

TURKISH PRINTING AND PUBLISHING IN MALTA IN THE 1830s

The English Church Missionary Society (CMS) ran a press in Malta between 1825 and 1842, which was largely concerned with publishing books in Arabic, mainly Protestant religious works and school text-books.¹ It was part of the Mediterranean Mission of the CMS, which conducted propaganda and educational work not only in the Arab countries and Greece, but also in Anatolia. In the early 1830s they established a mission station at Buca near İzmir, under the control of J.A. Jetter. From the outset the highest priority was given to primary education, and to assist in this it was decided to make use of the Arabic type-founts of the Malta press to print elementary text-books in Ottoman Turkish also.

The first such publication was a beginners' reading- and spelling-book (item 1 in the annexed bibliography), prepared by Jetter with the assistance of a local Turkish scholar called Yusuf Efendi. This was published in 1834, and was followed in the same year by an illustrated school-book on natural history (item 2). The most important work, however, in preparing Turkish texts for publication was done subsequently by the Swedish pastor Peter Fjellstedt. A graduate of Lund University, he had joined the CMS in 1829, and studied Arabic, Ethiopic, Coptic and Persian at their college in Islington, as well as, briefly, Greek at the Basle Seminary, and in 1831 was posted to Tinnevely in southern India, where he served as a missionary until 1835.² He was then obliged to return to Europe for

¹ Information concerning the history of the press and of the mission has been drawn mainly from the CMS Archives in Birmingham University Library. An extended treatment can be found in my thesis *Arabic printing in Malta 1825-1845: its history and its place in the development of print culture in the Arab Middle East* (Ph.D.) (University of Durham, 1988).

² N. RODÉN, "Fjellstedt, Peter," in E. GRILL, ed., *Svenskt Biografiskt Lexikon* (Stockholm, 1966) 16: 85-87; Church Missionary Society, *Centenary Volume, 1799-1899*, London 1902, p. 622, #169.

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medical reasons, but after a few months' recuperation he went to Turkey, where he joined the CMS station at İzmir.³

In İzmir Fjellstedt set about learning Turkish from Yusuf Efendi, who had already been employed for the same purpose by Jetter.⁴ He believed that there were opportunities for educational work among the Turks of western Anatolia, but reached the conclusion that "before all, it is necessary to prepare school books, without which nothing can be done."⁵ Yusuf, as already mentioned, had previously prepared a basic spelling- and reading-book and sent it to Malta to be printed, but, according to Fjellstedt, "the typographical errors are very numerous, because there was no corrector there who understands the Turkish."⁶ Nevertheless, he remained convinced that "our chief immediate object must naturally be [...] preparing school-books on the elements of the various branches of education, and this is what we at present [September 1836] endeavour to do."⁷ He accordingly set about translating some basic English "catechisms" of moral and social duties, and of ancient history, into Turkish.⁸

Difficulties with Yusuf, however, held up the work for a time⁹, and Fjellstedt spent part of 1837 travelling to Trieste and in Anatolia with Jetter.¹⁰ At the beginning of 1838, however, he returned to the project, and formulated a new plan for Turkish school-books, beginning with Yusuf on a "General History adapted for the use of Turkish schools" (never published); he ventured the opinion at this time that, provided satisfactory arrangements could be made for proof correction, the use of the Malta press would obviate the need to establish one in Turkey itself, which would be a difficult and dangerous undertaking.¹¹ But by May of that year he had come to the conclusion that school-books would not after all be acceptable to the Turks, and that the preparation of them should be abandoned in favour of religious books for adults.¹² Nevertheless, his own translation of a catechism of sciences (items 4 and 5 below) was printed at Malta in the following year,¹³ the proofs having been corrected by Fāris al-Shidyāq in Malta and Yusuf Efendi in İzmir.¹⁴

³ E. STOCK, *The history of the Church Missionary Society* (London, 1899) I: 350; N. RODÉN, *art. cit.*: 85-87.

⁴ CMS Archives: CM/025/3, Fjellstedt to Coates, 15.4.1836.

⁵ CM/025/5, Fjellstedt to Coates, 22.6.1836.

⁶ CM/025/6, Fjellstedt to Coates, 1.9.1836.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ CM/025/10, Fjellstedt to Jowett, 8.12.1836.

⁹ See further below.

¹⁰ CM/037/134, Journal of J.A. Jetter, Oct. 1837.

¹¹ CM/025/13, Fjellstedt to Secs., 4.1.1838.

¹² CM/025/16, Fjellstedt to Secs., 26.5.1838.

¹³ CM/04/26, List of publications, May 1842. Cf. H. LINNSTRÖM, *Svenskt boklexikon: åren 1830-1865, förra delen*, (Stockholm, 1883): 350, where the date is wrongly given as 1837; M. SEYFETTİN, ÖZEĞE, *Eski harflerle basılmış Türkçe eserler kataloğu* (Istanbul 1971-1982): #12677.

¹⁴ CM/O65/60, Schlienz to Secs., 26.12.1838.

But the remaining two Turkish books of Fjellstedt were of a religious nature: items 6 and 8 in the list below.¹⁵ Both were ready for printing in 1839, and Fjellstedt decided to go to Malta himself to see them through the press, “as the printing goes on a great deal too slowly in the way hitherto tried, by sending the proof-sheets backwards and forwards with the steamers, making only 2 or 3 sheets a month.”¹⁶ He arrived there with Yusuf Efendi in September 1839,¹⁷ and soon became confirmed in his view that “it would be utterly impossible to print anything of consequence in the Turkish even tolerably correct without being present where the press is.”¹⁸ He went to some trouble to standardise the orthography of Yusuf’s manuscript copy for the three texts before giving them to the compositor.¹⁹ The books were “nearly finished” by December, the remaining proofs “being corrected by a Turk, who happened to live there for a time and who assisted us much in copying and correcting even before we left.”²⁰ But lack of types prevented Fjellstedt from proceeding any further with Turkish printing, so he left Malta and returned to İzmir.²¹

In July 1840 Fjellstedt was granted furlough by the CMS, and he spent the next two years in Germany and Switzerland, working on a revision of the Turkish version of the Bible²² and a translation of the Church of England *Book of Common Prayer*.²³ Then he returned to his native Sweden, where he passed most of the rest of his life in evangelical and educational work. He died in Uppsala in 1881,²⁴ leaving his important collection of books in Arabic, Turkish and other languages, including many of the Malta imprints, to the library of the University of Tübingen, where they still are.

Some further consideration must now be given to the role of Yusuf Efendi. In 1836, after Fjellstedt first arrived in İzmir, he expressed his regret “that Juseph Effendi, the excellent Turkish Master, who was here, is gone to Malta.” He went on to describe him as “a learned and very

¹⁵ H. LINNSTRÖM, *op. cit.*: 350 (again wrongly dated 1837); Fehmi Edhem KARATAY, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi Türkçe basmalar alfabe kataloğu: memleketimizde ilk Türk matbaasının kuruluşundan yeni harflerin kabulüne kadar (1729-1928)* (İstanbul, 1956): 26; M. ÖZEĞE, *op. cit.*: #10946, where the place of publication is wrongly given as Beirut.

¹⁶ CM/025/18, Fjellstedt to Coates, 25.7.1839.

¹⁷ CM/025/19, Fjellstedt to Coates, 5.9.1839.

¹⁸ CM/025/20, Fjellstedt to Coates, 16.10.1839.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ CM/025/21, Fjellstedt to Coates, 9.1.1840. The Turk’s name was apparently Halil Efendi. CM/04/25, Expenses, 1840.

²¹ *Ibid.*; CM/018/55, Brenner to Coates, 29.12.1839.

²² R. KEEN, *A catalogue of the papers of the missions of the Africa (Group 3) Committee; 6: Mediterranean and Palestine missions 1811-1934* (London, 1981): 32; N. RODÉN, *art. cit.*: 87.

²³ Published in Leipzig in 1842 under the title *Kitab-ı Dua* کتاب دعاء. H. LINNSTRÖM, *op. cit.*: 350.

²⁴ N. RODÉN, *art. cit.*: 89.

superior man” although “not yet a Christian,” and “invaluable to us here,” being “very much attached to Mr Jetter.”²⁵ Of his background we know nothing, not even his full name, but he was evidently recruited by Jetter in İzmir, to teach him Turkish, some time in the early 1830s. Yusuf did indeed go to Malta in 1836, where he still was in July of that year,²⁶ presumably in connection with the printing of item 3 on the list below, and with plans for future Turkish printing.

By February 1837 he was back in İzmir, but had left the mission after quarrelling with Jetter and Fjellstedt. The latter complained not only about his refusal to embrace Christianity, but also about his literary propensities, “it being impossible to make him deviate from the mixed bombastic stile [*sic*], even in simple compositions intended for children.”²⁷ At the beginning of the following year, however, Fjellstedt re-employed him, despite new difficulties arising from his living at a long distance from the mission premises, and began work with him on a “General History adapted for the use of Turkish schools” (never published). He considered that Yusuf was at this time, although outwardly still a Muslim, inclined towards Protestant Christianity, even if this was partly because he wanted to marry an Armenian woman in a Protestant church.²⁸ By March he had in fact married, professed Protestantism, and was residing in the mission.²⁹ He continued for the next year to work with Fjellstedt on Turkish texts for printing.³⁰ In May 1838 the latter suggested that Yusuf should go to Malta and be employed on translating and printing “some useful works [...] in English. This could very easily be done because Yousuf E. knows now English.”³¹

But Fjellstedt’s suggestion was not at that time acted upon, and Yusuf was still in İzmir in July 1839, having, according to Fjellstedt, “been spoilt again [...] and I fear he will be difficult to manage.”³² The latter determined to take him to Malta forthwith, “that we may go on with our work.”³³ They accordingly set out, and arrived in Malta at the beginning of September.³⁴ There Yusuf set to work in the printing office and was said by Fjellstedt to be “going on pretty satisfactorily,” although the latter complained about the difficulties in type-setting and proof-reading caused by the “vagueness” of Yusuf’s Turkish orthography; but he took more care after Fjellstedt insisted on it.³⁵

²⁵ CM/025/3, Fjellstedt to Coates, 15.4.1836.

²⁶ CM/L2/433, Coates to Jetter and Fjellstedt, 14.7.1836.

²⁷ CM/025/11, Fjellstedt to Coates, 24.2.1837.

²⁸ CM/025/13, Fjellstedt to Secs., 4.1.1838.

²⁹ CM/025/14, Fjellstedt to Coates, 15.3.1838.

³⁰ CM/025/17, Fjellstedt to Coates, 7.1.1839.

³¹ CM/025/16, Fjellstedt to Secs., 26.5.1838.

³² CM/025/18, Fjellstedt to Coates, 25.7.1839.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ CM/025/19, Fjellstedt to Coates, 5.9.1839.

³⁵ CM/025/20, Fjellstedt to Coates, 16.10.1839.

Lack of types prevented any further progress with Turkish printing after three works had been seen through the press. Yusuf and Fjellstedt therefore left Malta and returned to İzmir at the end of 1839.³⁶ Of Yusuf's subsequent life and career nothing is known.

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All of the Turkish books printed at Malta by the CMS seem to have been intended for Muslims (unlike most of the Arabic books, which were primarily for Arabophone Christians). This is implicit in the very use of the Ottoman-Arabic script, since Turcophone Christians generally used other scripts (mainly Greek or Armenian). In fact another contemporary missionary press, that of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) did publish some Turkish books in Malta using Armenian types,³⁷ before this activity was transferred to İzmir in 1834.

The CMS Turkish books were all aimed at school-children and young students. Three of them (items 1, 3 and 7) are primers and reading-books for beginners, and are probably the first ever printed in Turkish: educational books printed in Turkey itself hitherto had all been for more advanced students. Presentation of the alphabet is followed by words, phrases, sentences and then short fables to provide elementary reading material. Three of the other books (items 2, 4 and 5) are elementary text-books on general knowledge and natural history; two of them (items 2 and 5) are illustrated with lithographed plates. Item 4 and 5 are part of a projected 4-volume work, the rest of which was never published.³⁸ The remaining two items (6 and 8) are on Christian ethics and theology, optimistically intended to influence young Muslims in favour of evangelical Christianity.

The archives relating to the press reveal that altogether 8,122 copies of the Turkish books were sent out from Malta.³⁹ As already mentioned the CMS had a mission station at Buca, near İzmir, where a book-depot was maintained. From there, in the second half of the 1830's, the two resident missionaries, Jetter and Fjellstedt, made excursions into neighbouring areas, taking supplies of the Malta books with them. In November 1836, for instance, Jetter visited Magnesia (Manisa) and "presented a copy of each of the Turkish books [...] to the Mutselim and Mullah. They were both pleased; and the Mullah said that they were well executed." He also gave "a few copies to a Turkish schoolmaster."⁴⁰ In 1838 Fjellstedt

³⁶ CM/025/21, Fjellstedt to Coates, 9.1.1840.

³⁷ W.E. STRONG, *The story of the American Board* (Boston (USA), 1910): 85.

³⁸ CM/04/26, List of Publications, May 1842.

³⁹ CM/04/23; CM/018/34; CM/04/24-25; CM/067/29. Some figures are also given in *Missionary Register* (1835): 196; (1836): 174; (1837): 249-250; (1840): 121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (1837): 186.

gave Turkish school-books to a doctor in Pergamos (Bergama)—for his wife, presumably a beginner in reading⁴¹—and to a schoolmaster and his pupils near Ephesus (Efes).⁴² In 1839 he left a supply to be distributed in the island of Kos, using the local British consul (a Greek) as an agent.⁴³

By 1841 the CMS Committee noted with satisfaction that the Turkish books “have already awakened much wonder and inquiry among the Turks.”⁴⁴ In 1842 Theophilus Wolters, who had replaced Fjellstedt, issued 1,112 Turkish books from the depot: some of these were supplied to the book trade, both locally and in Istanbul. A Greek bookseller in the capital had sold 171 by March 1843, and another 100 had been disposed of by the American missionaries there: the CMS received 698 *kuruş* for these sales.⁴⁵ A repeat order of 100 of each title was received from the Greek dealer, but only a much smaller number could be supplied. Wolters pointed out, as an “encouraging fact,” that this indicated a significant demand from individual Turks.⁴⁶

Later in 1843 Wolters received the whole of the remaining stock of 3,096 Turkish books from Malta,⁴⁷ and he continued to distribute them for the rest of the decade. The same year he disposed of a number in Salonica and elsewhere in Macedonia, as well as in Anatolia.⁴⁸ In 1844 he sent a supply to a Muslim school near İzmir⁴⁹ and also left some with a local agent for distribution in Philadelphia (Alaşehir). In a nearby village, he gave “a few Turkish books” to the secretary (*kâtip*) of the local Aga, who described them as “wonderful things” (*acablı şeyler*).⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the sales in Istanbul continued, although difficulties at the customs-house impeded the delivery of fresh supplies there.⁵¹

The following year Wolters reported that “the circulation of Turkish books, published by the Society, continues; but not with the same rapidity as two years ago. Occasionally copies are sold here [İzmir], and at Constantinople.” The sales, it seems, diminished greatly when the reading-book went out of print.⁵² There was little to report in the ensuing years, except that in 1847 some Turkish tracts⁵³ were given to, and read by, two Turks, one of them an Imam, in İzmir.⁵⁴

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (1839): 296.

⁴² *Ibid.*: 374.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 376.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (1841): 333.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (1843): 293-294.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁴⁷ CM/067/29, Weiss to Coates, 28.5.1844.

⁴⁸ *Missionary Register* (1844): 309.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (1845): 269.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 271.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 274.

⁵² *Missionary Register* (1846): 200.

⁵³ Presumably items 6 and 8 below.

⁵⁴ *Missionary Register* (1848): 266.

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This necessarily brief survey is intended to stimulate Turcologists into paying some attention to a subject hitherto almost entirely neglected. The texts of these books are doubtless quite unimportant in terms of the history of Turkish literature or science. Nevertheless they may perhaps have some significance, inasmuch as they are apparently the earliest children's text-books to be printed in Turkish and used by beginners in Turkish schools and homes. They should not, therefore, be completely disregarded by historians of Turkish education and nineteenth-century Ottoman modernisation.

G.R.

TURKISH BOOKS PRINTED IN MALTA 1834-1839

1834

1. *Okumak kitabıdır*

او قومق كتابي در

24 p. 16mo. [Reading book, conversational phrases, fables, sentences. Reprinted at the Jesuit Press in Beirut, 1858. Copies in British Library, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen (2).]

2. *Tekvin ül-mahlûkât*

تكوين المخلوقات

48 p. 4to. or 8o. ["Natural history, with lithogr. prints"—CM/024/26. Not seen. J.T. ZENKER, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, I: #1696.]

1836

3. *Cemi-i ulûma ziver olan fenn-i kitabetin medhal-i evveli ya'ni lisan-i letafet-resan-i Türkinin elifbesi*

جميع علومه زيور اولان فن كتابتك مدخل اولي يعنى لسان لطافتيسان توركين الفبہسى

34 p. [2nd ed. of item 1. Copy in British Library. J.T. ZENKER, *op. cit.*, I: #317; M. ÖZEGE, *op. cit.*: #2873.]

1839

4. *Medhal-ı ulûm. Derece-i sani*

مدخل علوم درجهٔ ثانی

70 p. [Probably translated from one of William Pinnock's educational catechisms. Only parts 2 and 4 (see next item) published. Copies in British Library and Dār al-Kutub, Cairo.]

5. *Medhal-i ulûm ve mebde-i fûnun ya'ni zarafetli mektep çocuklarının kıraat eylemeleri için ulûm-u mütenevvi'enin müfiden ve muhtasaran beyanında cild-i rabi*

مدخل علوم و مبداء فنون یعنی ظرافتلو مکتب چوجقلرینک قراءت ایلملری ایچون علوم متنوعه‌نک مفیداً و مختصراً بیانده جلد رابع

124 p. 9 lithogr. places. [Copies in Bodleian Library, Oxford and Dār al-Kutub, Cairo. J.T. ZENKER, *op. cit.*, I: #1273; M. ÖZEGE, *op. cit.*: #12677.]

6. *Kitab-ı ilm-i edeb ve merasim-i ülfet ve ünsiyet*

کتاب علم ادب و مراسم الفت و انسیت

200 p. 12mo. [“On manners & morals”—CM/04/26. Not seen. Copy in İstanbul Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi (F. KARATAY, *op. cit.*, 26). M. ÖZEGE, *op. cit.*: #10946.]

7. [“Turkish spellingbook”]

45 p. 12mo. [3rd ed. of items 1 and 3—CM/04/26. Not seen; Turkish title not known.]

8. *Ulûm-u hakayık*

علوم حقائق

78 p. 12mo. [“On the attributes of God”—CM/04/26. Copies in Atatürk Kitaplığı, İstanbul and Dār al-Kutub, Cairo.]

Geoffrey ROPER, *Turkish printing and publishing in Malta in the 1830s*

Eight Ottoman Turkish educational books were printed at the English missionary press in Malta, 1834-39, using the type-founts maintained there for Arabic printing. The texts were prepared at the mission station in Buca, near Izmir, by Swedish missionaries and a Turkish assistant. The printed books were subsequently distributed in western Anatolia, Istanbul and Macedonia, and were probably the first printed Turkish primers to be used by Muslim Turks.

Geoffrey ROPER, *Imprimerie et publications turques à Malte dans les années 1830*

Huit ouvrages scolaires turcs de la période ottomane sortirent des presses de la Mission britannique à Malte (1834-1839), où ils avaient été composés avec des polices d'imprimerie destinées aux textes en langue arabe. Les textes mêmes de ces livres turcs avaient été préparés au centre de la Mission situé à Buca, près d'Izmir, par des missionnaires suédois avec l'aide d'un assistant turc. Ces livres, une fois publiés, furent distribués en Anatolie occidentale, à Istanbul et en Macédoine. Ce sont probablement les premiers livres de lecture turcs imprimés dont firent usage les Turcs musulmans.