

Workshop

To Print or Not to Print? Knowledge Diffusion in the 18th and 19th Century Middle East

May 5 and 6, 2006 (Friday and Saturday)
Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Villa Jaffé, Wallotstr. 10, 14193 Berlin

Convenor: Dana Sajdi (Fellow of the Working Group Modernity and Islam 2005/6)

Abstract

Despite the presence of the printing press in various parts in the Middle East from the early 18th century, and its relative widespread use in the 19th century, scribal culture continued to thrive well into the early 20th century. The coexistence of scribal and print technologies, sometimes in the very same social and cultural milieu (such as the presence of two authors in the same household each utilizing one of the two technologies exclusively, or of the same author both technologies), compels us to reconsider what has been posited as a necessary connection between print culture and modernity, where the printing press is seen as an obvious and inevitable tool that meets the requirements of a modern age of efficiency, mass consumption, new ideas, and rising literacy rates. The persistence of scribal culture in a decidedly modern world indicates that the use of the method of diffusion of knowledge (print or scribal) was a *decision* that may have been informed by considerations that render our assumptions about the uses of print and scribal cultures moot/dated. By locating the use of dissemination technologies as a decision, the workshop aims to invite questions and observations that offer a new line of inquiry about the functions and uses of media of knowledge propagation, and perhaps to re-consider the role assigned to print culture in the constitution of modernity.

The following is a series set of questions that may be salient to the discussion:

What structures (social, political, economic, cultural) had a bearing on the utilization of print or scribal technologies? Were there technical considerations to do with notions about the preservation and storage of information that may have influenced choices of publication media? Were there specific discourses and literary forms that were seen as more appropriate for either print or scribal cultures? Was the decision to utilize a specific method of knowledge diffusion motivated by the choice of authors or demand of readers, or both? Were there groups/communities being deliberately or unintentionally excluded or included in the decision to use one or the other media? Can we speak of various discursive communities coalescing around certain contents and forms of knowledge through a particular publication media? And what does all of the above tell us about the intellectual and cultural lives of the producers and consumers of knowledge in the period in question?

PROGRAM

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Friday, May 6

10.00-12.30 Session 1

Dana Sajdi, *Introduction and Moderation:*

Konrad Hirschler (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel), *Diffusion of Knowledge in a Pre-Print Culture: Reading Audiences in Medieval Damascus*

Martin Gierl (Berlin), *The Individual Authority of the Nib and the Social Discipline of the Printing Press – the Bearing of Dissemination Techniques on the Development of Knowledge, Using the Lutheran Theological Disputes at the End of the 17th Century as an Example*

12.30-14.00 Lunch

14.00-17.00 Session 2

Orlin Sabev (Institute of Balkan Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), *In Search of Lost Time in Waiting for Godot: Was First Ottoman Printing Press Too Late and Insignificant?*

Carsten-Michael Walbiner (Katholischer Akademischer Ausländer Dienst), *The Attitude of the Oriental Churches of the Arab World towards Book-printing in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*

Saturday, May 6

10.00-12.30 Session 3

Randi Deguilhem (CNRS, IREMAM-MMSH, Aix-en-Provence), *Diffusing Information in Late Ottoman Damascus. Choosing One's Media: The Example of the Qâsimî Brothers*

Dyala Hamza (Zentrum Moderner Orient), *For Whom the Press Rolls: Modern Manuscripts and Medieval Books in Muhammad Ali's Egypt*

12.30-14.30 Lunch

**15.00-17.00 Guided Tour: "Buchdruck und Orient – Orient und Buchdruck"
Exhibition at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Haus Potsdamer Str. 33**