasping

28 Mehmet Bahadır Dördüncü, *The Yıldız Albums of Sultan Abdülhamid II: Mecca – Medina* (New Jersey, NJ: The Light, 2006), 61.

29 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 23.

what it held onto. The photographs of Mecca and Medina represented both the medium's technical aspect of collecting proof and knowledge, and the visualization of space created. Maps were essential to this, as well as daily telegraphs and transport from the center to the periphery, for instance. The Yıldız albums of Mecca and Medina did not circulate as widely as other albums. When they were sent abroad, they again were confined to libraries and gifts to the government as one copy. A large part of these albums were viewed internally for the purpose of knowing and visually conceiving the state.

PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUST

The importance of the optimism and progress that the photographs projected cannot be relegated as wishful thinking. The growing anxiety within the government displayed itself very well within the negatives being developed. What will first ground this idea, again, is the importance of the photographic material itself being free from tampering. That is, before ideologies become inserted into the analysis and understanding of the photographs by both contemporaries and ourselves, the medium is viewed with a certain trust. Even fantasy in photography relied on the same positivist assumptions of trust-in-truth in the photographic medium.³⁰ European realism and rationalism displaced older Ottoman forms with “new forms of visual entertainment” and meaning.³¹ More to the point, though, the photographs were a form of collateral that proved that a person, good or service existed. If the telegraph and railroad were modern instruments that were considered important technologies of information dissemination, so too was the photograph. The government could not function if it regarded its telegraph relays as socially constructed and subjective. The photograph as a technology was seen as being reliable and free of human tampering. Photography was *trusted* as true: photography-as-truth was not automatic.

30 In America, “at the time they were taken, these images were valued for what they proved—or disproved—of the reality of occult phenomena.” Truth proves the unbelievable. Clément Chéroux, *et al.*, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 2005), 13.

31 Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 15.

The medium was trusted enough to enter the into law and policing. Photography became widespread among police and prisons for recording individuals.³² The police stations across the Ottoman Empire requested photographic materials to utilize in their operations.³³ In Europe, almost immediately in the 1840s photography was mobilized for photographing prisoners. By 1884, the Ottoman Empire followed suit.³⁴ In an extreme case, Abd ül-Hamid II pardoned prisoners based on their physical appearances in photographs requested by him. He had learned of new physiognomic practices happening within Europe and applied them to these prisoners.³⁵ Showing clearly a fashion to keep abreast with European advancements, it also revealed how much Abd ül-Hamid II wished to extract knowledge from visual material. Based solely on appearance, the sultan decided which prisoners to pardon. It disregarded the idea that photographs could contain constructed meanings of history, culture and society, even if today it is clear how heavily ideological physiognomic practices were. The photographic image was a form of legal identity, a replacement to the phenomenological experience of knowing.

Not only albums, but exhibitions were important in the dissemination of photographs. In a document from the *Zabtiye Nezareti Maruzatı*, the Russian patriarch in Beyoğlu needed to set-up an “electric machine” in order to show photographs in his theater.³⁶ The place where this letter is recorded is a part of the police force. The apparatus of state surveillance had interest in photography. It was common for the government to censor publications,³⁷ and it seems that photography fell under some oversight.³⁸ But it is unclear whether the machine was large and

32 Abd ül-Hamid II even turned diplomats and consuls into surveillance mechanisms for Ottoman subjects across the realm: Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 283.

33 BA, DH.EUM.LVZ, 43A, 81; 10, 12; 27, 25. Each of these three letters requested equipment to be sent to Konya, Sivas and İstanbul, respectively.

34 Bahattin Öztuncay, *Hâtıra-i [sic] Uhuvet, Portre Fotoğrafların Cazibesi: 1846-1950* (İstanbul: Aygaz, 2005), 29.

35 Dördüncü, 13-14.

36 BA, Y.PRK.ZB, 37, 57, “Petitions to the Ministry of Police.”

37 Donald J. Cioeta, “Ottoman Censorship in Lebanon and Syria, 1876-1908,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, NO. 2 (1979): 167-169.

38 Öztuncay, *The Photographers of Constantinople*, 219. In this extreme case, the Abdullah Frères lost the title of Court Photographer and had their negatives depicting the royal family destroyed after photographing a Romanov.

attracted attention, or whether it was a pretext for the government to keep track of the kinds of images on public display. Exhibitions were the easiest method of disseminating photographs.

The Hamidian state embraced photography at the level of the most mundane bureaucracy: this should not let this gesture become insignificant. When it became practice to include photographs within passports, the state was again asserting the primacy of photography.³⁹ The trust of the photograph as an accurate recorder became the photograph-as-truth.⁴⁰ For example, the use of photographs for passports and police records by the turn of the century objectified the relationship between individuals and the state. It defined what criteria would hold true under law and scrutiny for the document bearer. Although not a universal adoption, the use of photography in these instances show a shift from the court uses of Abd ül-Aziz to the bureaucratic uses by Abd ül-Hamid. It was not a technological gap that caused this disparity, but one of choice.

What emerges then is an institutional preference for photographically-produced images. Indeed, the recording of official events,⁴¹ royal portraits⁴² and military campaigns⁴³ were preserved in photographs and disseminated in other media. It was rare in the Ottoman visual tradition to utilize miniatures as the main narrative format, and their value was even more diminished by the photograph.⁴⁴ The trust of the photographic image and the belief that it referenced a real event was essential in this preference. Concurrently, the anxiety and decline experienced throughout the Empire could be more successfully dealt with via the photograph. It allowed the government

39 BA, DH.EUM.SSH, 19, 46; 22-7; 22-42; 22-57; 18, 99.

40 Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 96. For a critique on realism in the nineteenth century see Roland Barthes, "L'Effet de Réel," *Communications* 11 (1968): 84-89; cited in Clark, 257.

41 This responsibility often fell to the photographers employed by the military: Engin Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami: 1866-1936* (İstanbul: Haşet Kitabevi, 1989), 6, 40.

42 The longest-lasting photographers to Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II were the Abdullah Frères.

43 Çizgen, *Abdullah Frères: Ottoman Court Photographers*, 14. James Robertson photographed in 1855 for the Crimean War, and Kenan Paşa published images from the Turco-Greek War of 1897: Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 43, 148.

44 A lavishly decorated album from around 1582 is an important exception. Even though it utilized a different visual language, it was also concerned with documentation. Like the Hamidian state, the album and the festival it depicted "were an essential part of the international language of 'wonder and power.'" Derin Terzioğlu, "The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation," *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 87.

to create an image of itself that it believed to be true and with which it could disseminate within and outside the empire, a panacea to the troubles of modernization and the decline of empire.

PHOTOGRAPHY WAS ESSENTIAL to the “policies and progress” of the state.⁴⁵ It helped to modernize the entire empire in the tradition of the powerful “gaze” of the imperial center. Photography was both a practical and ideological tool to help the whole empire “achieve modernity and to arrive at a position that was not yet occupied by the empire as a whole.”⁴⁶ From Mecca to Stockholm, photography traveled to the farthest points of sight.⁴⁷

It was the photograph’s apparent realism that was so convincing. It can be argued then that to achieve such a belief one must marry empirical, positivistic thought with visual depiction.⁴⁸ This was something that developed outside the pre-modern Ottoman visual canon. Indeed, the move from ideal to real became firmly cemented once the photograph emerged. No longer would it be practical or feasible to have visual depictions idealized and associated with larger themes and motifs. The tower would no longer represent imperial sight; the distorted miniature, embedded with meaning in the very collapsing of distance, would give way to the scientific perspective of the photograph. Instead of only the visual source communicating to the viewer, the viewer became central to how the visual source would be read. Photographic perspective, based on the single viewer, unified what was depicted towards the mind of the viewer.⁴⁹ Not only associative, the images were now descriptive and literal.⁵⁰ Even so, no transition is absolute, and the photograph naturally gained the associative ability of older visual forms: the chance to reflect broader ideas and beliefs not literally inherent in what was depicted. The modern condition for the Hamidian

45 Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 258.

46 Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107, NO. 3 (2002): 771.

47 BA, HR.SYS, 2416, 52. Although dated 1915, the failed exhibition of photographs of the Ottoman Army in Stockholm is part of the Hamidian tradition of visual diplomacy.

48 Sturken, 16.

49 *Ibid.*, 111-115.

50 Gottfried Hagen, conversation with author, May 2008; Gottfried Hagen, “Justice, Cartography, Perspective: Thoughts on Ottoman Visual Culture,” April 7, 2008.

state reflected this tension between reality and expectation.

The large albums given to foreigners and the truthfulness of the photographic image became important in a type of “visual diplomacy” of the Hamidian state. The empire could be “visited” without ever having to set foot within it, and thus the visual portrait controlled information and impressions abroad more than anything else. Since photography was familiar in Europe, it seemed a doubly assertive effort at modernization to utilize photographs and not other visual and textual formats when depicting the state. And naturally, the effect of the photograph went far in convincing both the state and the states of Europe of Ottoman “modernization rooted in a discourse of progress.”⁵¹ Abd ül-Hamid’s imperial apparatus was certainly borrowing from multiple histories, traditions and technologies to underpin an increasingly precarious position.

Abd ül-Hamid II prolonged the power and position of the imperial dynasty. His reign of 33 years became the most productive era of court-patronized photography. Yet it was not photography in isolation. Rather, photography should be considered as part of a larger coordinated effort at presenting new values for the Ottoman state, while maintaining older institutions. It was as essential a part of bureaucratic practice and standards as much as the telegraph or railway. In fact, all these technologies were new, necessary parts of the state. If photography was therapeutic, then imaging reality went far in coaxing the mental landscape of Ottoman reformers and statesmen.

51 Makdisi, 769.



fig. 4 The family of Ali Sami reading newspapers.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 76-77

PART TWO

Ali Sami Takes His Camera Home

The troublesome category of the mental landscape provides no easy entry. What was emphasized as scientific, photographic truth must now be tempered by the fact that photography was as constructed as any other piece of visual culture. Determining the extent to which either analytical mode dominated the photographs was a part of Ali Sami's work. The photographer "Üsküdarlı" Ali Sami worked for the government of Abd ül-Hamid II, yet his photographic method operated outside the Hamidian message. This investigation of Ali Sami deals with the split between the public and private world of photography in relation both to vignettes of his family and of the bureaucratic class of his peers. What emerges from the photographs is the pronounced and important fusion of realism and fantasy in the photographic images.

Ali Sami was a member of the Imperial School of Engineers (*Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayun*) and was a part of a new labor group of craftsman working for the state. The engineering school was very active in visual and material media like painting and sculpture and acquired a *camera obscura* from England in 1805.¹ Later in the century, photography classes began in the school. Sami was trained in the artillery school but worked as an art and photography teacher in the School of Engineers after 1886. His father-in-law worked as a teacher in the School of Engineers and under the sultan directly.² Sami similarly was appointed to photograph the imperial

¹ Engin Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 34.

² *Ibid.*, 37.

visit of Wilhelm II in 1898, along with other photographers from the engineering school.

Sami's grandfather was a Mevlevi, and the family arrived from Rusçuk (Ruse) in present-day Bulgaria after 1866.³ Distinguished from the photographs of more famous studios like Sébah & Joaillier and the Abdullah Frères, Sami never capitalized on their technical perfection. Instead he chose a fresh style that seemed quite amateur. What set him apart was that Ali Sami brought his camera into his "personal" life and photographed it. An instrument and technology used publicly by the government, and rigidly by professionals was now integrated into the home.

But the division between public and private is tenuous and unpredictable in the work of Ali Sami and even of Ottoman photographic practice in general. It is the acknowledgement of the weakness of a public-private division that will become apparent in the analysis. If anything, the private sphere was deeply affected by the public and was always in communication with it. His photographs can never be considered private for they dealt with publicly consumed ideas and ways of living. The private sphere required the voyeuristic gaze of the public sphere to confirm a part of its existence.

THE OTTOMAN CITIZEN: SOCIAL RITUAL AND PRIVATE SPACE

Ali Sami began photographing his home around the 1890s and into the 1910s. It is perhaps one of the earliest cases of an intimate, casual form of photography that emerged in the Ottoman Empire. Certainly, it was not rare to have family portraits taken in studios. Nor was it unusual for photographers to place themselves as subjects in studio portraits. But the photographs, or rather images, taken by Sami used his home as a studio. Sami worked against prevalent attitudes around the home and photography by doing so. Firstly, the homes and neighborhoods in Ottoman-Islamic cities traditionally were a cul-de-sac that valued privacy. Secondly, photography was technically difficult to expose in unpredictable light sources in the home with the bulky cameras. Thirdly, photography was a social activity related to a particular class and urban population in İstanbul. It

3 The Mevlevis were a religious order based on Sufi and Islamic teachings.

meant something to have a picture taken, especially if the technology was new, novel and mostly confined to the urban centers. Fourthly, it was rare to have Muslim women photographed, which constituted Sami's entire immediate family.⁴ It was even common practice in the photographs of the large studios — marketed to Europeans — to dress up Christian women as a replacement for Muslim women. Finally, iconoclasm was still discussed as a problem in photography for Muslim and Jewish people.⁵ Sami worked against both traditionalist issues around photography and the limits of the technology to achieve his purpose.

The newness of the medium certainly made it a fashionable item in İstanbul.⁶ It was not difficult or prohibitive for an enthusiastic individual to take photographs outside of government business or studio use and into another sphere — the personal. But rarely did photographic images travel outside these realms. It is uncommon to find photography that was, in a sense, produced and consumed by the same party, without a professional's help. Ali Sami was not a direct part of this group of European-minded people who visited the studios for all their photographic needs. There are not many practical reasons why photography would have to wait for the twentieth century to enter the home.⁷ Rather, studio portraits were a social practice and a marker of difference — publicly displayed and embedded with social meaning. Going to the studio was a social ritual that defined a part of this urban entity. But Ali Sami opted out of that practice and instead desired to achieve a greater sense of control in his photography.

Photography was a public item, displayed publicly and consumed between people as a result. The meanings conveyed in the photographs of Ali Sami created an identity in relation to this public space. This was the ritual of the photograph: capture and display the image, trust the content, consume the meanings and memorize. Photography, then, moved from a public space into the private sphere, and not the other way. As a result, the private images of Ali Sami still

4 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 16. His family tree is in Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 43.

5 *Ibid.*, 15-16.

6 Micklewright, 262.

7 Technical skill could be overcome. The invention of the Kodak handheld camera around 1894 certainly helped the learning curve: Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları*, 319.

acknowledged meanings that a larger audience would be interested in, not familial or private concerns. Sami was certainly a part of a public ritual of photography.

Essentially, Ali Sami wanted others to see into his personal life, which is why he set up such convincing portraits of his home. The photographic image fixated this sight. One could always look into the private life of Sami merely by viewing a photograph, whenever or wherever. The power of repetition and re-engagement with the subject enforced reality. This was the temporal and spatial permanence the photograph offered.

Ali Sami appeared to be an avid and keen photographer, but that entailed acute stylistic choices. He used his family members as subjects in his arranged portraits of them. It should be emphasized that Sami did not take a great deal of personal photographs in sheer quantity; rather, the few that survived were unusual compared to the general body of Hamidian photography. Even his non-familial photographs were of the same casual and amateur nature. Each image gave the sense of unplanned serendipity. Of course, this serendipity is ridiculous considering the ladders, equipment and groups of individuals that would carry and deploy the large format camera. Working against a determinist reading then, spontaneity was not a technological fact of the medium but was instead created by Ali Sami through a desire to have it so.

The portraits and vignettes of his Istanbul life are our entry point into his world. They are natural insofar as they choose the right moments, moments that impressed unspoken messages only apparent to the viewer as a reaction. This was an environment of glances and momentary poses to rest on the content in the photograph. In essence, Ali Sami recreated the closest understanding and style of a snapshot in this time period. But, it is necessary to avoid the term “snapshot” for its modern connotations, since the style of Sami is like that, but the intent to take the photograph was anything but accidental.

There are then two ways of splitting the content of the collection of Sami’s photographs under review: photographs of his “private” life and photographs of his “public” or official life with his peers. The photographs come from a collection of glass negatives first published and

developed by Engin Çizgen in her monograph on Ali Sami.⁸ Out of the images, the ones under close review deal with vignettes of the family in some sort of activity. The pictures needed to have certain material elements, or props, that helped situate meaning in the photograph-as-text. After an explanation of their content in each, the level of self-awareness on Sami's sense of photographic meaning will be situated within the notion of trust and truth operating in the photographic world of the Hamidian state. It will be seen that Sami's content, style and method blurred the division between a clear photographic genre and actively laid claim to creating strong identities via the reality and truth of the photograph. Private and public, as well as the temporal nature of photographs, loose their operative value in the photography of Ali Sami.

FAMILY VIGNETTES

Ali Sami, later taking the surname Aközer, was the father of two daughters and was married only once to Refia.⁹ He had two sisters, one of whom never married. The other sister's marriage produced a lengthy family line up to the present, while Sami's own two daughters never had children. As such, the family unit for Sami was considerably intimate. The set of photographs of his family members and acquaintances are exceptional, as mentioned earlier, for their casual, immediate quality. But this casual quality is manufactured with the precision of a studio photographer. Being behind the camera, Ali Sami was involved in the placement of objects, the light source and the pose of the subjects to a great, but not total, extent. These were after all his family members, and he would have been interested in both a comment on his life and a fair portrait of the individuals.

This was a tension of awareness in constructing imagery that needed to convey a natural authenticity. For now, it will suffice to say that in these images, the factor of time in the moment of photographic capture was of little interest to Sami. That is, the desire to temporally fix the meaning of the photograph transcended the need to signify the actual moment. This is markedly

⁸ Engin Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami, 1866-1936* (İstanbul: Haşet Kitabevi, 1989).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42. Ali Sami was born in 1866 and passed away in 1936.

different from the concerns of reality as wedded to time. If anything, the permanence increased the power of the message. If we consider the uniqueness of photography to partly lie in its ability to capture time, then even if Sami had pursued a snapshot style, he was not interested in the specificity of time that a documentary photographer might desire. In fact, it would run counter to the idea that these familial vignettes espoused certain identities.

The photographs as such should be more permanent than representing the fleeting moment caught on film, or else they would lose their capacity to hold meaning. This aspect created the sense of naturalness, as if it was always a part of Sami's social scene. Notions of time coupled with photography were an instantaneous and realistic constructor of space and moment. So that a photographic "moment" referred to the physical act of taking the image that indeed existed in a particular time, but the resultant photograph tried to achieve greater permanence and fixity. The identity landscape in the photographs, then, were an elaboration of fixing photographic time and truth.

Three photographs (*figs.* 4, 5, 6) captured Sami's peers taking part in two exceedingly class-specific activities: playing the piano and reading the newspaper. Both activities assumed a certain level of education and leisure that Sami chose to photograph. These three photographs are perhaps rare examples of home life taken during this time period. As mentioned before, photography was mostly done outdoors, by the government, or in carefully controlled studios during Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II's reign. Perhaps in someone's attic lies a *fin-de-siècle* collection of home photographs waiting to be published. Until then, Ali Sami's three photographs are telling for their focus on these activities.

According to Çizgen's research, the people in the two photographs of piano playing are not direct family members of Sami. The human subjects are important not for themselves but in relation to the activity and interior of the photographs. Pianos were both expensive and certainly without precedent as an instrument in Ottoman music. To own one was a statement of modern

(or rather Western) awareness and a willingness to be a cosmopolitan Ottoman citizen.¹⁰ In the thousands of other photographs of this time period, it would be rare to find another image of a piano.¹¹ If the government was concerned with modernization and the wealthy with displaying wealth, it is odd that the piano is less often depicted.¹² The piano was both expensive and Western, yet the piano was also something for the home. The newspaper shown in Sami's photograph occupied a more liminal realm of exposure, since it was read in public and private spaces, but playing the piano was something that was done in private. Yet its significance ultimately depended on Sami learning of its value from public discourse and taste.

Likewise in the newspaper photograph (*fig. 4*), the closeness of each person and the air of intrusion on the part of the photographer created this atmosphere of normal activities within the household of Sami. Each newspaper was comfortably held or sat on the table. Conveniently, the title of each paper was clearly displayed for the camera.¹³ There is no accident here: the viewer should know that the family is abreast in the latest news and humor. The lighting is natural to the point of obscuring some faces, while one person refuses to look up, and instead continues reading his paper (in this case, a humor and current events gazette). The family was positioning themselves within a larger public class with this gesture. What appears to be a private, familial photograph is embedded within a social practice of photography that placed the family into the larger group — this was indeed a public gesture.¹⁴

A photograph of Refia, the wife of Ali Sami, dates from 1889 (*fig. 7*). In it, Refia is seated at a small wooden table with her right side facing the camera. Her face is in profile, her hair neatly put up into a bun. She rests her chin effortlessly on her left hand, while the right hand holds some

10 David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1977), 40.

11 There is one of Fehime Sultan, a daughter of Murad V, but only posed by the piano. Is the royal family appropriating bourgeoisie culture or the other way around? Image is in Micklewright, 274.

12 Zeynep Çelik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse," in *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, eds. Jill Bueaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 22. This is an analysis of an oil painting depicting the royal family playing Beethoven.

13 The newspapers were *İttifak*, *Karagöz*, *Tanin* and *Hürriyet*.

14 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 2006).



fig. 5 Woman at the piano.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Özendes, *Osmanlı'nın Son Başkenti İstanbul*, 94



fig. 6 Man at the piano.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 80

small item. A small mirror, lilacs in water and various items of a lady's vanity cover the table: the item in her hand probably applies make-up. The whole scene is in front of a cloth backdrop and looks to be on a dirt ground. Interestingly enough, Sami apparently placed the entire vignette outside and in front of a studio-esque backdrop. He wanted control over the entire scene. Sami or Refia has chosen to disengage with the camera with eyes that catch a mood of sustained thought. The light falls softly on her face. What is offered is a charming domestic scene of this man's wife, taken very seriously and with much effort to record. She is putting on her face both in the photograph and *for* the photograph. Perhaps, Sami once again is exposing an awareness of creating self and standing in society. All the photographs offered a modern take on the household. It was of a clean interior, punctuated with elements and strongly present flourishes (furniture, wall decorations, pianos, photographs, newspapers) of their contemporary, urban lifestyle.

The people in the photographs, as a result, are not the most important feature, which clears space for focusing on the photographic content of the images. The material, non-human content applies itself to the meanings the people in the photographs created. The photographs construct an identity of calm modernity. That is, a modernity that is both pleasant and natural, not disruptive and incongruous with the past or present. The ideal cannot be temporary or the effect is spoiled, and no impression can be constructed. Again, the notion of permanent time transformed the photographic meaning.

The photographs of this family are a badge of identity. And it is no doubt that they would have displayed these photographs in the home, as framed photographs appear in *figs.* 4 and 5. In the private sphere of the home, and in the casual warmth of the subjects, as well as the glowing sunlight bathing the scene, a natural aura is created. It turns the signs of a piano and newspapers into a natural, and as a result banal, part of Sami's social life. This is reinforced by the variety of European styles decorating the interior. Rococo wall decorations, Victorian furniture, art nouveau tables and Edwardian hairstyles coalesce into a convincing scene of Westernization in the Ottoman Empire.

An important decorative feature in each vignette was the photographs within the

photograph. Picture frames and portraits on the dressers, tables, pianos and walls demonstrate how photographs were displayed. Was Islamic prohibition ignored or did people realize how broadly the Islamic leaders, like the Sultan, were interpreting religion? Pictures were taken and actively made a part of the decoration and visual language of the household. Surely, they became more and more ordinary through time, but initially it was exciting or frightening to confront one's memories fixated within the photograph. The visitor would also internalize what he or she knew of the people from the photographs.

Can we know what Sami thought of all of this — his awareness? Not with certainty, but the photographs are as textually laden as if they were journal entries or letters Sami wrote himself. Sami certainly knew of the special place of these activities and his enjoyment of them, as well as his family's. Most importantly, he decided to depict these scenes over others, not wanting to waste time, effort or film on vignettes of little purpose. Ali Sami must have been satisfied and assured of the value of what he depicted. This is evident in the pleasant postures and lighting of the people in the photographs. The family of Ali Sami served as a social and cultural message tied to the way the photograph envisioned them. Photographic truth again returns to finalize the process of meaning-making for Sami. Photographic reality created a narrative of the Sami household by reifying activity into identity.

With that in mind, the photographs of his immediate family and a few friends more persuasively demonstrated a bureaucratic class mentality. Unlike the bourgeoisie in Europe, who arose from an intimate relationship with commerce and production, the Ottoman bureaucratic class was living a bourgeoisie-esque lifestyle through yet another route. Their education and standing in society were tied intimately with the government and military, as it had been in the centuries before. Ali Sami educated himself in photography and art while in the military and School of Engineers.¹⁵ He was attached to the sultan's court and officially taught lessons at the

15 Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 33.



fig. 7 Sami's wife Refia.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 70



fig. 8 Sami's father-in-law Servili Ahmed Emin.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 89

school and photographed various official functions.¹⁶ In essence, Sami, along with many others in his class, were not carving out a new social space but instead existed within a largely traditional social class attached to the imperial state. Ali Sami was keenly aware of what this social space constituted. Consequently, when Abd ül-Hamid II was deposed and constitutionalism was reinstated in 1909, Sami left his government post to teach in Trabzon, away from the tumult.¹⁷ Sami was not a revolutionary nor part of a new, separate class, like the merchants and bourgeoisie of the European neighborhood of Péra. He was comfortably cosmopolitan, but apolitical and, to an extent, ahistorical. Yet unlike so many, he was of a mentality that would use photographs as intimate markers of identity. And he was exceptional in bringing that technology home to align the private sphere into the orbit of the public.

THE BUREAUCRATIC CLASS OF ALİ SAMİ

This bureaucratic class was highly intellectual, worldly and cosmopolitan in the photographs of Ali Sami. Photography formed a large part of the bureaucratic world, and not only because a great deal of bureaucrats had their pictures taken.¹⁸ Photographs were part of the early functions of the state, and photographers worked as civil servants. Not to mention, photography was a part of a larger entertainment and visual culture. Perhaps the image of Sami's father-in-law, Servili Ahmed Emin, represented this modern bureaucrat (*fig. 8*). Amongst the military uniform, medals and regalia is the important marker of this man's official status: a camera and photograph. He grasps an image in one hand, while the apparatus of a large-format camera sits on the desk next to him. Ahmed Emin gestured to his new position in the bureaucracy and military as a photographer.

16 Such as the Friday prayer processions (*selamlık*) and the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898. For the importance of the Friday prayer *see* Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire," 11-12.

17 Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 42.

18 Photographs were taken both on individual initiative and by the state. For example, the state photographed the members of the first parliament convened under Abd ül-Hamid II on March 30, 1877: Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları*, 221.

Even so, the modern bureaucrat was also historically positioned. In a scene reminiscent of Dutch group portraits, six Ottoman students in an artillery class pour over a table strewn with Ottoman military artifacts (*fig. 9*). Maces, swords, helmets, two musket-like guns and books were placed over and around the table. The students in the photograph seem earnest in taking notes and sketching the items. But their actions and faces are somewhat ambiguous, and the posed nature of the photograph does not help convince the viewer. There was little to learn about modern artillery weapons and practices from these precious, courtly artifacts. There is a detachment in their eyes as they looked down into the objects. Would a careful, though posed, study like this not suggest a certain detachment from the past? Is this nostalgic curiosity, or a rekindling of the bravura spirit of the Ottoman military past, now translated for the present? If it seemed nostalgic, the uninterested gaze of the students tempers the importance of the objects. What practical purpose could this activity — forged in the photograph — have?

The purpose is critical and reflective on the state of Ottoman history and the military. The military based on Western models and dress could not find anything useful in a distant style of fighting. If Europe would rely on the classical and even medieval world for inspiration then where were those models for the Ottomans? The Ottoman state had a much different relationship with its history and progress than did its western neighbors. The Ottoman past was glorious to Ottoman history and yet it was an insufficient model for their present situation. The activity in the photograph was then at once a cultural and historical comment. Sami revealed the futility of the task the students were engaged in by the style of disengagement and curiosity in the photograph. The students were participating in an event with little educational merit. Sami, though, did not discredit the scene completely.

Rather, these posed students served an ideological purpose on the state of the empire. In his other photographs of the school, he never posed the figures. Rather, he preferred to follow that natural style of the photo-journalist. But the artillery class photograph was certainly posed. He placed the engineering and military school in a decidedly cultural, historic activity. This was not a tension but a connection between positivism (ahistoric) and experience (historic). Ali Sami

was ambiguous about how the Ottoman state would deal with the formation of new ideological axioms that would solidify the vague status of ruler and subject in the modernized state.

The photographs of Ali Sami help decode what exactly this engineering school purported to achieve. The engineering school was training a new class of people. Firstly, they were members of a bureaucracy that was heavily tied to military hierarchy. Ali Sami was a photographer but also a lieutenant, and was never an engineer.¹⁹ But secondly, the school transformed individuals and exposed each one to a new conception of Ottoman citizen: highly fluid and mixed. Coming from the Balkans and from a father who was part of the Mevlevi order, Sami adopted the cosmopolitan ways of his peers and education. Each photograph exposed this affiliation with a new order. He remained acutely aware of what attributes made him who he was, which is why he could depict them so clearly to the viewer. The newspaper titles, piano playing, western dress, city strolls and the practice of photography were a deliberate attempt of narrating Ali Sami.

ON PHOTOGRAPHIC MEANING

The reality of reasoned thought in explaining the empirical world created mechanisms of legitimacy that reproduced precise environments of meaning. Photography lays firmly in this tradition of scientific rationalism. Concurrently, art and the creative pursuits grasped the means of manipulation and construction that would engender a synthesis between itself and science. Sami was a practitioner of this blend. The historical development of photography adopted the twin traditions of art and science at different moments. For the government, for commercial studios and for Sami the power of photography to take on these twin traditions created their photographic meaning. Only when photography borrowed from the traditions of reason and technology did the image create a space for the trust of the viewer to be inserted. This trust (based on cultural concepts) is fundamental as the beginning for the cascade of photographic meaning to unfold. Production, consumption and meaning followed each other only when the viewer trusted

19 Ali Sami taught and studied watercolor. *Ibid.*, 37, 40.

the medium of the photograph.

Sami's naturalized style compared to the studio- and government-produced photographs embraced trust and reality while also subverting it. Ali Sami did this by specifically choosing not to extend empiricism with the photograph, but rather to construct a world that would use the vernacular of empiricism to legitimize itself. Indeed, Sami placed much care into these images. He chose for his limited number of home interior photographs to focus on the family in leisure pursuits. Sami's photographic method and how he practiced his art were based on his stylistic choices and photographic content. The method of informality corroborated realism.

Studio control was essential in the way Ali Sami created his photographs. As mentioned earlier, Sami chose a seemingly uninhibited style of photography that created a familiarity and easiness within his subjects. Understandably so, Sami photographed his friends and family. But even his officially commissioned images of public processions and documentary news photographs have an amateurish distinction in style. It was purposely imprecise, when most of the Ottoman photographers were very precise.

Again, it is emphasized that this precision was a preference of Sami in the photographs, a stylistic choice. The detail and precision of the predominate photographic style did not evoke the naturalness and geniality of his lifestyle and family. The photographs of the family reading newspapers was poorly lit not by accident but to communicate to other viewers that the photograph was taken within a *real* home.²⁰ This style, even subverting the detailed and relentless realism the photograph could achieve, did not mean no truth claim was made. In fact, it was even stronger by this journalistic style. It was as if to say that Ali Sami simply placed his camera, without cue or call, and took the photograph. Sami, then, was certainly choosing a visual method that perhaps did not exist deliberately in Ottoman photography before him.

Commercial success was a result of popularity and professionalism; government

20 Photographic studios often had to operate on the upmost floor to receive appropriate light to achieve the detail of the brightest whites and darkest blacks within a few seconds of exposure. Öztuncay, *Hâtrâ-i Uhuvvet*, 33-37.

requirements were focused on accuracy and precision (both for the pure documentary quality and to reinforce the reality of the image); and European photography had an eye for the exotic and peculiarly “Turkish” in its images. Broadly then, Sami took the photographic genre to a hybridized format and not directly into any of these traditions.

The hybridization was achieved firstly in his handling of three wide categories: props, clothing and people. These categories are useful, though not definitive, and exhibit much overlap. As stated before, intention was the key to understanding the issues in the photography of Sami. The background and material objects in the photographs discussed above provide the first example of this. Beyond decoration, Sami chose items that would continue his message of progress and belief in his position in the Ottoman cosmopolitan world. These included most wall coverings, framed photographs on the Victorian and art nouveau furniture, books, mirrors, pianos, newspapers, antiques and artifacts. By constructing his studio on the spot, Sami could express a higher level of control than other photographers.

Instead of having a wealthy woman come into the studio, Sami would photograph her in front of her massive home.²¹ Or the wealthy court jester of Abd ül-Hamid II would have his portrait right in front of the expensive home being constructed on the shores of the Bosphorus.²² Pianos and newspapers, things that would hardly be carried to a commercial studio, deliberately find their way into the photographs. Sami exhibited them with a strong effect of casual realism by subduing their presence as appearing natural. That is perhaps why he chose to take his camera home and shoot photographs there. He did not take spontaneous photographs, but rather recognized the visual value of the interior of the home, its communicative aspect. A sense of the everyday, of the banality of what was inside reinforced the authenticity of the people living this lifestyle. This fidelity was hard to achieve if one followed the studio style too strictly.

THE HAMIDIAN STATE WAS A LARGE ENTITY of photographic production. Servili Ahmed

21 Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 67.

22 *Ibid.*, 64-65.

Emin and Ali Sami were members of a photographic workforce that took the main responsibility of creating the images that flooded the state and society. Even when the government used private studios like the Abdullah Frères, they did so as employees of the government and not otherwise. The legitimacy of the state, when handled coercively, mitigated itself through its workforce of photographers. The military and engineers appropriately became photographers. All three areas were concerned with penetration, control and construction as part of the Hamidian system. Photographers were soldiers as well.

Yet restraint is also helpful in depicting Sami as a masterful compiler and deft expert at construction. It is necessary to emphasize his control to help photographic practice in the Ottoman Empire break away from a detached novelty or an obsessive reduplication of a Western form. This could be extended as part of the informal style. The blurred reality of Ali Sami that was indebted to the dual phenomenon of the photograph as technologically true, mechanistically produced but socially influenced and creatively constructed left an important meaning of the role of photography in the Ottoman Empire. In Part Three, it was a duality in two more photographs by Ali Sami that will lead into the last part of this foray into photographic practice.



fig.9 Artillery Class.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 42

PART THREE

Public Adaptations and Private Expectations

In 1900, and then again in 1905, Ali Sami photographed perhaps the two most interesting images of the same person (*figs. 11, 12*).¹ When put side-by-side, the photographs reveal the awareness of a society undergoing rapid Westernization and technological change. As a starting point, the photographs will be part of the main paradigm of Ottoman photography as one between trust and truth that only developed historically. The case of photography in the Ottoman Empire places the state within an imperial message, even during modernity, that would be questioned and complicated by Ali Sami's photography. Ultimately, photography became a surrogate and imagination of reality, dependant on individual initiative for meaning, and depicting things as they never could be.

The woman in question for these two photographs was Hamide, the daughter of Hoca Ali Rıza of Üsküdar, himself a fairly well-known painter.² Not only were Ali Sami and Ali Rıza similar in age, but they both lived in Üsküdar. Photography had special meanings and purposes discussed earlier that made it a personal and peering form of information. The photograph from 1900 has a full-body portrait of Hamide (*fig. 10*). The photograph was taken outside on the dirt with a painted backdrop of a birch tree and stream leading into a lake and mountainous forest. This natural environment surrounded Hamide, who is dressed in Oriental "Turkish dress." It is of

¹ Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 142.

² Ali Rıza lived from 1858 to 1939.

a kind most often depicted by Orientalist painters or photographers of Turkish or Muslim ladies. Her two hands are buried in the back of her hair and head with the long strands falling down to her waist. The overall effect tries to be passive, romantic and quixotic of the sort likened to the pacifying moves of European depictions of Muslim women. Her eyes look directly at the viewer. But it falls short of the masterful Oriental construction of such a scene. Overtly sensual overtones are possible but ultimately her eyes have the same passivity of the next portrait.

The second photograph from 1905 depicted Hamide again outside (*fig. 11*). Her backdrop is an absolutely plain piece of light-colored cloth nailed into the stone wall of the garden. Perhaps they are in the private garden of Sami's household. Unlike the other image, the camera is far enough that there is considerable space between the end of the backdrop and the actual outside environment. The photograph would have eventually been cropped to remove this margin. This time, Hamide is standing on a rug, which lies on the dirt. An ornate lamp, chair and table covered with a clock, book, ink blotter and papers, complete the scene. Hamide is holding what appears to be a paintbrush. The scene is full of objects unlike the last, and Hamide is completely clad in "Western dress." Her hair is in a tight bun. She is not looking directly at the camera, and is disengaged from the viewer as a result.

The two photographs are complete visual opposites of one another, yet with the same individual as subject. Or actually she can barely be considered the subject. Rather, the entire scene is what Sami has taken up: the idea of costume or dress for individuals. The dress seems easy to apply and interchangeable, and perhaps that leads to its insignificance through Sami's astute awareness. The Turkish lady is surrounded by nature and is an established, customary part of the world. Her naturalness is also a part of her easygoing character and comfort as she stands on the dirt. But Hamide in the second photograph should not be seen as in contemporary or normal clothing, but rather just as fantastical (*fig. 11*). One cannot consider the Turkish costume photograph as anachronistic, artificial or playful while the other is merely a contemporary image. In fact, her style of Turkish dress was not a disappearing fact of the time in general. It was instead a disappearing fact from the specific urban landscape Sami was a part of at that

time, but something he would have known. Sami displayed identity as interchangeable and unfixed. The costume created a dialogue between the individual expectations of modernity and the public adaptation. When society moved towards “progress,” where did that leave Ali Sami and Hamide? Apparently it left them in an ambiguous but placid position: the “Turkish” past merely interchanged for the “Western.”

But broadening the scope back towards the public, the Hamidian state adapted the photographic medium to its own purposes. As a result, the history of how photography was used revealed that the importance of the medium changed over time. An implicit relationship between the people and the photographic image had to take shape. The portraits of Hamide, however constructed, predicated themselves on photographic truth, just like the album of waterworks from the Hamidian state.

PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUTH

Trust looms large as an important precondition for photographic truth to have any implication for the use of images by the empire. It is a connection that allowed for a tacit understanding between the world of the empire as it was and as it was depicted in the photography. The trust was partly contingent on the medium’s usefulness and on the cultural formation of trust. In the bureaucratic crisis of the early Hamidian government, when restructuring of the state moved by the great force of the personality of the Sultan, it was crucial to stabilize the government.³ The “creation of a more rational and regulated administrative system” during and after the *Tanzimat*, existed in an opportune moment of rapid industrialization happening in Europe, where the state would become dependant on technology to maintain information, communication and control.⁴ Consequently, “a new concept of the bureaucratic professional was emerging, and it was emerging in a context that demanded an unprecedented degree of control and accountability in the working of bureaucratic institutions.”⁵ A general climate of newness indicated broad changes

3 Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 223, 227-239.

4 *Ibid.*, 224.

5 *Ibid.*, 283.



fig. 10 Hamide in Turkish costume, 1900.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 73



fig. 11 Hamide in Western dress, 1905.

PHOTOGRAPHER Ali Sami

Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotoğrafçı Ali Sami*, 72

in the relations of people working within the Ottoman bureaucracy. Thus the photograph existed alongside railroads, telegraphs, and modern statistics as a necessity of running the Ottoman Empire.

But it was not only during the Hamidian period that photography or realism was first experienced. It began with the hanging of Sultan Mahmud II's portrait in the Selimiye barracks in 1836, as the first use of the sultanic portrait as imperial propaganda. The following sultans would take realism and later photography to central focus.⁶ Abd ül-Aziz had the Abdullah Frères in 1863 take his portrait for the die cut used in a series of medals.⁷ In the first cases of *Tanzimat* ideas spreading into the cultural sphere, the Sultans were extending their selves into the production of portraits of various mediums and kinds that would be circulated — in limited ways, to be sure — to barracks and medals and clocks (*figs.* 12, 13).⁸ It did not use photography yet for this purpose. Instead, more traditional visual forms were the end result, the photograph only being a minor step. The visual productions were an extension of the concept of sultanic gaze, whereby the Ottoman Sultan would be purveyor over his domains.

In a vast empire rapidly dwindling during the habitual territorial losses beginning in the late eighteenth century, a more concrete form of both visualizing and understanding the empire as a whole was both a practical and psychological remedy. In one aspect, aside from maps and surveying missions, the portraiture provided an extension of the sultanic gaze, which was a paternal notion of the head of state purveying over his domains. The hanging of portraits and the use of them in a visual culture outside of the book-miniature was a rudimentary attempt at extending the gaze of the ruler into the visual orbit of the members of the state. Yet, it was portraiture and not photography that was used: the content and the medium was important. But photography,

6 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 13; Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları*, 208. In a slightly different case, the photographer based a photograph from a miniature. The photograph, then, became the model for later paintings, etchings and sculptures: Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları*, 194-195.

7 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 53.

8 There exists two pocket-watches with sultanic portraits of Abd ül-Mecid I and Abd ül-Aziz. These objects are housed in the Topkapı Palace Museum, TSM 2/7192 and 2/2805: in Wolfgang Meyer, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesindeki Saatların Kataloğu* (Karaköy, İstanbul: Ümit Basımevi, c. 1966), [non-paginated text].



fig. 12 Original portrait of Abd ül-Aziz.
 PHOTOGRAPHER Abdullah Frères
 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 53



fig. 13 Watch with portrait of Abd ül-Aziz.
 Meyer, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesindeki Saatların Kataloğu*

amongst other modern means of control like statistics and railroads, would occupy a more central role later in this paradigm.

As trust was being conferred onto photographs, truth in the photograph lay in both realist and imaginative mentalities. This duality was in the scientific and artistic value of the photographic image: one a result of the mechanical and chemical nature of the process, the other an association of the medium into visual culture more generally. The act of photography “encourages the human eye to evolve into a new state”.⁹ The photographic gaze became an extension of the sultanic one. However, it was not merely the sultan sending his power outward and over, but also of receiving what was conveyed on the other end and inside the photograph itself — what can be termed vicarious gaze, whereby the photograph mediated the channel by which the government kept watch on its citizens, and displaced direct sight. The sultan could be affected by what was in the photograph. To paraphrase, the photographs shifted from merely depicting reality to shaping it. Indeed, when the sultan would send for these monumental albums of the empire to be created, and parts of his communication to rely on photographs, in a way he was fulfilling or denying the narrative or response he had already created in his mind. The photograph filled in the mental idea and could add to its truth-bearing weight. Scientific positivism fulfilled the trust in this effect, and the mechanistic aspect of the medium emphasized it as well: a mental truth was confirmed by visual proof. And since photography at this time could not falsify what was literally being captured in the image, it became a convincing tool.¹⁰ The duality between mental landscape and empirical fact was nearly merged, especially under the uses by the Hamidian state. Yet further then being content with this duality, the full study addresses the space created in between the “real” and the “imagined” landscapes of the photograph.

9 Ron Burnett, *Cultures of Vision: Images, Media and the Imaginary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 12.

10 In full disclosure, there was the practice of retouching (*rötuş*) confined to portrait photography and consuming much time. One great master of the time, Boğos Tarkulyan, said that “even with a few imperfections, everyone has inherit beauty. It is the art of photography that must discover this. (*Nadir istisnalarla her kişinin bir güzel tarafı vardır. Fotoğrafçı bakışta bu tarafı bulmasını bilmelidir.*)” [Author’s translation]. It would seem then that touch ups do not falsify the image, rather they can only find the inherit “truth” beneath layers of imperfection for these individuals. Öztuncay, *Hâtıra-i Uhuvvet*, 38-39.

Even as technology, the photograph was a visual material. The visual aspect can be interpreted as more dependent on interpretive methods that focus past the deterministic and rationalist arguments and into the horizon of meaning. And essentially, interpretation is what gives photography its lasting power. Ali Sami and Abd ül-Hamid II would create a space for ideology to manipulate the real temporal and spacial bounds of the image. In this formulation, reality and realism (phenomenological experience) are highly valuable, obviously so, but insufficient without conscious or unconscious meaning-making. Ali Sami in his two portraits of Hamide — one as the serious Westerner, the other as the engaging Oriental lady — was playing exactly with this productive tension. The photographic instrument becomes a method to understand the Ottoman experience for individuals. In Ali Sami's images, the objects, people, light and stylistic conventions are channels of his social experience. The ability to insert the mental by the viewer achieves the creation of meaning. That is, the photograph begins a trigger but cannot complete it without the viewer. And each viewer who completes this process is always different, which is why photographic meaning diverges seriously from the perceived meaning of the producer and that of the endless viewers by replacing real experience.

If photography encompasses a broad ability to insert itself into the expectations of different groups, the medium itself still has limitations. The question arises between the power of photography at constructing reality and the fundamental rift that should have been created in the Ottoman state. In other words, photography was unprecedented as a realistic visual medium, the shock that occurred when it arrived in the empire was perhaps only noticed by the strict Muslims and Jews. Previously, experiencing reality as a subject happened through time. With the photograph, there was the confrontation of a reality that was permanently fixated on paper that visualized more than the human eyes could normally see at once. If anything, the photographic sources do not fully reveal such a shock. The class of élites and bureaucrats were quite immersed in photography. Over time, adoption increased until Abd ül-Hamid made it a mandatory part of the bureaucratic system. At that point, the photograph reached its apex of a truthful, trustworthy and essential medium of communication and thought.

Thus, it is helpful to consider photography as occupying an ideological uncertainty after its invention in 1839 but before the reign of Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II. For the following few decades, photographic meaning was still being conceived and integrated into the government and lives of the İstanbul citizens. Its significance could waver.¹¹ The production of the water album amongst the many albums of government and society certainly was meant to carry its message powerfully from İstanbul to the shores of the New World.¹² At the same time, there were also photographs of people playing with toy boats in the suburbs of İstanbul, where did their meanings travel? Photography became elaborated as it displaced older mediums of Ottoman visual culture. Instead of a pathway into other forms, the photograph was an end in itself. First novel, then slightly utilized by Sultan Abd ül-Aziz, photography achieved its most useful place in the Hamidian period.

THE OTTOMAN CASE

The novelty of the photograph quickly acclimated to the atmosphere of the palace and the state system of Abd ül-Hamid II, which relied heavily on both quotidian mechanisms and high-handed ideology to legitimize and support the volatile reforms and changes within and without the empire. Both the everyday and the special messages could operate within the same medium.¹³ The practice of photography in the Ottoman Empire for the state and individual like Ali Sami is an important historical moment. But how does it exist within the historical narrative of photography?

The place in Ottoman visual culture of photography changed over time. Photography as we know it was invented in 1839. In that same year, the newspaper of record, *Takvim-i Vekāyi*^c,

11 In concept, it is similar to the notion of nationalism laid out by Billig. The photograph always maintains a passive charge of resonance that can allow it to become quickly powerful when needed, or move back into the background. See Billig, *passim*.

12 In this case, the most famous album was of 1,819 photographs from Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II given to the Library of Congress in 1893/94. An almost identical set was given to the British Museum (now the British Library). See Carney E. S. Gavin.

13 The social ritual of the Friday prayer, obligatory for every Friday on all Muslims, was turned into an important public ritual for the Ottoman rulers since the very beginnings of the empire. Something of the everyday could carry significant power if symbolically charged.

announced the invention in its paper.¹⁴ It was in the 1840s that the earliest surviving examples of Ottoman photography appear. In these cases, Europeans took the photographs. They focused naturally on the capital city of İstanbul and included mosques and other vignettes of the streets of the city, mostly focusing on urban landscapes. These were images both of familiarity (the urban space) but also maintaining exoticism (mosques and typologies). The Ottoman court would employ James Robertson after the 1850s sometimes as a photographer, but more importantly as an engraver for coinage and other metal items.¹⁵ It was the court, not the nascent bureaucracy, which utilized photography as mostly a template for other media and not a form in itself.

A few possible reasons based on Islamic prohibition of images and the early state of photography help situate this neglect. The newness of the technology also did not allow it to be understood as a surrogate or replacement for established forms of visual representation. Seeing photography as a technology more so than a visual art form for this early phase implied that photographic meaning developed over time. In one early example, Sultan Abd ül-Aziz commissioned the Abdullah Frères to photograph his profile. They did, and the sultan meant to send his portrait to the reigning monarchs of Europe as a gift. Political and cultural allegiances aside, the sultan did not send the photograph itself. Instead, the photograph was an accurate template that James Robertson used to make a metal punch. This punch created the impression on a series of medals, which were commissioned by the Empress of Germany.¹⁶ The photographs, themselves, then, served no persistent purpose, occupying just one more step in a process that culminated in a much more traditional form of visual depiction and gift-exchange. Photography in the 1850s-60s was still shaping a space of meaning in the minds of those interacting with it. Novelty was very much an aspect of this experimentation. The photographic “ritual” — capture, display, trust, consume, memorize — was still in formation at this point. Photographs were mostly a technology without significance and meaningless as a visual idea in the previous system.

14 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 20.

15 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 62; Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları*, 103-107.

16 For a detailed account see Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 53.

By the end of the 1860s and leading into the 1870s, photography would rise in popularity in the commercial sector. New studios began opening.¹⁷ The government sent James Robertson to photograph the Crimean War, initiating an important rise in the use of the photograph by the state. Ottoman photographic development was on par with other photographic centers, and they were highly cognizant of the media and its power. The novelty had worn off certainly over the decade.

But if we pause to think about this teleology of photography entering the public sphere and also gaining importance on its own, do we risk removing actual historical actors that can clarify *why* the photograph? Photography and the human actors have a push-and-pull in each one's agency in bringing about photographic popularity. Was it embedded in the technology, or did it rise with the individual? There were few discrete or concrete moments in the Ottoman history of photography that exemplify human agency in shaping the visual meaning of the photograph. Rather, it happened gradually. As a larger issue, how much were the Ottoman sultans (and then the bureaucrats and the well-to-do) enchanted by the novelty of the photograph? Perhaps they merely "desired [photographs] for their own sake and not because of attached prestige."¹⁸ Even if Hamidian patronage is evident, before then the photographic record is very much incomplete.

The personality of individuals, then, helps to historicize and analyze photography. If we follow a technological-determinist argument, then photography loses any contingent meaning and becomes an equal experience for everyone, regardless of historic moment. Instead, the sparse use of the photograph and the incident of the imperial medal and watch of Abd ül-Aziz indicated a moment when photography was not fully embraced (*fig.* 12 and 13). Novelty made the photograph seem insignificant for broader meanings. But still, the court recognized and valued the accuracy of the depiction for other purposes. Full realism at this point was a hindrance to an Ottoman visual culture that still utilized the ideal and not the real.¹⁹ The photograph by itself

17 *Ibid.*, 26-27.

18 Micklewright, 262.

19 Gottfried Hagen, "Justice, Cartography, Perspective: Thoughts on Ottoman Visual Culture."

cannot be seen as the sole agent in transforming Ottoman visual culture, as its use from 1840-1870 was uneven. Novelty and realism alone did not necessarily become the only driving forces pushing photography into the Ottoman world.

The reign of Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II, however, propelled photography into an unprecedented importance from the previous rulers. It was part of larger changes he had for the state and imperial authority. It would not be unreasonable to say that the personality of Sultan Abd ül-Hamid was decisive in the prominence of photography during his reign. The intrinsic qualities of the photograph (that which was seen as truth and realism), only became apparent in his reign. Abd ül-Hamid *recognized* the value of the photograph as a modifier of time and space. The photograph had meaning and substance that fit well into his modern state. So that even if the photograph was used as a document of truth because of its means of production, it does not account for the whole story. The mind of the viewer must trust the photographic image by acknowledging the value of it. Trust becomes an outgrowth of belief that saw the photograph as useful, as Abd ül-Hamid II was aware. The biography of the individual and the historical moment developed the meaning of the photograph.

Photography under Abd ül-Hamid II became an essential extension of his gaze and presence into the periphery and center of the empire. Networks of spies, public coercion, imperial authority and legitimacy were both separate goals of the sultan and communications from the photographic images.²⁰ The complex creation of mechanisms of control during the reign of Abd ül-Hamid stimulated this change in governance. He “stood in personal control of this system.”²¹ It began as close as the private palace at Yıldız and extended towards the edges of the empire.

The astounding increase in the use of photography was as much a part of the necessities of a burgeoning state, as by the unique personality of Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II. Afraid of leaving the confines of İstanbul and his palace, Abd ül-Hamid relied heavily on others for information, since he could not and would not appear spontaneously outside the capital. Photographs had the weight

20 Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 233, 239.

21 *Ibid.*, 229.

of textual and verbal communication. Even more so, as Abd ül-Hamid remarked, “Every picture is an idea. A picture can inspire political and emotional meaning which cannot be conveyed by an article of a hundred pages; therefore I benefit greatly from photographs rather than written records.”²² Sultan Abd ül-Hamid realized an importance above text in the photograph.

Indeed, trust and truth were the keys to this configuration for Abd ül-Hamid. It was yet unseen for photographs to be doctored, and their production process precluded any ability to do so. That is, the person taking the photograph was more removed from the actual production of the image and could not tamper it. The actual recording of the image, as a reproducible text, was carried out by light that reacted with the photosensitive material. It could not be interceded by the photographer. So that when the state requested images of the finished guest rooms at Mecca, the officials in Mecca had no choice but to place the camera at the site of construction, take the photograph and send it to İstanbul. More so than a text, the photograph could not be manipulated — certainly a unique time and instance in the history of photography. As a trustworthy document for the sultan then, the photograph was without equal, except for his own body being present at a site. This was one of the most untheatrical uses of photography, though an essential element for the “Hamidian system.”²³ But there was another facet, the cultural and ideological, which would prove essential for the government and Ali Sami.

Let there then be a subtle difference between the two uses of photography discussed in this paper.²⁴ For the Hamidian state, photographs could construct reality precisely because one acknowledged only their truth-conferring value. The logical proof would follow along these steps: because the technological aspect of photography cannot be tampered with like other documentary forms and is dependent on scientific and empirical laws and processes, what it depicted was based

22 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 22.

23 Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 223.

24 Commercial, European, environmental and archaeological photography, though not discussed, reveal different sets of meanings but still rely on a semblance of trust and truth. See Nicholas B. Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992) and Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Possessor and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

on reality. In fact depiction is a weak word. Duplication occurs, which is a somewhat disheveling and unsettling thought. The photograph captures details and an overall impression that the human eye cannot process at once. Perhaps it reveals a stronger truth even, so that what is real is especially true. Abd ül-Hamid II believed that the photograph had a gelatinous absorption of reality and truth, suspended in the resultant image. At this point, photography could construct conceptions of the government that it desired to see. Modernization, progress, urban life and social spaces occupied the majority of government photographs. What about the other use of photography?

Even though Ali Sami never instituted major public shifts into the use of photography like the Hamidian state or commercial studios, the overt merging of reality and imagination occupied prominence in his photographs. Ali Sami recognized this complexity of the photographic image. He used it to great effect in constructing images of his social and cultural world for himself, friends and family. In effect, persuasion, conversion and artistry became the thematic play on the realism of the photograph. In contrast, the Hamidian state wanted to be persuaded and converted much more so than Sami. If the pollution of multiplicity in meaning and the manipulation of photography would actually be perceived, it would dismantle the trust the government placed on the photograph. This is not to say, however, that Sami was completely rejecting the realism of his images, but was at least serious about bringing it to light as a constructive force.

The historical review could stop here, but a few remarks on photography after the reign of Abd ül-Hamid II are useful. After the Hamidian state, photography would not see the same bureaucratic fame in the remaining years of the Ottoman Empire. The lavish state-sponsored albums of Abd ül-Hamid's reign were not as common. Even what the institution of the state and notion of imperial authority meant would undergo many revisions. Governance affected by the personality of the leaders and not the office itself would still remain, especially under the Committee of Union and Progress, which would explain how photography developed in this period.²⁵ The photographic image had created a valuable space for itself for the previous regime,

25 Like the patrimonial Sultan Abd ül-Hamid, the CUP would follow a "neopatrimonial style" of leadership with much control over the bureaucracy: Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire*, 299-300.

but it could not actually address the issues of the last years of the empire. As such, photographic realism was a dangerous and not hopeful message. Instead, photography followed another route, that of suggesting a different notion of time. In political propaganda from this time, the photograph suggested more of what *could* follow. For instance, the images of the deceased in the propaganda pamphlet, *İzmir Tragedies*, implied that more death was on the way if one did not act.²⁶ If Abd ül-Hamid implied future success from his photography, the following regimes emphasized both success²⁷ but more so future tragedy. Indeed, through time, different aspects of photographic meaning gain or lose prominence. In this period, the idea was to place the future in the present, and avoid realizing the present in any temporal permanence like the Hamidian photographs were apt to do.

Returning to Abd ül-Hamid II, the personality and biography of his reign — as a paranoid despot always in fear of assassination, and as a result always wanting to have control and knowledge — institutionalized many of the meanings and uses photography had for the Ottoman state and those who viewed the photographs abroad. The human agent cannot be forgotten in constructing the meanings around the photographic material. In it not only the inherent technological fact that shaped photography in the Ottoman Empire, but more importantly a socially conditioned “way of seeing” that changed over time.²⁸

AS IT NEVER COULD BE

Photography undoubtedly assumed a constant place in the Hamidian period. It was both common for affluent İstanbulites and the government. The Hamidian state was making broad claims about the Ottoman past and future. The claims that were apparent in the waterworks album dealt with the power and beauty of science and technology, the historical legacies of the

26 BA, DH.KMS, 52-4, 1, *İzmir Fecāyi'i* (*İzmir Tragedies*).

27 BA. HR.SYS, 2416, 52. This letter spoke of a failed exhibition to display photographs of the Ottoman Empire in Stockholm. It failed from a lack of material for display, but was an important attempt at visual diplomacy (or propaganda) during World War I.

28 Sturken, 113.

state, and the guarantee of water for “all.” Very pronounced in the language of the text in the waterworks album, the government claimed a succession from a grand imperial history. Moving past a general historical nostalgia, if anything, the most prominent resonating theme of the imperial photographs is the *imperial narrative*.

If any social, cultural or historical aspects appear in the Hamidian photographs, they are ultimately tied to the imperial center. In the waterworks album, social good was produced by the imperial state in each photographed waterwork. The album utilized the sultan’s name as an adjective, “*Hamidiye*,” so that the water and fountains are not a part of only İstanbul, but *Hamidian* İstanbul; the cultivation of water for the city was directly linked to the imperial authority in İstanbul. The album went further, mentioning the Byzantine and Roman history of waterworks for the public good. It even brought in the vocabulary of hygiene and cleanliness then being cultivated by the bourgeoisie of Europe, which were the new members of a colonial and cultural empire.²⁹ The imperial associations were not at all subtly placed. The French translation referred to Abd ül-Hamid II as “the Great Emperor” (*Personne Auguste*), using a word that derives its etymology from Augustus, famed emperor of Rome.³⁰ The photographs, text and design all point to an imperial message.

In the most famous album produced under Sultan Abd ül-Hamid II, the one gifted to the Library of Congress and the British Library, the photographic content can be broken into two content categories: those related directly to the present and future (the reign of the sultan), and those of famous places in İstanbul. The famous places do not always overlap with touristic and European photography: they avoid cemeteries, quaint neighborhoods, dogs, İstanbul typologies and coffee houses. Instead, the İstanbul the government wished to capture was the monumental. The great mosques (including Hagia Sofia Church),³¹ fortresses and palaces of the past were the subjects. In choosing that history, the albums highlighted the imperial power that produced those

29 See Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

30 Kanburoğlu, 1.

31 A monument that was an imperial icon of both Byzantine and Ottoman ascendancy.

items. There was certainly a claim placed on the past glory of Ottoman and other ancestors, which spoke to the idea of inheritance and ownership of a long, stable past to legitimize the state.³² This past as solely related to the imperial narrative was the album's main point. Power and the House of Osman (Abd ül-Hamid II's dynastic line) dominated the historical narrative of the photographs, even if those claims were quickly losing ground for the constitutionalists and reformers.

The photographs in the waterworks album fixated on a temporal moment in the past. The photograph could never literally capture something that did not exist. Did a singular fountain or pumping station really become a synecdoche for modernization, though? The analysis certainly relies on it. In the mind of the viewers the future could be extrapolated from the images. There was an objective view of the photograph-as-mirror onto the Ottoman world: what was seen existed, naturally. Anything existing outside the actual content of the photograph was also connected to this reality. The photograph was subjective as well, where meaning was ultimately constructed. As viewers, they would have drawn “upon distinction between the perceptual and the mental,

suggesting that it is the sense of sight that apprehends the ‘fact’ of the mirror’s relationship to us and that our ideas about that relationship happen in a ‘different time.’ In other words, we see and then we think, or to put it in more popular terms, we are affected by what we see and then think about it. Yet, this is a moment dominated by various and different kinds of conflicts *about* the possible set of relationships between self (selves) and mirror(s).³³

Images of modernity were doubly effective for they stated the obvious (e.g. this school for girls or modern hospital exists and functions) and the connotative (therefore the future of Ottoman modernity will continue). External causes channeled internally into the viewer, which was “capable of linking one’s values to the new political entity, the modern state.”³⁴ This power would prove fundamental for photography and propaganda: the idea that what was depicted could lead to more of itself in the future.

Ali Sami recognized memories of the Ottomans, but not only as imperial narratives. His

32 Makdisi, 771, 777. There was a contrast between a static notion of Ottoman rule and one ascending towards the modernity of Western Europe; Deringil, “Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State,” 354.

33 Burnett, 29-30.

34 Karpat, 264.

photograph of an artillery class in progress (*fig. 9*) was peculiar for its anthropological occupation with an imperial, military past of the Ottomans. Notably, the objects were too precious to be in widespread use by the earlier forces, and the students were appreciating the objects like museum pieces. It was appreciation and acknowledgement, but not aggrandizement. The gazing on artifacts was historically minded but not quite nostalgic: *that* Ottoman military was defeated countless times since the seventeenth century. Arguably, European Orientalist narratives that fixed the Ottoman type also shaped Ali Sami's notions of the past. Conversely, though, Sami acutely cast the European woman just as fixed as the Turkish one in his two photographs of Hamide (*figs. 11 and 12*). In a way, then, Sami was not occupied with a full assault on Westernization or of the culture from the West.³⁵ Indeed, he was at ease and admired the trappings of his contemporary lifestyle, whether or not he considered the rightful originators and creators of it as the West.³⁶

ALİ SAMİ AND SULTAN ABD ÜL-HAMİD II represented two divergent approaches to providing meaning in the photographs of their time. The necessity to depict social values occupied the photography of Ali Sami, yet, like Abd ül-Hamid II, he dealt with the new technology and modernity that existed in urban İstanbul. The sultan also came to terms with this experience and recognized the photographic approach as legitimate in statecraft and the creation of meaning. Their belief in the photograph was firmly grounded in a trust in the medium. This trust allowed the photograph to carry truth in its message and replace aspects of older cultural forms. Reality constructed itself by relying on the truth in the image. Yet the photograph had limitations and the circulation of the image lead to multiple meanings. Ultimately, the photograph was powerful but not hegemonic, as what it depicted was not a complete solution to the state of the empire and the lives of individuals.

35 Unlike the painter Osman Hamdi: Çelik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse," 22-25.

36 See *figs. 4, 5, 6* for Sami's photography on his lifestyle.



fig. 14 A memory of the Sébah & Joaillier Studio.
 PHOTOGRAPHER Ara Güler, 1972
 Çizgen, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire*, 82



fig. 15 The studio as it operated in Pera (Beyoğlu) on *Grand Rue de Pera (İstiklâl Caddesi)*.
 PHOTOGRAPHER Sébah & Joaillier(?), 1908
 Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları*, 279

CONCLUSION

Circulating Images

There was nothing peculiar about 1839. Photography was a decoy — mimetic, though reflective like a mirror and exceedingly realistic. Photography was seen as a surrogate for some sort of reality. We cannot view these images without a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty about where truth and reality, imagination and trust ultimately operate, but rather recover discrete moments through detailed analysis. It is perhaps this very tension of the medium that Ali Sami sought. He had an extreme self- and social-awareness of what photography could provide as a means of expression, extension and investigation. The genre was pushed further with these photographs. The realism of the medium immersed Ali Sami, like the Hamidian state, into a unique moment of reality and imagination. Technological determinism is inadequate, there certainly was already a desire in the viewers and practitioners to believe. As a result, the ambiguities multiply for the modern viewer especially. It is refreshing and difficult to deal with historical subjects that push back with recognition of the large frameworks and forces operating in the historical space. It is an example of this that places Sami as active in shaping his world around him during a time that was anything but stable.

Viewers, producers, historians, tourists, statesmen and civil servants interacted with photographs in the Hamidian state in an unprecedented level. Trust, leading into truth, provides a way into understanding the strength of the photographic medium and its effects once adopted on this bureaucratic scale. Even when the government over-emphasized its mission or when Sami

discarded reality completely, there was no attempt to fully subvert truth. Indeed, realizing that there was a recoverable truth, as a firm, irrefutable meaning, in photography ultimately grounded the mental world into the images.

Barthes' and Kuhn's assessment of two of the largest ideological discourses of the nineteenth century — realism and scientific positivism — place them as socially constructed and problematic.¹ The mirage of photographic authenticity and truth is completely discredited. But we cannot let our understanding of nineteenth century phenomena, which has been inflected by the great twentieth century schools of thought, be implanted as the way the Ottomans in the nineteenth century thought. Nor can we assume they were completely overcome by their own ideologies. We can unravel a complexity in photographic practice. The tropes of Islamic and Ottoman gaze, positivism, empiricism and modernity existed to supplement any inherent meanings within the photographs. Yet, photography was a unique visual and vicarious form that was part of a larger transition for the Ottoman Empire into new governmental and cultural forms. Photography disrupted the scene but provided a heightened fixity to the new era it represented. There were many ways of revealing modernity and self: food, clothing, leisure activity, cinema, novels, religion, politics, warfare, diplomacy, culture and the photograph.

Traditional visual cultures of paintings, architecture and sculpture have maintained an important framework that pins them into analysis quite well. Considering the nascent state of photography (not even two hundred years old), this medium has undergone shocking reconfigurations from absolute representation of reality to fabricated constructions in the twenty-first century. Each understanding remains and is overlaid as a remnant. Most importantly photography in the Hamidian period was a “distinctive marker for temporal shifts ... and a strategic respondent and creator of historical discourses.”² These rich accretions provide a complex but

1 Georg Iggers describes Thomas Kuhn's argument on Science “as a historically and culturally conditioned discourse” and “an institutionalized form of scientific inquiry.” Quoted from Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 120.

2 Burnett, 13.

accurate was of understanding how trust and truth operated in photographic meaning for the Ottomans. It still provides an important approach to the experience of change.

The history of photography in the Ottoman Empire only lasted for roughly 80 years. By the 1920s, the Ottoman order was dissolved and replaced by the Republic of Turkey. Indeed, much changed, but perhaps photographic legacies remained more firmly embedded in the mental landscape of Turkey. Understandably, the power of knowing and conceiving the state and self that operated strongly for Abd ül-Hamid II and Ali Sami would not diminish in the republican period. Photographers like Ara Güler and Othmar Pferschy created photographs of İstanbul and Turkey that were so powerful, their effect on dominating the mental landscape is nearly universal. *That* time and *that* space is hard to erase. Even if they depicted a contemporary moment, the photographs soon became nostalgic and historic as the viewers scrambled to find lost referents and vanished narratives.

It is not surprising, then, to see the cascading layers of history in the photograph of a dilapidated sign from the prominent Sébah & Joaillier photographic studio (*fig. 14*). Ara Güler, working in the 1970s, captured this once-modern street that burst with the work of over thirty photographic studios in İstanbul (*fig. 15*). For Güler, his modern moment was more problematic and critical. Indeed, for Ali Sami the Ottoman past was important, problematic but not nostalgic. Yet in the cumulation of time and memory, the photographs of the Sébah & Joaillier Studio have now become plastered everywhere in İstanbul, just as fragmentary as the sign. For better or worse, they form (along with the Abdullah Frères' photographs) the largest nostalgic montage and collective visual memory of the Ottoman Empire, overriding even the personal memories of individual experience. Their images linger within subway stations, postcards, exhibitions, books and endless ephemera. Did Güler see his work operating like Sébah & Joaillier, as perhaps the only way future Turkish people would know and think about their past? Photography offered a comforting reality in the Hamidian period but its significance is much more problematic. The photographic moment is better if purely real even if it is not so simple — but think instead of all the images we can keep.

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