Ottoman Print Culture and the Rise of the Image: Everyday Life and the Historical Past in Ottoman Illustrated Journals

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Abstract This lecture is part of a broader project that investigates photography in the Ottoman Empire with particular focus on the illustrated journals of the Abdülhamid era (1876-1909). The aim is to distinguish the status of photography in the Ottoman domain with reference to a broader and variegated environment of medial production, dissemination and reception. Rather than approaching the Ottoman photographic material as discrete objects of pure aesthetic and connoisseurial interest, or taking them as confirmatory evidence of all-pervading ideologies, the study follows and historicizes the traces of these images in the context of infinite, quotidian reproducibility, as they were produced, redeployed, collated with texts, and disseminated in the pages of the illustrated journals. It proposes to see these images as the product of changing medial practices and protocols that extended from the Hamidian archive and gift albums, to newspaper causerie, snapshots, postcards, illustrated textbooks and dime novels. The mechanically reproduced images in question demanded new systems of value and new rhetorical strategies in the course of their deployment, and, as they were spilled out in the Ottoman terrain, they signaled the rise of a changing experience of reading texts and images.

Bio Ahmet Ersoy is Associate Professor at the History Department at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. His research involves the cultural history of the Late Ottoman Empire with a special focus on visuality and its links with rising discourses of locality and authenticity during a period of westernizing change. He is the author of Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary: Reconfiguring the Architectural Past in a Modernizing Empire (2015), and the co-editor, with Vangelis Kechriotis and Maciej Gorny, of Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeastern Europe (1775-1945), vol. III (2010). His publications include “Ottoman Gothic: Evocations of the Medieval Past in Late Ottoman Architecture,” in Patrick J. Geary and Gábor Klaniczay (eds) Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe (2013), and “Architecture and the Search for Ottoman Origins in the Tanzimat Period,” in Muqarnas 24 (2007).