

Turkish Language, Literature, and History

Travelers' tales, sultans, and scholars since
the eighth century

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An Ottoman annal in its own right

Hakan T. Karateke

The Ottoman term for a historical work, *tarih*, can sometimes be misleading to modern students of history. Modern scholarship replicates the Ottoman use of the term and regards virtually all works with narratives of events as “history”; little distinction is made between the various types of Ottoman historical writing. Yet, from a modern perspective used to modern definitions and taxonomies within the discipline of history, seeing the label applied to a variety of Ottoman historical productions is confusing, both with regard to the topics, and to the time period that they cover. To the modern mind, pamphlets and monographs justifying a political position, glorifying campaigns, eulogizing statesmen, or investigating controversial current events would be regarded as reportage, propaganda, political analysis, or some combination thereof. The Ottoman mind, however, classified all such works under the rubric of history. A closer look to better understand the array of Ottoman historical works will not only illuminate us with regards to the Ottoman conceptions of historiography, but also allow us to conduct an adequate analysis of the contents of Ottoman histories.

Formulating a classification for the entirety of Ottoman historical production is outside the scope of this chapter. Rather, I shall draw attention to a type of writing concerned with reporting on recent and current events and thereby explore the nature of the Ottoman official gazette *Taqvim-i Veqayi* as a publication—particularly in its earlier stages. By doing that, I hope to demonstrate the gazette’s character as a continuation of the Ottoman imperial annalistic tradition and point to a moment of transition in the Ottoman historiography.

Ottoman imperial annals can be regarded in the abovementioned category, albeit usually lacking the immediate temporal proximity to the events reported, and certainly as an outcome of a more structured and institutionalized effort. No one doubts that the main objective of these annals was to reify the state’s position and, eventually, to move public opinion to favor imperial ideology. While dismissing all annalists as mere mouthpieces of the government would do an injustice to their achievements as historians, it is evident that composing an account contradicting the pillars of state was not feasible for these annalists. They regularly submitted their partial compositions to the court and collected remuneration for good work. Once an imperial annalist was appointed to his post, he would typically cover events from the time his predecessor left off, often

treating events before his time—ideally with the aid of documentation inherited from his predecessor and with access to the state archives. He was also expected to keep a record of current events in daily journals that would be passed on to his successors as source material. These accounts were later compiled to book-length chronicles; but it usually took a few decades before the complete work was circulated to the public, if indeed it was at all.

Taqvim-i Veqayi (“Calendar of Events”) is generally accepted as the first Ottoman newspaper. As an official enterprise of the government, it had a long lifespan. First published in 1831, the paper continued to appear, with interruptions, until 1922. During its period of publication, the *Taqvim* no doubt went through many editorial decisions. New sections were introduced, and others lost their significance. The gazette regularly announced appointments to various offices and orders, and decorations awarded by the palace. A separate “charitable works” (*asar-ı hayriyye*) section listed for a period of time newly constructed or repaired buildings, mainly undertaken by state officials; in the 1860s, another section enumerated criminal cases and verdicts from around the empire. Some of the Sultan’s edicts and official declarations were recorded verbatim. The *Taqvim* discernibly printed information acquired through correspondence with government offices. A close evaluation of the *Taqvim* raises questions about the way that it was perceived by its publishers in its earlier stages, at a moment when the concept of a newspaper was novel in Ottoman society. Can this publication be viewed as a hybrid genre between an annal and a newspaper? Indeed, evidence suggests that the *Taqvim* began life as what we might call a “contemporaneous chronicle.”

The two-page preface to the *Taqvim* (see Appendix), which must have been distributed even before the first issue of the gazette was printed on November 1, 1831, leaves no doubt that the paper was conceived as a historiographical project.¹ From the first sentence, the preface provides a description and justification of the “exalted discipline of history” and elaborates on the topic for the better part of the essay. While modern scholarship unanimously refers to this publication as the first “newspaper” in the Ottoman language, we should investigate why the gazette defined itself as a historical project, and what that definition may have meant.

Mehmed Esad: an annalist in the shoes of a “journalist”

Mehmed Esad (d. 1848), the director and editor-in-chief of *Taqvim*, was likely instrumental in providing the historical touch to the gazette.² A member of the *ulema*, Mehmed Esad is known to have been an active writer of history; in fact, at the time he was appointed as the director of the gazette, he had held the position of imperial annalist since 1825. It is highly likely that his selection was made on the basis of his expertise as a “historian,” and that this expertise was meant to guide the direction of the gazette. Mehmed Esad was not the only annalist who functioned as an editor at the gazette; all imperial annalists during the nineteenth century, with the exception of Ahmed Cevdet (d. 1895), held a position at the gazette. It is safe to assume that this continuity in the leadership

of the *Taqvim* had to do with the parallel and overlapping roles of newspaper and imperial annal at that time.

That observation certainly offers a partial explanation. However, it still leaves us with the question of why *he* was charged with bringing out the periodical in the first place. Mehmed Esad was one of three candidates recommended to the Sultan. The qualifications cited for the position were decency, the ability to compose good prose, and skillfulness. The candidate moreover had to be knowledgeable about official affairs and protocol, and to understand the subtleties of the time and circumstances.³ The Kaymakam Pasha, or the Stand-in to the Grand Vizier, who submitted a long report to the Sultan, remarked that Mehmed Esad seemed to be the most qualified of the candidates not only due to his strong character, but also because he already held the position of imperial annalist. This was conveyed as the consensus of the committee tasked with getting the gazette off the ground. The Sultan's decree accordingly favored the historian. Two assistants to the director were appointed to summarize the daily proceedings at the Sublime Porte and the Ministry of War respectively. The French journalist Alexandre Blacque would regularly supply the publishers with news from the European papers.

None of the official correspondence about the *Taqvim* refers to it as "history" or ascribes any historical qualities to it. The documents describe at length the kinds of information that should or should not be included in the gazette, with emphasis on the contemporary character of the paper.⁴ The conceptualization of the whole enterprise as a historical one seems primarily to be within Mehmed Esad's purview as he expressed in the preface. However, before publishing the preface, he first submitted it to the abovementioned committee. Documents suggest that some editing was carried out by the bureaucrats involved. Unfortunately, we do not have the redacted document, so we do not know what parts were altered. It is clear, however, that the preface was received very positively overall.⁵ So, there must have been some kind of consensus about the intellectual trajectory of the paper. Perhaps Mehmed Esad was also present at the committee meetings. If not, he certainly was made aware of the minutes of the meeting, since some of the ideas in the meeting notes submitted to the Sultan were later incorporated into the preface that Mehmed Esad composed.⁶

Since the *Taqvim* represented the advent of a new medium, it is likely that its editor did not have a category with which to regard it, other than his home discipline of history. If it is interesting, it certainly is not surprising. However, Mehmed Esad adapted to the new mode, respected the gazette's contemporary character, and conceptualized a kind of mixed genre. The publishers were very much aware of the crucial fact that the public would now have rapid access to information; something to which the aforementioned first sentence of Mehmed Esad's preface alludes. He states that the exalted discipline of history reveals events occurring in the world in a timely fashion (*vaqt u zamanyla*). This may have been the first instance of describing historiography with an emphasis on the immediacy of its availability to the public. A few lines later, while describing the working methods of the Ottoman imperial annalists, Mehmed Esad mentions

that it often took twenty or thirty years before information about “recent” events was gathered into a narrative and made accessible to the public. His examples include the works of Naima, Raşid, Subhi, İzzi, and Vasif, all of whom were eighteenth-century imperial annalists. Mehmed Esad points out that when events of historical importance are not made public at the time of their occurrence (*zamanında*), their real causes remain hidden, which in turn leads people to question the state’s handling of affairs, whether foreign policy, or issues related to administration and reforms.

Controlling the flow of information and presenting the state’s position on events were, of course, the main objectives of the newspaper. If the goal of works produced by imperial annalists was the creation of a state account of events, a gazette would even more efficiently serve this purpose. Of the few names suggested for the gazette in the initial report to the Sultan, two are quite telling about the intentions of the publication: *Islah-ı zünun*, or “The Amelioration of Suspicions” and *Def-i şübehat*, or “The Dismissal of Doubt.”⁷ The Ottoman ruling class understood the possibilities inherent in the newspaper’s format. Apart from the newspaper’s status as an implied indicator of modernity, the Ottoman officials became aware of the possibilities for immediate influence on public opinion. The memory of the unease caused by a French paper printed in İzmir during mid-1820s was still vivid. *Le Spectateur Oriental* pursued a pro-Greek publication policy during the insurgences leading up to Greek independence and exerted a great deal of public influence. The Ottoman government eventually had the newspaper shut down.⁸

The utility of history: reconsidered

However elaborate Mehmed Esad’s efforts may have been in welding together the principles of the discipline of history with those of the new enterprise, he had to let go of one fundamental feature of history in the Ottoman conception: *İbret*. Drawing lessons from historical cautionary tales was traditionally deemed the most distinctly utilitarian value of history writing and reading. It was also primarily this noble characteristic that made the discipline of history a legitimate pursuit. Contemporary happenings, however, even significant social or military events, did not easily offer clear and straightforward lessons; the events were too recent, and the consequences often murky. Arguably, annalistic history itself was equally unsuitable for drawing lessons. The great annalists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Mustafa Naima (d. 1716) and Ahmed Vasif (d. 1806) praised the instructive value of history in the introductions to their annals, but it appears their understanding of drawing lessons does not refer to recent history either. Both historians attribute such qualities to the discipline of history in general.⁹

Mehmed Esad notes the role of history as a reminder for subsequent generations only briefly in his preface. He does, however, expound on the utilitarian characteristic of history. According to some members of the *ulema*, he declares, history is considered a near-obligatory religious pursuit. The discipline’s importance is grounded in the fact that it facilitated the preservation of the state’s laws

and recorded people's circumstances. He then goes on to relate a story from Abbasid history to prove his argument, an anecdote about some Jews who produced a document that exempted them from taxes in the early eleventh-century Abbasid state. The document bore archaized calligraphy and signatures of prominent early Islamic figures, among which the Caliph Ali's signature featured. A bureaucrat became suspicious of the document and brought it to a historian, who quickly determined that the document was indeed forged. Apparently, he was tipped off by the fact that the death dates of the ratifiers, which he happened to know, preceded the date of the document. Mehmed Esad deems this strong evidence that history is a necessary line of work. One might find it odd that this instance from eight centuries earlier was advanced as proof of the benefit of history. Conceivably, Mehmed Esad only wanted a handy anecdote demonstrating the general utility of history before he moved on to his own ideas about what the *Taqvim's* contribution would be. It was probably not a great discovery on his part either. The same story had been related at least by another annalist, Ahmed Vasif, in the introduction to his annals composed a few decades earlier.¹⁰

İbret was, by definition, a *personal* lesson that the readers were supposed to draw from history. In contrast, whatever practical advantages Mehmed Esad could identify in the *Taqvim* enterprise from its outset were for the benefit of the state. The historian emphasized that controlling the flow of information to society was the most important service that the gazette would provide. The public would now learn the "true" import of events in a timely fashion and "would be released of the distress they suffered due to false information." That was, of course, a circumlocution that avoided saying bluntly that the state wanted only certain news to be circulated, and only in certain forms.

This probably was also the juncture where conceptually history-writing and the emerging idea of a newspaper would diverge from one another. The traditional philosophy of history believed that public order was secured by the lessons drawn from historical accounts. It was thought that the ruler would draw lessons from history, and the benefits would trickle down to the general public. The "new historiography," which would eventually transform itself to journalism, believed that controlling the circulation of information would lead to an orderly society.

Table of contents to the *Taqvim-i Veqayi*

As if to debunk any suspicion one might nurture that Mehmed Esad perhaps conceived of the gazette as a kind of history only at its beginning, before he himself was experienced enough to know what a newspaper could be, the fortieth issue of the gazette, which coincided with the first anniversary of its publication, included a short announcement. The notice declared that it was needless to mention that the *Taqvim* was indeed a "history" and that the gazette would now distribute a table of contents for those readers who collected the issues of the past year so as to form a bound volume.¹¹ The table of contents would make it easy to consult (*mütalaa*) the *Taqvim*. While the original articles in the gazette

bore no headings, the table of contents was unsurprisingly formulated just like the annals: Persian infinitives and nouns in string possessive constructions. The *Taqvim* issued a table of contents for at least another seven years, until 1838. This date happened to be just one year after Mehmed Esad was released of his duties at the *Taqvim-i Veqayi*.¹²

Clearly, a composition of some epistolary or literary quality was not yet imagined as something that would be quickly consumed and easily disposed of, as future newspapers would come to be. Of course, collecting certain sections of newspapers was not an unfamiliar concept to the newspaper readers of the nineteenth century. It was common for some French newspapers to print *feuilleton* sections, which included literary writing, separately so they might be collected with ease. When, some thirty years after *Taqvim*, the first Ottoman private newspaper *Tercüman-ı ahval* came out, the first issue explained the practice in detail. The sections printed at the bottom of the paper, called *tefriqa* in Ottoman Turkish, could be cut out, collected and bound together. In the case of *Taqvim*, however, the complete gazette was meant to be retained.

“The only true history of a country is to be found in its newspapers” read the quote by the British historian Lord Macaulay that Samuel Palmer, a London bookseller, printed on the front page of his *Index to the Times Newspaper*. The unique endeavor to index the prestigious London newspaper was undertaken first in 1868, and continued on a yearly basis until the 1940s. Curiously, in 1891 Palmer decided to retrospectively index the back issues of the newspaper to 1785. For all we know, Palmer’s was a private commercial enterprise, and was not even supported by the newspaper itself. The question seems to remain unanswered as to who bought an index for a newspaper going a hundred years back other than libraries and historians, and how a publisher might possibly profit. Be that as it may, newspapers as mines of information for history-writers naturally emerged during this period. The subtle difference between the *Taqvim* and Palmer’s index is that the former was not belatedly discovered as a historical source; it came forth with the assertion that it was a “history.”

Imperial annals and the *Taqvim-i Veqayi*: a brief comparison

The similarities and dissimilarities between the Ottoman annals and the *Taqvim* are best substantiated through a comparison of their contents. Generally, the topics covered in an Ottoman annal were likewise represented in the *Taqvim*. These were events concerning the Sultan, military developments or incidents of civil unrest, copies of imperial decrees and regulations, news of appointments and dismissals, and even reports on wondrous happenings. These themes were probably not surprising for readers who were accustomed to reading annals. Unusual and novel topics were mentioned separately in the preface. The gazette announced that it would publish articles on methods of teaching and learning, the fine arts and sciences, matters concerning trade, and the market prices of certain goods.¹³ Some inspiration may have been harvested from non-Ottoman newspapers; but the spirit of the age was certainly pushing its agenda. The

gazette also declared that it would include news from around the world, with a popular formula of the early nineteenth century, "as is required in this day and age."¹⁴

No doubt, there was some novelty in the conceived range of topics to be covered in the *Taqvim* and the way they were presented in separate sections ("Civil affairs," "Military affairs," etc.). Nonetheless, an examination of the *Taqvim*'s issues reveals that some of the abovementioned topics were hardly ever mentioned;¹⁵ others, like the section on foreign news, continued only for a short period, and disappeared completely by the 1840s.¹⁶ The true distinction of *Taqvim* was its immediate temporal proximity to the events reported, and the corresponding mode of interaction with its readership, for example, the market prices of goods, which were relevant and meaningful only for a period of time after their publication. While some of them indeed were lists of market prices for certain goods,¹⁷ most entries in this section (*es'ar*) reported on the imports of staple foods to the imperial granaries in an effort to publicize the abundance of supplies in Istanbul. Even then the ephemeral quality of these announcements were a novelty.

The regulations related to the military divisions or the palace officials must have had a limited target audience, and even less practical value, since these were announced and implemented within those institutions in any case.¹⁸ However, the gazette clearly interacted with the wider public when it printed notifications that concerned the public and that went into effect immediately. The very first issue announces the abolishment of a regulation stipulating that the inhabitants of all neighborhoods in Istanbul alternately stand guard overnight after the oil lamps were lit, a rule that had evidently been introduced as a fire-prevention measure. The public was now released of this duty by the Sultan's decree.¹⁹

Furthermore, some articles in the *Taqvim* feature clauses or adverbs pointing to the temporal proximity of events. A short entry in the fortieth issue reports that a certain Şehla İbrahim Pasha, who had successfully served in Shkodra and Bosnia, was now deployed to Istanbul to join the Anatolian Army. The Pasha "recently" (*geçende*) arrived in the city, and after being honored in the Sultan's presence with a robe of honor, was dispatched to his post of duty "the other day" (*geçen gün*).²⁰ A follow-up from the previous issue is offered to the readers of the thirtieth issue; the article references a document produced by the Grand Vizier that has arrived "just now" (*el-haletü hazihi*) and relates new developments of an expedition led by Mahmud Pasha in Sarajevo.²¹ The fourth issue of the paper lists the imperial ships that were "currently" (*el-haletü hazihi*) under construction in the provinces.²²

To be sure, the majority of the articles printed in the earlier issues of the *Taqvim* could well have been included in an annal without need for adjusting the language; the reader and reported events were separated by longer stretches of time and meant to have no interaction. But, however scanty they may have been, the time-sensitive news items were certainly a novelty, and would familiarize Ottoman readership with a concept that would eventually evolve into a "newspaper." In the same vein, if an event did not come to occur in its entirety within

a year, it was common practice in the annals to continue them in subsequent years. The follow-up entry would ordinarily refer to the earlier report. The *Taqvim* continued this practice, but the periodical publication schedule of the paper meant that references to earlier issues became frequent and recurrent. Some affairs dragged on, and the authors had to cope with a concept of reporting an event not retrospectively, and write from within the temporal midst of the events. Follow-up news would frequently be initiated with phrases such as “as everyone must have already been informed in [such-and-such] *Taqvim* issue.” A separation of newspaper from historical writing would naturally grow from these differences in reporting.

The impact of *Taqvim-i Veqayi* on annalistic historiography

If *Taqvim* did not render imperial annalistic historiography completely obsolete, the nature of the information that it began to diffuse may certainly be seen as a contributing factor to the sinking importance and prestige of the office of imperial annalist and of the genre as a whole. The *Taqvim* provided the public with similar information and in a much more immediate way. As seen above, the gazette was intended to be collected and retained to serve as an historical account like an annal.

The year Mehmed Esad was appointed imperial annalist (1241/1825–26), one of the major events of the early nineteenth century transpired in Istanbul: after some ferocious clashes in the city, the centuries-old janissary corps was abolished. On the one hand, Mehmed Esad was probably busy during the next two years writing his 250-page panegyric account of the event (published in 1828),²³ on the other, he must have also continued working on the composition of the annals for the years starting 1821. This date was where his predecessor Şanizade Ataullah had stopped and Mehmed Esad was expected to continue from there. He had already submitted a draft copy prior to the destruction of the janissary corps. His annals cover a period of four years from September 1821 to July 1826, and remained unpublished during his lifetime.²⁴ For the years following 1826, however, he did not appear to compose any accounts. This may sound strange at first, because Mehmed Esad remained the imperial annalist for another twenty years until his death in 1848. We can surmise that his intense preoccupation with the *Taqvim* until 1837 did not allow him to devote any time for writing the sequels. Additionally though, he also probably regarded his new line of work, namely bringing out the *Taqvim*, as a fulfillment of his duties as the imperial annalist and did not see the necessity of keep daily journals: The paper itself became a daily journal direct to the public.

There are conflicting accounts regarding some journals that Mehmed Esad may have kept until the launch of the *Taqvim*, however. Ahmed Cevdet, imperial annalist between 1855 and 1866, wrote in a memorandum that the long-sought notes by Mehmed Esad to the years 1826–31 had finally been found and that he had forwarded them to his successor Ahmed Lutfi.²⁵ The latter’s annals, however, open with an apologetic explanation by the author. Ahmed Lutfi complains about the

scarcity of documents for the few years following 1826. No historical accounts had been compiled, nor had the current events been recorded for internal use by Mehmed Esad at the time. Ahmed Lutfi apparently had some access to the archives of the Imperial Council and the Office of the Grand Vizier, but the documents provided him with only an incomplete picture of events.²⁶ Ahmed Lutfi's apology is found in the first volume of his annals, which gives August 18, 1873 as its publication date in the colophon. Ahmed Cevdet's memorandum is dated October 1, 1871, just shy of two years before the publication of Ahmed Lutfi's book.²⁷ Ahmed Lutfi in all likelihood received the notes from Ahmed Cevdet after he had composed the years 1826–31, but did not want to alter or rewrite his chronicle.

Ahmed Lutfi's dire situation would ease when he proceeded to write the annals of the year 1831 and after. What did he do? He now used the *Taqvim* as his main source for these years, and with good reason: these were the most detailed documentation of the events after 1831. While Ahmed Lutfi would be harshly criticized by his successor Abdurrahman Şeref and some professional historians of the twentieth century for having used the *Taqvim* as the main source for his own work, given the nature of this official gazette, the criticism is not justified.²⁸ The historian was not doing anything other than referring back to the accounts written by his predecessors, which happened to have been made public knowledge. When Ahmed Cevdet sent the journals he himself kept during his tenure to Ahmed Lutfi, he advised him that for a complete account of the events which he had recorded in an abridged fashion, he should consult the *Taqvim-i Veqayi*.²⁹

For my purposes, all these developments are supporting evidence for a view that the *Taqvim* emerged more or less as a "blog" of events, not so different from the daily journals which were kept by the annalists to serve as documentation for their successors. To be more precise, the new enterprise was probably viewed somewhere between journals which were meant exclusively to be used by the annalists and a finished product of annals which were ready to be made public. They were, in a way, copyedited versions of the daily journals that were released to the public immediately.

Yet Ahmed Lutfi's complaints are also related to the sinking prestige of the office of the imperial annalist in general. One could say that the imperial annalistic historiography did not adequately transform and reinvent itself with the historiographical fashions of the later nineteenth century. A disapproving attitude toward the conventions of annals-writing became apparent by the mid-nineteenth century, and it became increasingly harsh and dismissive in tone. Later in the century, an assertion that someone wrote like an annalist even became a kind of insult. There are a number of reasons for this development. More and more historians viewed annalistic historiography as one-sided in terms of its use of sources and narrative. Among the primary critiques was the fact that the annalists recorded events in chronological order without seeking to elucidate any causal relationship beyond providing a justification of the actions of the powerful statesmen.

A revealing petition submitted to the grand vizier by Recai Mehmed just after his appointment to the post of imperial annalist in 1848 indicates that even the

annalist found the tradition problematic by this point.³⁰ In his petition requesting assistants from the grand vizier, Recai Mehmed suggested that the traditional practices had inevitably produced a one-sided historiography. The use of the primary sources written from the perspective of the political entities with which the Ottoman state was in conflict would bring about a more balanced view. Recai Mehmed clearly considered the unilateral nature of the sources to be the main shortcoming of the annals written by his predecessors.³¹ It is likely that this sort of criticism had been existent around the time when *Taqvim* began life and may have been one of the incentives of devoting a section to "foreign news."³²

Conclusion

Since *Taqvim-i Veqayi* was a new medium, and the chief editor and the primary contributor was a historian himself, it was only natural that his intellectual background would be reflected in its contents and style. That said, it was not his private paper either; there was obviously a consensus on the general direction and publication strategy of the paper. Most scholars draw a connection between the Ottomans' decision to bring out the *Taqvim* with the publication of *Veqayi-i Misriyye* in Cairo (*al-Waqa'i al-Misriya*), an official enterprise of this provincial government. The preface of the bilingual Turkish-Arabic Cairene paper, which had been launched only a few years before the *Taqvim* in 1828, similarly discusses the importance of making information accessible to the public to prevent the dissemination of unfavorable news. There is, however, no allusion in the preface of the Cairene paper to a historiographical character.³³

The *Taqvim* grew out of the tradition of annalistic writing. The dual character of the annals allowed such a development. The annals covered certain types of events chronologically, but the accounts were ordinarily circulated a few decades after the events. One might regard the annals as "newspapers" that were publicized with some significant delays. The main difference was the author's temporal position. An annalist generally composed his accounts after the events came to an end, whereas Mehmed Esad was writing in the temporal midst of the events, a position that made an enormous difference for the chronicling of ongoing events with no clear end in sight. Incidentally, the Ottomans fought and lost a few battles against Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt's armies during the first two years of *Taqvim's* existence. The Egyptian governor's ambition to capture Istanbul and become the ruler of the empire was apparently no secret. How *Taqvim* covered that string of events can reveal such differences in style and approach.³⁴ It seems, then, the *Taqvim* started out as a hybrid genre, operating at first more on the tradition of annalistic historiography. The preface and the contents suggest that it was considered a contemporaneous chronicle by its publishers. If we were necessarily to ascribe a modern label to the *Taqvim*, I think a "government bulletin" would best describe the publication.

Defining and introducing this new medium within the framework of a well-known genre of writing, namely history, had its own benefits. Many readers were already accustomed to its format and jargon. On the one hand, not being

one of the core branches of knowledge in Islamic learning, and absent from all *medrese* curricula, history as a discipline had to be validated by some historians for additional positive attention. Following Ahmed Vasif, Mehmed Esad, too, emphasized that some *ulema* saw history as a near-obligatory religious occupation.³⁵ But while history was no doubt a prestigious literary activity, what about the newspaper, a concept which was a novelty for many commoners? Could people have known of it as a “foreigners’ enterprise”? Could there have been a culturally and religiously grounded antagonism towards the publication of a gazette? This possibility would not have occurred to me, had the correspondence of the Sultan with his ministers not expressly stated on two occasions that the publication of the gazette would not be “conflicting with the noble *sharia* and the exalted order.”³⁶ Might they have anticipated some (religious) opposition to the *Taqvim*, or was this just the standard hedging language with which to introduce any novelty? Further studies are needed before we jump to simplistic conclusions. Interestingly enough, five months into its publication life, the *Taqvim*’s Cairene equivalent, the *Veqayi-i Misriyye*, apparently had some problems with its intended readership’s reception of it. The publishers were instructed to announce that one should not feel “disgusted” with the paper, and that it was a “fine and pleasant thing.”³⁷

One might assume that the rather convoluted language of the *Taqvim* must have stymied its purpose of reaching the masses. Not surprisingly, the paper boasted a very similar language register to that of the annals, for instance those of Mehmed Esad himself. The dilemma is rooted in the fact that such a prestigious literary product championed by the imperial court *had to* possess the standards of court literature. At least, Mehmed Esad must have felt that way. Yet evidence suggests that the government was conscious of the wider audience this publication was trying to reach. The Kaymakam Pasha suggested in his report submitted to the Sultan prior to the paper’s launch that the articles should be written in a way that “all people would understand.”³⁸ The Sultan himself is known to have disapproved of Mehmed Esad’s style in the description of an imperial trip, and instructed that works that were supposed to reach the masses should be written in comprehensible language.³⁹ There may have been groups who did not cheerfully welcome the *Taqvim*, or were not able to peruse it with ease. Even so, evidence suggests that even in its earlier stages, when it was characterized by annalistic elaborate phrasing, the *Taqvim* and its contents became the talk of the town and must have had some impact on public opinion. Robert Walsh, an astute British observer of the events in Istanbul around this time, wrote:

The Turks, when this newspaper first appeared, had no conception of any amusement to be derived from such a thing; but, like children, when their curiosity was once excited, it knew no bounds. The publication of the news of the empire in this way soon became of universal attraction. The paper made its way to the coffeehouses, and the same Turk that I had noticed before dozing, half stupefied with coffee and tobacco, I now saw actually

awake, with the paper in his hand, eagerly spelling out the news. But the most usual mode of communicating it are news-rooms, and a place is taken where those who wish to hear it assemble. A stool is placed in the centre, on which the man who can read sits, and others form a circle round him and listen. The attention paid is very different from that which I saw them give to a story-teller. There was no mirth or laughter excited, but all seemed to listen with profound attention, interrupted only sometimes by a grave ejaculation of "Inshallah" or "Allah Keerim."⁴⁰

Of course, the *Taqvim* enterprise brings up all sorts of questions about the Ottoman government's desire to control the information circulating among its subject people. Mass media generally facilitated ways to censor and manipulate information. I have not attempted in this article an analysis of the implications of the new concept of "newspaper" for public opinion. Rather, I hope to draw attention to how changing technologies could have an effect on the accepted ways in which people created and disseminated information—a phenomenon that is ever-present in our modern life.

Appendix: preface to *Taqvim-i Veqayi*

The exalted discipline of history is comprised of recording and revealing the circumstances that occur in the world and leaving a reminder which will be a legacy (*hisse*) from the ancestors to next generations. This discipline has many benefits. Because it facilitates the preservation of the state's laws and records the conditions of the people,⁴¹ some of the *ulema* have even stated that the discipline of history is a near-obligatory religious occupation.

As the renowned author al-Safadi, who wrote a commentary to the *Lamiya*, recounts, some of the descendants of the Jews of Khaybar submitted a document to the court of al-Qaim al-Abbasi, who was the caliph of the Abbasid State in 422 AH. The document was in the form of a deed and bore the archaisized writings of Ali al-Murtaza and the witness testimonies of Sad b. Muazz and Muawiya below. It purported that these Jews had been exempt from taxes for generations, since the capture of the Khaybar Fortress. The caliph was initially inclined to grant the request. However, Abu l-Qasim b. Maslama, the head of the chancery, became suspicious [of the document's authenticity]. When the deed was shown to Khatib al-Baghdadi, a historian of the time, he declared that the document was not genuine: "The capture of the Khaybar Fortress took place in 7 AH, whereas Muawiya joined the companions of the Prophet in 9 AH and Sad b. Muazz died in 5 AH. These dates are clearly not in accordance, therefore the document is not acceptable." Confronted with the historian's statement, the Jews were not able to produce a counterargument, and confessed that the document was forged. This true story is a strong proof that the discipline of history is a necessary line of work.

Therefore, much attention has been devoted to this exalted discipline in Islamic and other states in the previous eras. Preeminent Koranic commentators

and scholars of hadith, and intelligent and wise scholars such as Ibn Kathir, Imam Suyuti, Ibn Djawzi, Qadi Baydawi, and Ibn Khaldun have composed works of history. Special consideration to this issue was also given in the Ottoman State. Designated officials, called initially the *şehname-han* and later the *veqayi-nüvis*, were appointed to compose histories. It has been a custom for a long time to print and make these annals available to the public twenty to thirty years after their composition. The annals of Naima, Raşid, Subhi, İzzi, and Vasif testify to this fact.

Yet, so long as the events are not publicized and spread at the time of their occurrence and their true causes remain concealed, humans, in accordance with the principle "man is averse to what he does not know," are naturally inclined to oppose things of whose true nature and essence they are not aware. Consequently, various interpretations are made about the domestic and foreign affairs of the Ottoman State, appointments to offices, and other administrative decisions. Such interpretations, which come close to deciphering an enigmatic couplet of *muamma*, would not [even] occur to the functionaries of the state. The common people may be excused, since they are, as stated, naturally disposed to such rumors. However, since this situation will unnecessarily spoil the tranquility of the hearts and the purity of the minds of all the subjects of the Ottoman State, it may put those who, due to their ignorance, dare to spread such rumors, in a position in which they would deserve to be accused and reprimanded. Rescuing all the people of these lands from this confusion of delusion, anxiety, and suspicion, and securing the general peace, have been a preference of the Ottoman sultans. Due to his compassionate character, the ruler of our time, the exalted and generous Sultan Mahmud, genuinely desires to arrange these reports in a comely way, so that the people will not involve themselves in nonsensical evil acts.

This issue was discussed by the ministers, along with the *ulema* and the statesmen that are appointed as councilors, in a meeting at the Sublime Porte. As a matter of fact, [records about] the events pertaining to the domestic and foreign affairs of the Ottoman State will not be withheld and accumulated anymore. Their real reasons and necessities of the circumstances will be publicized to the public at once. Everyone will then no doubt understand the happenings in a truthful manner, and those who used to hasten to interpret the events contrary to their course of occurrence will be released of the distress they felt due to false information.

Furthermore, topics in the areas of the fine arts and sciences, market prices of goods, and those reports related to trade and commerce will also be published. These will be beneficial to all subjects and inhabitants of these lands in many aspects, and will be advantageous for the state and society. In particular, the pleasing illustrious acts of our master, the merciful Sultan, which prove the imperial goodwill to provide pleasant conditions and cheerfulness for all, will also be announced and publicized. His goodwill is in accordance with his natural quality of imperial justice and his beautiful, compassionate disposition, which is his by divine blessing.

However, there is much difficulty in composing by hand, editing, and publicizing such events every day. The easy way to do this is to acquire a printing house designated for this purpose, separate from the one in Istanbul currently. It was deemed necessary and suitable to publish there the daily events in various languages. While the compassion, kindness, and generosity of our master, the Sultan of the Muslims (may his sovereignty continue until the end of time) is manifest and obvious for all the Muslims and his subjects, his sincere feelings to all the friendly foreign states is also evident. In order for the benefits of the publication to extend to all, it was decided by the statesmen to employ a trusted person experienced and competent in another language. A petition was then submitted to the Sultan, who, in accordance with his favorable opinions about all sectors of the society and his servants, permitted that it be carried out as explained in Istanbul.

Consequently, a printing house was procured and designed by the government for this purpose in the vicinity of the Paşa Kapusu and named "The Imperial Taqvim-i Veqayi House." The imperial annalist Şeyhzade Esseyid Mehmed Esad Efendi, a previous holder of the office of the [Judgeship of] Mekka, was appointed the director. Furthermore, Sarım Efendi, of the division of Amedi and currently the Khvaja of the Küçük Evqaf, was charged with the task of summarizing the happenings related to the state administration at the Sublime Porte and submitting them as a memorandum to the director every day. The issues pertaining to the military will be gathered at the Ministry of War and submitted in the same vein by Valide Kethudası-zade Said Bey, of the imperial scribes, who is currently appointed to the Ministry of War. These tasks are not to obstruct the primary appointments of these individuals.

The printed paper will be divided into two sections. The first part will contain events pertaining to the official internal affairs of the Ottoman State. The other part will include news gathered by oral means from outside [the governmental offices], and address beneficial topics related to methods of teaching and learning, sciences related to crafts and fine arts, trade and commerce, and finally, events happening in the world, as is required in this day and age.

At present, it will be published once a week and the yearly subscription will be 120 *guruş* to cover the costs. Anyone interested is expected to pay a sum of 120 *guruş*, have their names recorded at the printing house, and collect the papers printed for them.

Notes

- 1 The emphasis on "history" in the *Taqvim's* preface has already been pointed out by Orhan Koloğlu in *Takvimi Vekayi: Türk basımında 150 yıl, 1831-1981* (Ankara: Çağdaş Gazeteciler Derneği, [1981?]) and Nesimi Yazıcı in "Takvim-i Vekayi ve Ceride-i Havadis'in Mukaddimelerinin Tahlil ve Karşılaştırılması," *Gazi Üniversitesi Basım-Yayın Yüksekokulu Dergisi*, 6 (1984), pp. 69-76.
- 2 For the other names associated with the publication of the *Taqvim*, see Ahmed Lutfi Efendi, *Vakanüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), vols. 2-3, p. 651.

- 3 See Nesimi Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi, 1983), p. 70 transcribes Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Hatt-ı Hümayun 1237 as *rabatalı, hem münşi ve hünerver ve hem usul u ahval ve deqayıq-ı vaqt u hale arif*.
- 4 Kaymakam to the Sultan: *basılacak havadis yeknesak olmayıp daima vuquat-ı haliyyeye ittiba olunacağına nazaran...* Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler*, p. 82. Ahmed Lutfi, *Tarih* (Istanbul: Darü't-Tıbaati'l-Amire, 1875), vol. 3, p. 157: *malumat-ı zamaniyye ve vuquat-ı cariyeden halqı haberdar etmek*. The new edition incorrectly renders the second part of the phrase as *vuquat-ı harbiyyeden*, cf. Ahmed Lutfi Efendi, *Vakanüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi*, vols. 2–3, p. 651.
- 5 The Sultan: *Mahv u isbat olunmuş mahalleri yolunda olaraq sebk ü ibaresi güzel olmuş!* The Minister of War: *Muqaddime-i mezkure güzel qaleme alınmış...* Cf. Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler*, pp. 82–83.
- 6 See Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler*, pp. 44–46, for a discussion on the authorship of the preface.
- 7 Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler*, p. 69.
- 8 See Orhan Koloğlu and Erol Üyepazarcı, *Osmanlı Basınının Doğuşu ve Blak Bey Ailesi* (Istanbul: Müteferrika, 1998); cf. A. Ubcini, *Lettres sur la Turquie...* (Paris: J. Dumaine, 1853), pp. 257–258.
- 9 See Mustafa Naima, *Târih-i Na'imâ: Ravzatü'l-Hüseyn fi hulâsati ahbâri'l-hâfikayn*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2007), vol. 1, pp. 2–3, and Ahmed Vasıf, *Mehasinü'l-Asar ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbar*, ed. Mücteba İlgürel (Istanbul: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1978), p. 2.
- 10 Ahmed Vasıf, *Mehasinü'l-Asar ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbar*, pp. 3–4. Oddly, the anecdote would be retold by yet another imperial annalist, Ahmed Cevdet, in the introduction to his *History* in the mid-nineteenth century; cf. *Tarih-i Cevdet* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Osmaniyye, 1853), vol. 1, pp. 6–7.
- 11 TV (*Taqvim-i Veqayi*), no. 40 (2 R 1248/29 August 1832), p. 3: *Taqvim-i veqayi tarih demekden ibaret olmagla...*
- 12 See the announcement for the publication of the table of contents for the seventh year of the *Taqvim*: TV, no. 171 (29 C 1254/19 September 1838), p. 4. For others see Orhan Koloğlu, *Takvimi Vekayi: Türk basınında 150 yıl*, p. 71. For his discharge from the directorship of the *Taqvim*, see Ahmed Lutfi Efendi, *Vakanüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi*, vols. 4–5, p. 920.
- 13 The contents of the *Taqvim-i Veqayi* were summarized in Orhan Koloğlu, *Takvimi Vekayi: Türk basınında 150 yıl*.
- 14 *Muqaddime-i Taqvim-i Veqayi*, no. 1 (1831) p. 2: *ber mukteza-yı vakt u hal*, literally “as a requirement of the times and circumstances.”
- 15 For instance, I have not been able to locate any articles on “Methods of teaching and learning” (*usul-ı talim ve taallüm*).
- 16 Orhan Koloğlu, *Takvimi Vekayi: Türk basınında 150 yıl*, pp. 63–64.
- 17 E.g., TV, no. 21 (7 Za 1247/8 April 1832), pp. 2–4.
- 18 E.g., TV, no. 2 (7 C 1247/13 November 1246), p. 3: “The code for the cannons of the imperial fortresses”; and p. 1: “The code for the imperial gatekeepers.”
- 19 TV, no. 1 (25 Ca 1247/1 November 1831), p. 5.
- 20 TV, no. 40 (2 R 1248/29 August 1832), p. 2.
- 21 TV, no. 30 (21 M 1248/20 June 1832), p. 1: *el-haletü hazîhi varid olan tahrirat-ı hazret-i sadr-ı azamîde...*
- 22 TV, no. 4 (21 C 1247/27 November 1831), p. 3.
- 23 Edited recently as *Üss-i Zafer: Yeniçeriliğin Kaldırılmasına Dair* by Mehmet Arslan (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2005).
- 24 Edited recently as *Vak'a-nüvis Es'ad Efendi Tarihi* by Ziya Yılmaz (Istanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2000).
- 25 Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir 1–12*, ed. Cavid Baysun (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 19913), p. 3. There are two appointed annalists between Mehmed Esad and Ahmed Cevdet.

- Recai Mehmed (in office 1848–53) and Nail Mehmed (in office 1853–55) did not write any accounts at all. Ahmed Cevdet also did not compose a sequel to where Mehmed Esad had left off, but wrote a separate history. For a study of Ahmed Cevdet's history, see: Christoph K. Neumann, *Das indirekte Argument: ein Plädoyer für die Tanzimât vermittelt der Historie: die geschichtliche Bedeutung von Ahmed Cevdet Paşas Ta'rîh* (Münster: Lit, 1994).
- 26 Ahmed Lutfi Efendi, *Vakanüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 1–2.
- 27 Baysun's edition of Ahmed Cevdet's memoranda, which was based on his draft copies, does not bear a date. An earlier edition of this letter found in Ahmed Lutfi's personal papers does carry a date; cf. Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir 1–12*, pp. 1–2, and "Vakanüvis Cevdet Paşanın Evrakı," *Tarih-i Osmani Encümeni Mecmuası* 44 (1 Haziran 1334/1 June 1918), pp. 93–95.
- 28 E.g., Abdurrahman Şeref in his preface to vol. 8 of Ahmed Lutfi's *Tarih* (Istanbul: Sabah Matbaası, 1912–13), pp. 2–3; Mükrimin Halil Yinanç, "Tanzimattan Meşrutiyete kadar bizde tarihçilik" in *Tanzimat I* (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1940), p. 575; and Ercüment Kuran, "Ottoman Historiography of the Tanzimat Period" in Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 423. Many entries in Ahmed Lutfi's *Tarih*, vol. 3, pp. 157–314, are indeed summarized from the *Taqvim*.
- 29 Ahmed Cevdet also mentions *Ceride-i Havadis*, which was a semi-official news bulletin launched in 1840. Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir 1–12*, p. 5. Memorandum dated 19 January 1878.
- 30 Recorded in Mehmed Cemaleddin, *Osmanlı tarih ve müverrihleri: Âyine-i zurefa* (Istanbul: İkdâm Matbaası, 1896–97), pp. 105–111.
- 31 Criticisms along the same line were also expressed in Hayrullah Efendi's *Veqayi-i Devlet-i aliyye Osmaniyye* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Âmire, 1856–75).
- 32 For the imperial annalist Ahmed Vasıf's petition, as early as July 1802, requesting facts and information regarding the events occurring in Europe to be used in his annals, see: Ahmed Vasıf, *Mehasinü'l-Asar ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbar*, xlvii–xlviii.
- 33 For the text of the rather short preface, see Nesimi Yazıcı, "Vakayi-i Mısriye üzerine birkaç söz," *Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı tarihi araştırma ve uygulama merkezi dergisi* 2 (1991), pp. 267–278.
- 34 A starting point on the topic can be Orhan Koloğlu's study, *İlk gazete, ilk polemik: Vekayi-i Mısriye'nin öyküsü ve Takvimi vekayi ile tartışması* (Ankara: Çağdaş Gazeteciler Derneği, 1989), esp. pp. 66–67.
- 35 Ahmed Vasıf, *Mehasinü'l-Asar ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbar*, p. 3. Ahmed Cevdet later reiterates the same idea, cf. *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 1, p. 6.
- 36 Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler*, p. 67, from the Sultan's order: *şer-i şerife ve nizâm-ı münife asla doqunur yeri olmadıgından*. Also see Kaymakam Pasha's report, *ibid.*, p. 69.
- 37 Ibrahim Abduh quotes a document dated 10 Za 1244/14 May 1829 from *Makhtutat Abidin*; cf. *Tarikh al-Waq'a'i' al-Misriyah, 1828–1942* ([Cairo]: Mu'assasat Sijill al-'Arab, 1983), p. 38.
- 38 Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler*, p. 69: *herkesin zihni teslim edecek surette yazılmak lazım gelip...*
- 39 Ahmed Lutfi Efendi, *Vakanüvis Ahmed Lutfi Efendi Tarihi*, vol. 5, p. 909.
- 40 Robert Walsh, *A Residence at Constantinople, During a Period Including the Commencement, Progress, and Termination of the Greek and Turkish Revolutions* (London: F. Westley & A. H. Davis, 1836), vol. 2, p. 283. Cf. Alexander Blacque's report about the feasibility of publishing a gazette. He suggests that the paper be read aloud in the neighborhoods, for example by the imams, so that its contents disseminated as widely as possible; Yazıcı, *Takvim-i Vekayi, Belgeler*, p. 79.
- 41 *İlm-i tarih ... milletin rabt-ı ahvalini müstevcib oldugu-yçün*. This phrase is not clear. I have restored the meaning following Ahmed Vasıf's introduction where he writes:

Zabt-ı veqayi-i milel bununla [i.e., tarihle] hasıl olup... Cf. Ahmed Vasıf, *Mehasinü'l-Asar ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbar*, p. 3.

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