7. Jahrgang 2026 | Heft 1

Zeitschrift für Osmanistik, Türkei- und Nahostforschung

Journal of Ottoman, Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies

Herausgegeben von der Gesellschaft für Turkologie, Osmanistik und Türkeiforschung e. V.

Veruschka Wagner, Anna Kollatz: Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context
Elif Kiraz: Laughter and Morality: The First Caricatures of the 19th-Century Ottoman Humour Press in Istanbul
Juho Korhonen: Scoffing at Empires: Late Ottoman Empire in the Political Satirical Imagination of the Grand Duchy of Finland
Eberhard Dziobek: Caricatures as a Means of Communication in the Late Ottoman Context: Rifqī's Cairo in the 1920s, a Scene on the Tram
Katrin Köster: Caricatures in the Newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition'): Fighting for Social Justice in Lebanon, 1921–1936
Veruschka Wagner, Anna Kollatz: Satirical Visions of the Future? Egyptian and Ottoman Caricatures on 'Science Fiction' and Technology from the Beginning of the 20th Century

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

7. Jahrgang 2026 | Heft 1

Zeitschrift für Osmanistik, Türkei- und Nahostforschung

Journal of Ottoman, Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies

Herausgegeben von der Gesellschaft für Turkologie, Osmanistik und Türkeiforschung e. V.

Veruschka Wagner, Anna Kollatz: Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context
Elif Kiraz: Laughter and Morality: The First Caricatures of the 19th-Century Ottoman Humour Press in Istanbul
Juho Korhonen: Scoffing at Empires: Late Ottoman Empire in the Political Satirical Imagination of the Grand Duchy of Finland
Eberhard Dziobek: Caricatures as a Means of Communication in the Late Ottoman Context: Rifqī's Cairo in the 1920s, a Scene on the Tram
Katrin Köster: Caricatures in the Newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition'): Fighting for Social Justice in Lebanon, 1921–1936
Veruschka Wagner, Anna Kollatz: Satirical Visions of the Future? Egyptian and Ottoman Caricatures on 'Science Fiction' and Technology from the Beginning of the 20th Century

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

DİYÂR

Zeitschrift für Osmanistik, Türkei- und Nahostforschung
Journal of Ottoman, Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies

www.diyar.nomos.de

Editors: *Gesellschaft für Turkologie, Osmanistik und Türkeiforschung e.V. (GTOT) / Society for Turkology, Ottoman Studies and Turkish Studies e.V. (GTOT),* vertreten durch/represented by *Prof. Dr. Yavuz Köse,* Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Vienna, Austria | *Jun.-Prof. Dr. Alexander Balistreri,* Hamburg University, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Germany | *Jun.-Prof. Dr. Hülya Çelik,* Ruhr-University Bochum, Seminar für Orientalistik und Islamwissenschaft, Germany | *Ass.-Prof. Dr. Jeanine Elif Dağyeli,* Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Vienna, Austria | *Dr. Élise Massicard,* CNRS Paris, France | *Prof. Dr. Christoph K. Neumann,* Direktor Orient-Institut Istanbul, Turkey | *Prof. Dr. Julian Rentzsch,* Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Institut für Slavistik, Turkologie und zirkumbaltische Studien, Germany | *PD Dr. Gül Şen,* University of Bonn, Institut für Orient- und Asienwissenschaften, Germany

Editorial Office – Chief Editorial Staff: *Jeanine Elif Dağyeli,* Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Vienna, Austria | *Yavuz Köse (chief editor),* Institut für Orientalistik, Turkologie, University of Vienna, Austria | *Élise Massicard,* Directrice de recherche, CNRS Paris, France | *Julian Rentzsch,* Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Institut für Slavistik, Turkologie und zirkumbaltische Studien, Germany | *Christoph Werner,* University of Bamberg, Iranian Studies, Germany – **Editorship:** *Julia Fröhlich-Siegl,* Schellhammergasse 7, 1160 Wien, Austria, E-Mail: diyar@nomos-journals.de

Extended Editorial Board: *Fatih Altuğ,* Istanbul | *Marc Aymes,* Paris | *Philip Bockholt,* Münster | *Nathalie Clayer,* Paris | *Ferenc Csirkés,* Birmingham | *Burcu Doğramacı,* München | *Markus Dressler,* Leipzig | *Martin Greve,* Istanbul | *Onur İnal,* Wien | *Ralf Jäger*, Münster | *Michael Kemper,* Amsterdam | *Sooyong Kim,* Istanbul | *Tijana Krstić,* Wien | *Nazan Maksudyan,* Berlin | *Aslı Niyazioğlu,* Oxford | *Lea Nocera,* Neapel | *Kerem Öktem,* Venedig | *Alexandre Papas,* Paris | *Christine Philliou,* Berkeley | *Gisela Procházka-Eisl,* Wien | *Stefan Rohdewald,* Leipzig | *Ariane Sadjed,* Wien | *Marlene Schäfers,* Utrecht | *Jesko Schmoller,* Berlin | *Christoph Schroeder,* Potsdam | *Florian Schwarz,* Wien | *Henning Sievert,* Heidelberg | *Emmanuel Szurek,* Paris | *Melike Şahinol,* Istanbul | *Zeynep Uysal,* Istanbul | *Melike Üzüm,* Ankara | *Jenny B. White,* Stockholm | *Ali Yaycıoğlu,* Stanford | *İpek Yosmaoğlu,* Evanston

Manuscripts and Other Submissions: All submissions should be sent to the above-mentioned address. There is no liability for unsolicited manuscripts that are submitted. They can only be returned if return postage is enclosed. Acceptance for publication must be made in text form. With the acceptance for publication, the author transfers the simple, spatially and temporally unlimited right to reproduce and distribute in physical form, the right of public reproduction and enabling access, the right of inclusion in databases, the right of storage on electronic data carriers and the right of their distribution and reproduction as well as the right of other exploitation in electronic form for the duration of the statutory copyright to Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG. This also includes forms of use that are currently not yet known. This does not affect the author's mandatory right of secondary exploitation as laid down in Section 38 (4) UrhG (German Copyright Act) after 12 months have expired after publication. A possible Creative Commons license attached to the individual contribution, or the respective issue has priority in case of doubt. For copyright, see also the general notes at www.nomos.de/copyright. Unsolicited manuscripts – for which no liability is assumed – are considered a publication proposal on the publisher's terms. Only unpublished original work will be accepted. The authors declare that they agree to editing that does not distort the meaning.

Copyright and Publishing Rights: All articles published in this journal are protected by copyright. This also applies to the published court decisions and their guiding principles, insofar as they have been compiled or edited by the submitting person or the editorial staff. Copyright protection also applies with regard to databases and similar facilities. No part of this journal may be reproduced, disseminated or publicly reproduced or made available in any form, included in databases, stored on electronic data carriers or otherwise electronically reproduced, disseminated or exploited outside the narrow limits of copyright law or beyond the limits of any Creative Commons license applicable to this part without the written permission of the publisher or the authors. Articles identified by name do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the publisher/editors. The publisher observes the rules of the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels e.V. on the use of book reviews.

Advertisements: Verlag C.H.BECK, Anzeigenabteilung, Dr. Jiri Pawelka, Wilhelmstr. 9, D-80801 München; Media-Sales: Phone: +49-89-38189-612, E-Mail: mediaberatung@beck.de

Publisher and Overall Responsibility for Production: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, Waldseestr. 3–5, D-76530 Baden-Baden, Phone: +49-7221-2104-0, Fax: +49-7221-2104-27, www.nomos.de, Geschäftsführer/CEO: Thomas Gottlöber, HRA 200026, Mannheim, Sparkasse Baden-Baden Gaggenau, IBAN DE05662500300005002266 (BIC SOLADES1BAD)

Frequency of Publication: Semi-annually

Customer Service: Phone: +49-7221-2104-280, E-Mail: service@nomos.de

ISSN 2625-9842

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Diyâr

Jahrgang 7 · Heft 1 · 2026

Inhaltsübersicht / Contents

Einleitung / Introduction

Veruschka Wagner, Anna Kollatz
Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context 5

Aufsätze / Articles

Elif Kiraz
Laughter and Morality: The First Caricatures of the 19th-Century
Ottoman Humour Press in Istanbul 11

Juho Korhonen
Scoffing at Empires: Late Ottoman Empire in the Political Satirical Imagination
of the Grand Duchy of Finland 51

Eberhard Dziobek
Caricatures as a Means of Communication in the Late Ottoman Context:
Rifqī's Cairo in the 1920s, a Scene on the Tram 77

Katrin Köster
Caricatures in the Newspaper al-Maʿraḍ ('The Exhibition'):
Fighting for Social Justice in Lebanon, 1921–1936 106

Veruschka Wagner, Anna Kollatz
Satirical Visions of the Future? Egyptian and Ottoman Caricatures on
'Science Fiction' and Technology from the Beginning of the 20th Century 139

Rezensionen / Book Reviews

Kristof D'hulster
Şen, Ahmet Tunç. 2025. *Forgotten Experts: Astrologers, Science,
and Authority in the Ottoman Empire, 1450–1600* 165

Julia Fröhlich-Siegl
Daniels, Jacob. 2025. *The Jews of Edirne. The End of Ottoman Europe
and the Arrival of Borders* 170

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Nilab Saeedi
Czygan, Christine and Aynur, Hatice (eds.). 2025. *Challenging Conventions: Love, Lovers, and Beloveds in Early Modern Ottoman Poetry* 173

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Veruschka Wagner
University of Bonn, Germany
wagnerveruschka@gmail.com

Anna Kollatz
University of Heidelberg, Germany
anna.kollatz@ori.uni-heidelberg.de

Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context

1. Caricatures as a Historical Source

In the 'visual age' ('Visuelles Zeitalter'),[1] in which we currently find ourselves, images as sources ('Bildquellen') are more important than ever before. These images include various forms of graphic representations, from sketches to portraits to paintings, from photography to film and video. Just as memes and other visual materials are of great importance for today's producers and recipients to express, share, and form their opinions, caricatures were and still are a medium for positioning oneself on social, cultural, and political issues and helping to shape them. The caricature does not (only) want to inform or illustrate, it wants to enlighten, uncover, denounce, expose, stimulate reflection, and sometimes also call to action. By assessing a certain–usually current–situation from an individual point of view, it contains a factual and value judgment.[2] Caricatures are therefore an ideal source for researchers from various disciplines to gain insights into events, views, and ideologies that lie in the past. In academia, caricatures are increasingly being taken seriously as an independent source with their significance and impact as an important form of communication.[3]

However, caricatures are not isolated sources that focus on certain topics without any context, but rather they may refer to each other and to caricatures published in other regions and language areas, even distant ones. Caricatures often react to topics that are also discussed in daily newspapers and offer their own comments or criticism. Furthermore, they may also have a connection to other cultural and social areas such as literature, theatre, and art.[4] However, these can only be understood if one is aware of the developments in time and space. It is therefore not enough to look at the caricatures in isolation. In order to understand them and analyse the statements they embody or address or to use them as sources for social-historical study, they must be examined in their specific and broader contexts. Depending on their complexity and interconnectedness, some of

1 Paul 2016.
2 See Barth and Schnakenberg 2021.
3 Most recently published in the context of the special issue: Yolaçan 2025.
4 Two early examples are Teodor Kasap for the Ottoman and Yaʿqūb Ṣanūʿ for the Egyptian case. These caricaturists are known equally for publishing satirical journals and for translating and authoring plays, and both of them spent years of exile in Paris after being targeted for their satirical critique of politics. See, e.g., Anna Kollatz and Veruschka Wagner (eds.) 2025; see on Ṣanūʿ Ettmüller 2012. On the interplay of nightlife, cabaret, and (satirical) journalism in Cairo, see Cormack 2021.

Diyâr, 7. Jg., 1/2026, S. 5–10, DOI: 10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1-5

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

the caricatures can be 'read' and understood in an ad hoc fashion, while others can only be deciphered after examining the circumstances and micro-events close to their publication date, as they were addressed to the public of the time and were linked to contemporary issues, often even daily regional news. If caricatures are to be examined as historical sources, it is therefore essential to undertake a thorough contextual analysis on the basis of primary and secondary sources, as this allows for the decoding of the statements and meanings condensed within them.

2. Late- and Post-Ottoman Context

The Arabic-, Turkish-, and Ottoman-speaking world may serve as an example here, with Istanbul as the capital of the Ottoman Empire and Cairo as the capital of Egypt, which had been relatively independent of Ottoman rule since the reign of Muḥammad ʿAlī Pasha (r. 1805–1849), being its most important and globally best-connected metropolises at the time. Both capitals would become centres of (satirical) journalism and cartooning from the last third of the 19th century onwards. Colonial and imperialist interests and conflicts between 'European' superpowers and the Ottoman Empire characterised the eastern Mediterranean in particular. The emic reform endeavours that began in the second half of the 19th century, which led to the Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire and encouraged members of the upper classes in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Levant and Egypt in particular to seek to catch up with Europe, such as in the areas of education and 'technical progress,' also set the tone for society, culture, and, not least, politics in the entire region. This resulted, for example, in establishing special schools, especially for future civil servants, and in sending students to Europe.

Ultimately, the people in the region were confronted with a variety of influences that were often–from a Eurocentric historical perspective, but also from emic voices of the time–labelled as 'Western,' but also as 'modern' or 'progressive.' From the very beginning, however, this contact should be understood as an exchange that was actively pursued by at least certain sections of the population and thus quickly translated the influences brought to the region from outside into something 'of its own.' These processes began in the 1850s–1870s and, at least in this region, extended well into the 1930s; we will refer to this period with the term 'the long 19th century.' However, it would fall far short of the mark to view the interdependencies and interactions of this period purely as a 'transformation of the world' triggered solely by Europe; rather, we should assume globally networked, multi-layered processes of exchange and translation, which did not end with the close of the 19th century, but can also be observed, for instance, in Egyptian and Ottoman caricatures of the 1920s.

Unfortunately, the sometimes Eurocentric perspective of academia, but of course also the obvious language barrier for fields such as history (whether local or global) and political science, continues to obscure the view of these emic processes all too often. This also holds true for other regions of the world, such as China, Northern Europe, and the Balkans. Cartoons and caricatures published in regions requiring specialised language knowledge are still not sufficiently recognised in the international academic debate. The

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

same naturally also applies to a greater extent to public perception outside the region. But even though some time has passed since the appearance of Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities, even though researchers such as Sebastian Conrad have problematised and deconstructed these Eurocentric positions from a global historical perspective, there is still much to be done before we even come close to a balanced perspective on the phenomena mentioned, which must first and foremost include a complete reappraisal of emic positionings.

Here we come to another desideratum. Many aspects of the larger developments of the 'long 19th century' have already been extensively researched; however, this is less true for the contemporary satirical engagement with the aforementioned influences in the Middle East, as well as in other regions mentioned above. Although numerous interesting individual studies are available, these have so far mostly remained relegated to a small niche and have not been included in broader research discourses. Likewise, research in emic languages, such as Arabic or Turkish, often goes unconsidered in international academic discourses.

The Arabic, Turkish, and Ottoman worlds in particular offer a veritable treasure trove of caricatures, which have been published in different forms of print media from the mid-19th century to the present day, including newspapers, (satire) journals, or postcards. However, although a heightened interest in the national history of caricature can be observed both in the Turkish Republic and Egypt[5] and in spite of the fact that research on eminent caricaturists has been conducted in both countries, visual satire has not yet been established as a recognised field of interest in Middle East studies on an international level. This is all the more astonishing considering that the history of satirical journals in the late and post-Ottoman Empire and Egypt went through significant ups and downs. Closely linked to political events and the mechanisms of censorship, there were profound fluctuations in the volume and frequency of satirical publications across languages and regions that constitute an indispensable part of the political and social history of the respective times and places. These fluctuations may serve as a starting point for modern research to tap into alternative histories and to follow strands of action or discourse that ceased to exist at a certain point. Reading caricatures as sources could thus enable research that takes into account the multiple voices active at a certain point in time and that thereby

5 In Egypt, a number of associations and private initiatives are engaged in both fostering contemporary caricature culture and supporting caricaturists who, just like their ancestors of the turn of the century, are often subject to pressure and persecution. Among these associations, the *Al-Jāmiʿa al-Miṣriyya li-l-Kārīkātīr*/Egyptian Caricature Association hosted the 8th International Caricature Gathering in Egypt in 2024. The Fayoum Art Centre, founded in 2006 on a private initiative in the village of Tunis, Fayoum, near Cairo, stands out for running the first museum dedicated to caricature in Egypt and for organising an annual international competition for caricatures and satirical portraits (https://fayoumartcenter.com). Turkey is home to the Kadıköy Municipality Cartoon House (Karikatür Evi), which regularly offers drawing courses and hosts exhibitions, as well as the Cartoon and Satire Museum (Karikatür ve Mizah Müzesi), which provides insights into the history of cartoons in Turkey and is dedicated to important cartoonists. There is also the Association for Cartoonist (Karikatürcüler Derneği). Furthermore, the Turhan Selçuk Culture House (Turhan Selçuk Kültür Evi) recently opened in 2025.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

works against the historian's urge to construct a coherent narrative 'from beginning to end.' The polyphony of contemporary discourses can even be observed despite censorship efforts, and the latter may at times result in a certain polyphony within the same publication. Some journals were banned within just a few months of their first publication and their editors and authors were imprisoned. Teodor Kasap, for example, was sent to prison for a caricature on the subject of censorship.[6] Some of the magazines were renamed in order to circumvent the bans, while others were published abroad. Jacob Sanua's Egyptian journal *Abū Naḍḍāra Zarqā'*, for example, was printed first in Cairo, but later in Paris under a multitude of names, all playing with the elements of the editor's 'blue glasses,' sometimes adding 'Egyptian' to the name. Other editors and caricaturists, such as Ahmet Rifki, changed their location and continued their work and activity.[7]

Caricatures and their illustrators were shaped by the dynamics and mobility movements of their time. They were engaged in an exchange with European caricaturists and publishers, which influenced the style, form, and themes of their caricatures. On the European side, a vivid interest in the region is also visible in the time, and caricaturists took the region and its people for a topic in many caricatures, in a way that extended beyond addressing colonial political interests.[8]

3. Content and Aim of this Issue

This special issue of *Diyâr* is the result of a workshop that took place at the Karikatür Evi (Caricature House) in Istanbul in March 2024. The event that was titled 'Caricatures as a Sphere of Communication in the Late- and Post-Ottoman Context' was organised by Veruschka Wagner (University of Bonn/Bilgi University Istanbul) and Anna Kollatz (University of Heidelberg). The historical time frame of the workshop was the late- and post-Ottoman period. This time is determined by upheavals and change and was influenced by global events to an extent almost unparalleled by any other. As research on this period (up to and after the founding of the Turkish Republic) is largely considered to be fragmented, the aim of our research is to counteract this by focusing on this interwar period and its aftermath up to the 1930s–which was moreover affected by colonial interests–as a coherent period of investigation. Furthermore, we would like to illuminate the late- and post-Ottoman context from different perspectives by examining caricatures from journals from different regions that were both part of this context and outside of it.[9] We therefore present caricatures from Ottoman (Turkish and Armenian) and Arabic sources, but also from Finnish satirical journals.

We believe that caricatures published in media of different languages and from different parts of the region are a suitable and valuable source for gaining insights into different

6 Bostancı 1852–1919, 68.
7 See the article by Eberhard Dziobek in this volume.
8 See the articles by Juho Korhonen in this volume.
9 We are aware that we are only covering a portion of the regions and languages that belonged to the Ottoman Empire or its successor states. Transregional caricature research is still in its infancy and must be built up bit by bit.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

aspects of daily life and public sphere. These caricatures will provide us with information about different perceptions and meanings of discourses on political, historical, and social issues. Caricatures from 'outside' are particularly suitable for addressing the topic of ethnic, cultural, or national stereotypes and dealing with the 'other,' which is why we are also including them in this special issue.

To examine caricatures from the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman contexts from different angles, both as outcomes and as drivers of social discourses, this special issue contains five contributions. The individual contributions, written by people from different disciplines and at different stages of their careers, cover a period beginning in the 1850s, moving through the first decade of the 20th century, and ending in the 1920s and 1930s. In chronological order, Elif Kiraz focuses on caricatures from the first humour periodical published in the Ottoman Empire, *Zuarchakhos,* and in *Tiyatro* (1874) and *Latife* (1874). Kiraz deals with questions on morals in the context of modernisation. Juho Korhonen's contribution presents an analysis of caricatures from the Grand Duchy of Finland in the period 1900 to 1910, depicting another perspective on the Ottomans from the last phase of the Ottoman Empire. Eberhard Dziobek and Katrin Köster both contribute from an Arabic perspective. Eberhard Dziobek will provide insights into the Egyptian *al-Fukāha* from the 1920s and its main caricaturist Ali Rifqi, who dealt with issues such as gender and technology in his drawings. Katrin Köster uses the example of the Lebanese *al-Maʿraḍ* newspaper to show the role of classic media, in particular newspapers and magazines, in the everyday culture of post-Ottoman regions, and the importance and place of editors in the political sphere. Anna Kollatz and Veruschka Wagner make a joint contribution on visions of the future in Egyptian and Ottoman caricatures. They focus on a series of caricatures in the Egyptian magazine *al-Fukāha* and various individual presentations in Ottoman satirical journals of the 1920s.

The contributions bring together not only sources in different languages but also different disciplines: Sociology, Philosophy, Ottoman Studies, Translation Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and Arabic and Islamic Studies. This special issue therefore offers a transdisciplinary and transcultural approach that emphasises the importance of caricatures, which are often perceived as less important than other written sources and are therefore still neglected in research.

The individual contributions either focus on specific publications (Korhonen, Kiraz), on a single newspaper/editor (Köster), or even on just one caricature (Dziobek, at least in the analysis), or they concentrate on a specific topic and make use of several journals (Kollatz and Wagner). What is important is that the caricature as a source is brought into the focus of the investigation here. In this context, however, it is also essential to consider in which medium the caricature was published. It makes a difference whether it was published in satirical magazines or in the 'serious' press, as this has an effect on aspects such as thematic scope, target group, and function. Relevant questions in this context are: Are political controversies included? Is there censorship that restricts the subject matter? Are other topics used as substitutes, such as women as a vehicle for social and political discourse?[10]

10 Wagner (forthcoming).

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

The articles in this volume show that in interaction with censorship, as well as in response to the needs of the readership, caricaturistic publications range from sharp criticism, which may have landed publishers or artists in jail, to softened humorous illustrations that merely make fun of uncontroversial topics, such as the role of women. Visual satire as a communication tool seems to have been widely accepted both by authorities and the (independent) press. However, censorship (including self-censorship) would critically observe and sanction visual satire the moment it crossed political or moral boundaries. Thus, the genre found itself in a constant state of probing the possible range of criticism and adjustment to limits. This constant need to maintain a balance between the two poles of humorous illustration and caricature leads to an interplay of accepted, but innocent content and sharp criticism that risked punishment. It is in field of this tension that the characteristic ambiguity of the genre lies. The wide range of functions and topics that caricatures might address and react to is comprised, in the source languages, in one overarching term: *karikatür/karikatīr*. In this volume, we try to dissect these functions and characters, on the level of analytic terminology, using *visual satire* as an overarching term and specifying *humorous illustration* for the 'innocent' type of content and *caricature* for the critical sort.

In addition to the wide range of topics that are addressable when examining caricatures, this special issue also shows the different approaches that are possible when using caricatures as sources for examination. The contributions reveal transregional and interrelationships, whether thematic, stylistic, or linked to individuals. The caricaturist Rifqi, who was first active in Istanbul and later in Egypt, serves as a suitable example of this type of connection. Caricatures that have been directly adopted and provided with translations or their own inscriptions demonstrate very clear links.

Bibliography

Bostancı, Erol. 1852–1919. *Caricaturequie. Humour et satire dans l'Empire ottoman*. Tome 1.

Barth, Steffen and Schnakenberg, Ulrich. 2021. 'Die Karikatur im Geschichtsunterricht. Chancen und Herausforderungen'. *Geschichte lernen*. 34.204. 2–12.

Cormack, Raphael. 2021. *Midnight in Cairo. The Divas of Egypt's Roaring '20s*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Wagner, Veruschka (forthcoming). 'Bobbed Hair, Fashion, Gender Roles. Late Ottoman Caricatures of Istanbul Women'. In Kollatz, Anna and Wagner, Veruschka (eds.). *Cartoons and Caricatures in a Global Perspective. 1850–1950*. Heidelberg: HUPress.

Ettmüller, Eliane. 2012. 'The Construct of Egypt's National-Self in James Sanua's Early Satire and Caricature'. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag.

Kollatz, Anna and Wagner, Veruschka (eds.). 2025. *Erst lachen, dann denken!/Laugh first, think later! Karikaturen aus dem Nahen Osten, 1850–1940/Caricatures from the Near East.* Universitätsmuseum Heidelberg: Kataloge, Band 18. *1850–1940*. Heidelberg: heiBOOKS. https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1608.

Paul, Gerhard. 2016. *Das Visuelle Zeitalter. Punkt und Pixel*. Visual History. Bilder und Bildpraxen in der Geschichte 1. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.

Yolaçan, Serkan. 2025. 'A Seven-Headed Public: Empire and Satire in Revolutionary Caucasus'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 1–32.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

AUFSÄTZE / ARTICLES

Elif Kiraz

Independent researcher, Turkey
s1061719@ed-alumni.net

Laughter and Morality: The First Caricatures of the 19th-Century Ottoman Humour Press in Istanbul

Abstract

The oldest known caricatures of Ottoman humour press in Istanbul were published in *Zuarchakhos* 'Joker' (1856), an Armeno-Turkish humour gazette written in Turkish using Armenian script. It is also the oldest known humour gazette in Turkish. This gazette and its Armenian contemporary *Meghu* 'Bee' (1856) are the only known examples before the 1870s, when humour periodicals in Turkish using Ottoman Turkish script first appeared. The discourse of morality and normative caricatures featured in the Ottoman humour press in early 1870s. This phenomenon can be traced back to *Zuarchakhos* with many continuities. This article questions how subversive and satirical these first caricatures were, focusing on those featured in *Zuarchakhos* and two other gazettes in Ottoman Turkish language and script–*Latife* 'Joke' (1874) and *Tiyatro* 'Theatre' (1874)–all published by Ottoman Armenians. In doing so, this study explores what morality meant in this context, taking these caricatures as discursive formations. It could be suggested that morality was instrumentalised by the government to silence satire and political opposition and that humour gazettes in turn resorted to morality to push the boundaries of censorship. *Alafranga* was one popular topic shared by all three gazettes in question. At another level, this study seeks to contribute to the integration of the little-studied Armeno-Turkish humour press into Ottoman historiography.

Keywords: morality (*ahlak/edep*), humour (*mizah*), Ottoman, Armeno-Turkish, censorship, normative caricatures, social inequality.

1. Introduction

'If we close humour gazettes, can we restrain the hands of the illustrators (*ressam*s)? Let the impudent (*edepsiz*) be disciplined, but I am not of the opinion that banning humour would be a sound decision,' said one deputy during the lively debates of the Ottoman Parliament on 8 May 1877, when the second clause of the Article 8 of the new Printing Law–stipulating the prohibition of humour gazettes–was being voted upon. He was responding to allegations from the government's Director of the Press on the harmful effects of the pictures (*resim*s), that is, caricatures. Most other deputies opposed the ban, some basing their arguments on the morally instructive role of these gazettes, among other reasons.[1] During the same sitting of the parliament, Macid Bey, the Director of the Press, had argued that humour gazettes were unnecessary, of no good, and even harmful. To prove his point, he too, appealed to 'morality' by referring to some *resim*s he had seen in humour gazettes along with a French gazette. These *resim*s, he argued, were impudent (*edepsiz*) and acting

1 Us 1939, 216; 212–7.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

in a way contrary to public, household, and political morality. According to him, 'gazettes have two duties, that of defending laws (*muhafaza-i hukuk*) and that of instruction (*müreb-bilik*), where there is no need for buffoonery.' Macid Bey was apparently speaking on behalf of the government, as one opponent deputy criticised that comments made by Macid Bey were not his own, but those of a Director of the Press.[2] Ottoman Parliament was newly opened, about two months after the declaration of the First Constitution on 23 December 1876. These first parliamentary discussions over humour periodicals showed that the Ottoman government policy approach towards humour had not changed much, since the emergence of humour gazettes in Istanbul around the middle of the 19th century and those in the Ottoman Turkish language and script in 1870s. Instrumentalisation of morality for contesting interests and ideologies by Ottoman state officials, intellectuals, and authors alike had been an underlying feature of Ottoman political discourse since earlier centuries.[3] Moral ideology not only provided justifications for government policy but also shaped how they conceptualised humour in theory in the 19th century.

The humour press was to be gradually suspended as of 1877–1878, particularly in Ottoman Turkish language and script.[4] The next period continued abroad in the form of political satire.[5] The Revolution of 1908 brought in another period with relative freedom[6] and satirical gazettes with plenty of subversive caricatures containing political satire boomed in Istanbul within the climate of the Revolution.[7] Studies on Ottoman humour periodicals from the 19th to 20th centuries, however, usually generalise them all as 'satirical' without classifying them in terms of freedom of the press, the nature of the humour, and caricatures.[8] One exception is Brummett's work on the revolutionary press of 1908, in which her terminological choice was methodological. She deliberately employed the term 'satirical' because the lighter forms such as 'humorous anecdotes, witticism' (*latife*) or 'amusement' (*eğlence*) did not fit the political cartoons that she studied.[9] Yet, the nature of humour in earlier Ottoman humour press remains unclear. To address this problem, this article tries to answer the question of how satirical and subversive the earlier caricatures were by

2 Us 1939, 212–7.
3 See Abou-El-Haj 1988; Mardin 1974, 415; 425–42; Oğuz 2021.
4 Secondary sources cite a few Armenian humour periodicals from the late 19th century despite this period of suspension, such as Hagop Baronyan's *Khigar* 'Wise' (1884), but without illustrations. See Bardakjian 1979, 18–9; Stepanyan 2005, 590. For censorship during the Hamidian period, see Demirel 2007.
5 For the Ottoman satirical press in exile from 1878 to 1908 in London and Geneva, see Çeviker 1986, 269–98.
6 Yet, a new censorship would be imposed under the CUP regime, which one caricature in *Kalem* complained about in February 1909. See Brummett 2018, 82–6; Yosmaoğlu 2003, 15–49. Yosmaoğlu notes that censorship would gradually transform 'into an institutionalized form of social and political control' from the 19th to 20th centuries, and that not only the Hamidian period, but also the CUP regime, was violent against political opposition.
7 See Brummett 2000; Heinzelmann 1999, 2004.
8 For example, Elmas 2013; Georgeon 1998; Strauss 2001.
9 Brummett 2000, 17–8. Also, for a study focusing on the nature and strength of satire in a satirical magazine from modern Turkey, see Marcella 2021, and 2022.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

focusing on some of the oldest known examples that appeared in the Ottoman humour gazettes *Zuarchakhos / Zuarchakhōs*[10] (*Զուարճախօս*) 'Joker'[11] (1856) *Tiyatro* 'Theatre' (1874), and *Latife* 'Joke' (1874). *Zuarchakhos* was started in 1856 and is known to have published only three issues.[12] Both *Tiyatro* and *Latife* were published from 1874 to 1877. This study is not only based on the caricatures but also on the textual content of the accessible issues no. 1 and 3 of *Zuarchakhos* from 1856; those of the issues no. 1–87 of *Tiyatro* (1874–1875) and of issues no. 1–39 (1874–1875) and no. 1–43 (1875) of *Latife*.

The oldest known caricatures of the Ottoman humour press in Istanbul appeared on 25 October 1856 in the first issue of *Zuarchakhos*, which, whilst largely written in Turkish in Armenian script, had a small section in Armenian. This gazette and its Armenian contemporary *Meghu* 'Bee' (*մեղու*) from 1856, are the only known examples before the 1870s, when humour periodicals in Ottoman Turkish script first appeared in Istanbul. As two cases of the latter are *Latife* and *Tiyatro*, both published in Ottoman Turkish language and script. All three gazettes consisted of four pages and were quite similarly structured, starting with an editorial introduction (*mukaddime*) followed by conversational and witty short narratives, humorous news items, comic anecdotes, and a commercial advertisement on the last page. They usually published one caricature, while *Zuarchakhos* contained four per issue. Using a discourse analysis as a methodological approach, this study takes these caricatures as discursive formations. A discourse of morality was featured in the Ottoman humour press in the early 1870s. Along with the integration of Istanbul into the world capitalist system and the modernisation reforms of the 19th century, the social and economic transformations in the background featured prominently on the agenda. Yet the discourse in these periodicals was not generally that of westernisation or modernisation but one of morality. Shaped by censorship and government patronage, mainly justified by 'morality,' the caricatures in *Latife* and *Tiyatro* in the first years of 1874–1875 were humoristic and normative rather than satirical and subversive. This pattern can be traced back to *Zuarchakhos* with many continuities. This article suggests that morality was instrumentalised by the government to suppress satire and political opposition and that humour gazettes in turn resorted to morality to push the boundaries of censorship.

This study traces the emergence of the Ottoman humour press, examines how morality was used in censorship, and analyses caricatures as sites of indirect political subversion. The topics of *alafranga*, urbanisation, and transport were selected for this study, as all three draw attention to practices depicted as corrupt and as generating social inequalities. By reassessing understudied Ottoman Turkish and recently rediscovered Armeno-Turkish caricatures, this article seeks to contribute to the integration of Armenian humour gazettes into Ottoman historiography.

10 Library of Congress (LC) Armenian romanization system will be used for Armenian words, except for the editors of the gazettes, as they used the Turkish spelling of their names in signatures. See URL: https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/armenian.pdf (accessed 14 August 2025). For an alternative transcription system, see Çelik and Sargsyan 2022.

11 Hagopian 1907, 393.

12 See Step'anyan 1963, 83.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

2. Emergence of the Ottoman Humour Press: Integrating Armenian Humour into Ottoman Historiography

The Ottoman humour press of the imperial capital Istanbul originated around the mid-19th century, coinciding with the *Tanzimat* (reorganisation) Era (1839–1876) of reforms. Progress (*terakki*) and civilisation (*medeniyet*) were two defining concepts of this period. The reforms were modelled on European counterparts, especially those of France, to attain Europe's level of progress. The first gazette in the Ottoman Turkish language and script was the official gazette *Takvim-i Vekayi* (1831), which started as a government initiative as a part of the progress being aimed at. This was followed by the foundation of private periodicals, language reform, and publishing activities involving translations from European literature.[13] It comes as no surprise that one of the first humour gazettes in Ottoman Turkish language and script was named *Terakki* (1870). The Reform Decree of 1856, which created a relatively liberal atmosphere on the part of Ottoman Christian and Jewish Communities, in addition to the *Tanzimat* Decree of 1839, laid the preconditions for growth in print culture.[14] In this respect, Armenian Community played a significant role in development of the Ottoman humour press.

During the 19th-century cultural revival known as the Armenian Renaissance, *Zart'ōnk'* (*Զարթօնք*), already started in the 18th century, a prolific number of periodicals, newspapers, dictionaries, and books were printed. Classical and modern works in Latin, French, and Old Armenian were translated into Modern Armenian. Armenian schools delivering modern education were established both in the Ottoman Empire and abroad. Catholic and Protestant missionaries, among which Mekhitarists made an enormous contribution, took part in this process such as in the flourishing of printing and publishing in vernacular Armenian, translations of European literary works and comedy plays, the transfer of European thought, and foundation of numerous schools.[15] Hovsep Vartanyan, the author of the first Turkish novel in Armenian script, *The Story of Akabi* (*Akabi Hikyayesi,* 1851),[16] had also studied at Mekhitarist School in Vienna.[17] Modern comedy was carried over to the humour press, as in Baronyan's *Tiyatro*, which not only used the elements of Ottoman performative traditions but also published plenty of modern comedy plays.

Thanks to linguistic works largely of the Mekhitarists in Vienna, Modern Armenian *ashkharhapar* (*աշխարհաբար*), grounded in the vernacular and relatively free of foreign words, as opposed to classical Armenian *krapar* (*գրաբար*) succeeded in becoming a literary language.[18] While *ashkharhapar* was based on the language already spoken by Armenian community, many community members could only speak Turkish. A significant number of publications, including those of Mekhitarists, thus used Armeno-Turkish

13 For a quick overview of reforms, see, for example, Hanioğlu 2008; Shaw 1977.
14 Artinian 1988, 48–58; Barsoumian 1997, 175–201.
15 Bardakjian 1979, 2–7, 183–4; Der Matossian 2019; Nalbandian 1963, 30–67; Oshagan 1997, 156–60; Strauss 2003, 42–55, 58–65.
16 Tietze 1991.
17 Pamukciyan 2003, 373.
18 Artinian 1988, 70–2; Oshagan 1997, 155.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

in this century to reach a wider audience, advancing the mission of enlightenment and public education. This hybrid language, known as Armeno-Turkish (*Hayadaṛ T'rk'erēn*), that is, Turkish written in Armenian script, was the primary medium of the Armenian periodical press in the 19th century, whose reach was not limited to Armenian community. Publications in this script could be read and followed by some Turkish Muslim literati and bureaucrats as well, such as Grand Vizier Reşid Paşa of the *Tanzimat* period.[19] Based on vernacular Turkish, many Armeno-Turkish texts are closer to Modern Turkish and were easier to understand for the Turkish-speaking public than was Ottoman Turkish. [20] *Zuarchakhos*, too, states in the introduction that it was written in Turkish, as many Armenians could only speak Turkish, although some literate members of the Armenian community had learned Armenian.[21]

Terakki 'Progress' and *Diyojen* 'Diogenes,' the oldest known humour gazettes in Ottoman Turkish language and script, first appeared in 1870 without any caricatures[22] other than a vignette on the headers (*serlevha*). *Diyojen* was started on 24 November 1870. *Terakki* was published by Ali Râşid alongside a serious, 'non-humorous' gazette with the same name several months before *Diyojen*. Some of the early issues of *Terakki* accessible only contain small pictures, such as that of two dogs as a vignette for a short story named 'Conversation between Two Dogs' (*İki Kelbin Muhaveresi*).[23] *Diyojen*, published by the famous Ottoman Greek satirist Teodor Kasap (1835–1897), included only three drawings over its entire lifespan until 1873. The first one, from December 1871, actually used caricaturing techniques.[24] Kasap later published more illustrated humour gazettes: *Çıngıraklı Tatar* (1873) and *Hayal* (1873). These were followed by other illustrated ones in Ottoman Turkish language and script, including *Tiyatro* (1874), *Latife* (1874), *Kahkaha* (1875), and *Çaylak* (1876).[25] *Tiyatro* and *Latife*, usually published one caricature per issue, which from 1874 to 1875 looked more like a straightforward illustration.

Despite the intertextuality of the Ottoman humour press, scholarly literature has focused almost exclusively on gazettes published in the Ottoman Turkish language and script. Humour gazettes in other languages and scripts have largely been neglected, due to the tradition of national historiography, as well as language barriers and the inacces-

19 Cankara 2015a, 9; Der Matossian 2019, 15; Strauss 2003, 53.

20 Traced back to 14th century, Armeno-Turkish was used in diverse fields, even in the financial documents of the merchants in the Ottoman Empire, Der Matossian 2019,1–34; Pamukciyan 2002.

21 '…milletimizde kitap okuyan zatların bir fıkrası Ermeniceyi tahsil edebilmiş ise de pek çoğu dahi yalnız Türkçe söyler ve okur olduğundan bir taraftan yalnız Türkçeye aşina olanları okumak eğlencesinden yad etmemek…' *Zuarchakhos*, no. 1, 25 October 1856, 1. As a matter of fact, according to Cankara, many publications offer this explanation as to why they were written in Turkish. See Cankara 2015b, 118–20.

22 Not all prints used caricaturing techniques, and some were rather comic prints. Yet, in this article, all will be called 'caricature' in the broader meaning of present day.

23 E.g. Ali Râşid, *Terakki*, no. 8, 1 Rabi'ul-āhir 1287 [1 July 1870].

24 For these caricatures, see Özdiş 2010, 85–9. The first caricature is said to be a satirical portrait of Garabed Panosyan, Armenian editor of the Armeno-Turkish gazette *Manzume-i Efkâr*.

25 All accessible at Beyazıt State Library. See also Çeviker 1986; Duman 2000.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

sibility of these sources. The press of the Ottoman Armenian community in Istanbul is a good example of this largely unexplored heritage.[26] However, thanks to recent cataloguing and digitisation efforts, these periodicals are now more accessible, which has in turn highlighted the need to revise the existing literature. A case in point, *Boşboğaz Bir Adem* 'Blabber,' published in 1852 by the Ottoman Armenian civil servant, literati, and journalist Hovsep Vartanyan or Vartan Paşa (1816–1879),[27] was mistakenly labelled as the first humour gazette.[28] It is in fact titled as a 'treatise' (*risale*) on the header with no issue number and is not structured like Ottoman humour periodicals of the 19th century. It looks like a treatise containing an illustrated story in Ottoman Turkish written in Armenian script.[29]

Terakki and *Diyojen* had been hitherto thought to be the oldest known humour gazettes in Turkish. On the other hand, *Zuarchakhos* 'Joker,' which was started about 14 years earlier, on 25 October 1856, was also in Turkish written in Armenian script. *Meghu* 'Bee,' which was published by Harutyun Sıvacıyan, a few weeks earlier than *Zuarchakhos* on 15 September 1856, did not contain any visuals until 1859, other than a 'beehive' vignette on its header. Both *Zuarchakhos* and *Meghu* were published by Ottoman Armenian community members in Istanbul, with the difference that *Meghu* is in Armenian language and script.[30] The visuals and the content of *Zuarchakhos* are unsigned. The editor is not indicated either, as the gazette was published under the pseudonym *Zuarchasirats Ĕngerut'yun* 'Society of Joke Lovers' (*Զվարճասիրաց ընկերություն*). Only some unverified information about the identity of the editor(s) is available.[31] We as yet have no information about *Latife*'s editor Zakarya Beykozluyan, other than the fact that he was from Eğin.[32] Some caricatures in *Latife* and *Tiyatro* bear the signature of Armenian artists Nişan Berberyan and Tınghır. These caricaturists were renowned for their art, with their caricatures appearing in many other humour gazettes of the 19th century.[33]

Tiyatro's editor was the famous Ottoman Armenian satirical playwright, author, and journalist Hagop Baronyan (1843–1891). Baronyan was of middle-class origin and, according to Bardakjian, was writing from a humanistic standpoint, with a concern for the whole Ottoman public in general, regardless of ethnicity. He criticised the dominant

26 Both Turkish and Armenian historiographical traditions approach these periodicals as isolated cases. For an exception, see Strauss 2001. For a recent study on the Armeno-Turkish press, see also Uygur 2021.

27 Pamukciyan 2003, 373–4. Cankara's work verifies Vartanyan as the author. See Cankara 2014, 59.

28 E.g. in Çeviker 1986, 17; Elmas 2013, 246. Yet, these are very precious works about the 19th-century Ottoman humour press. Cankara and Strauss also mention this issue; Cankara 2017, 12–3; Strauss 2001, 122.

29 When examined, it is a 31-page, unsigned, humorous treatise, intended 'to show what malignancies can arise from gossip.' Vartanyan 1852, 1 (URL: http://haygirk.nla.am/cgi-bin/koha/opac-MARCdetail.pl?biblionumber=116231, first accessed 9 February 2017).

30 Sıvacıyan, Harutyun. *Meghu*. no. 1, 15 September 1856.

31 Kiraz 2024, 74–5.

32 Pamukciyan 2003, 126.

33 Çeviker 1986, 109–14.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

role of the Armenian aristocracy (*Amiras*) in the Armenian community and demanded equal rights and parliamentary democracy in the government of the Ottoman Armenian community.[34] In that regard, Baronyan's political stance seemed close to that of revolutionary intellectuals, known as the Young Armenians and the Young Ottomans.[35] The Young Ottomans also wrote for humour periodicals; Namık Kemal, for example, published his essays in *Diyojen*.[36] Although the Ottoman intelligentsia of the *Tanzimat* era was not unified in their thought, their one common mission was public enlightenment and reform.[37] In line with that, all periodicals under consideration in this article were written in vernacular Turkish. The editor of *Zuarchakhos* seems to pursue the same mission, specifying in the first issue that the gazette was written in a clear language so that it could be enjoyed by everybody.[38]

Ottoman humour gazettes were so intertwined that *Tiyatro* and its Armenian version *T'adron* published simultaneously by Baronyan, sometimes published the same caricatures and the same content.[39] They also borrowed caricatures from periodicals in Paris and London. Not only French fashion, but also the print culture of France had gone global in the 19th century. The famous British satirical paper *Punch*, *or The London Charivari* (1841) was inspired by Charles Philipon's *Le Charivari* (1832).[40] We don't know for how long, but the French publication itself circulated in Ottoman Empire according to an archival document from 1895, showing an import restriction imposed on this publication in the late 19th century.[41] As can be inferred from the content of *Tiyatro* and *Latife*, the word *şarivari* had come to mean 'humour periodical' in the Ottoman context. The short-lived Ottoman humour gazette *Şarivari Medeniyet* (1874) and the Armeno-Turkish *Şarivari* (1876) seem to have derived their names from *Le Charivari.* Periodicals resembling *Charivari* or *Punch* were established in many places from Istanbul to Cairo, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Melbourne, and South Asia.[42] *Kahkaha*, Çaylak, and *Letâif-i Asâr* published identical and modified versions of caricatures from *Punch* (1841), as Elif Elmas has shown.[43] In testimony to such transfers, *Tiyatro* ironically reported that pictures (*resims*), that is, caricatures, appearing in Kasap's *Hayal* were being taken 'free of charge' from illustrated (*resimli*) humour periodicals (*şarivari mecmuaları*) published in Paris.[44] On the other hand, caricatures appearing in *Zuarchakhos, Latife*, and *Tiyatro*, with very few exceptions, look more original in terms of their depictions of the local scenery in Istanbul.

34 Bardakjian 1979, 30–41; 181; 304–5; Basmajian et al. 2005, 404–7; Pamukciyan 2003, 102–3.
35 Artinian 1988, 59–65; Mardin 2000; Oshagan 1997, 151–2.
36 Özdiş 2010, 83.
37 Artinian 1988, 59–65; Mardin 1974, 428.
38 '... Ermenicesi olmuş Türkçesi olmuş gayet fasih lisanla yazılmak üzere gazetemizi iki fıkraya taksim ettik...' *Zuarchakhos*, no.1, 25 October 1856, 1.
39 Bardakjian 1979, 304.
40 Price 1957, 353.
41 B.O.A, HR.TH. 155–40.
42 Harder and Mittler 2013.
43 Elmas 2013, 250. I am also thankful to Tobias Heinzelmann for pointing out to me (before Elmas' work) that he had come across caricatures from *Punch* in *Kahkaha* (1875).
44 *Tiyatro*, no. 5, 3 April 1290 [15 April 1874], 1.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

3. Morality, Regulations, and Government Patronage

The nature of the caricatures was heavily defined by a specific censorship, government patronage, and thus by moral ideology, as will be outlined in what follows. Although the humour press was arbitrarily administrated regardless of laws in effect, regulations on printing and publishing had been drafted since the 19th century. Before the first humour gazettes came out in Ottoman Turkish language and script, Penal Code of 1858 had already brought a restriction on satire and caricatures, stipulating 'those printing and having printed impudent joke (*hezl*) and satire (*hicv*) in prose or verse contradicting with public morals (*ādāb-ı umūmīye)* or impudent pictures or portrayals (*edepsizce resim ve tasvir*) be subject to penalty and imprisonment from 24 hours to a week.'[45] The Press Law enacted in 1864 introduced another legal framework for censorship and would still be in effect in the late 19th century.[46] The requirement to obtain a licence from the Ministry of Education as per the first article of the law reveals that the Ottoman press was conceived as a component of public education. The law provided for penalty and imprisonment for the content contrary to so-called public morals; penalty and imprisonment for improper words and expressions (*elfaz ve tabirat-ı gayri layika*) about the sultanate and the members of the dynasty, for verbal attack (*taarruz*) on the government, and criticism of bureaucrats as well as the sovereigns of other states allied with the Ottoman state. The satirisation (*z̠emm* or *hicv*) or lampooning of civil servants, an official committee or council, foreign ambassadors, and of ordinary people would again be subject to penalty or imprisonment.[47]

Punishments prescribed for violation of 'public morals' (*ādāb-ı umūmīye*), that is, equal to *ahlāk-ı umūmīye* in meaning,[48] in this context, constitutes an example of the instrumentalisation of morality. Fortna suggests that *ahlāk-ı umūmī* would be used in the context of the late-19th-century Ottoman education project in the same communal sense, that is, 'the qualities that have been accepted as custom in a society.' Moral ideology was devised to build an obedient culture, as he remarks.[49] This suggestion may also be valid for the early Ottoman humour press, where the said regulations do not allow subversion of government policies and violation of certain social norms constituting so-called 'public morals.' Ambiguity of what would be considered 'morally acceptable' made arbitrary administration easier.

More to the point, journalists were expected to be a mouthpiece of the government and to deliver instruction on morality as underscored by the *Kararnâme-i Âli* governmental decree announced in 1867 during the reign of Abdulaziz (1861–1876). This decree specified that the gazettes had been acting contrary to common interests and even speaking against the fundamentals of the state, whereas 'their duty was to correct and reform morals (*tehz̠ib ve ıslah-ı ahlāk*).' Further, the gazettes allegedly published harmful (*mużır*)[50]

45 *Cezā Ḳānunnāme-i Hümāyûn*, 1858, Article 139, *Düstur,* Tertib 1(1), 568.
46 See *Düstur* (Tertib 1), 1289 [1872].
47 Matbû'āt Nizamnâmesi, 1864, Article 1, 14–7, 20–5 *Düstur,* Tertib 1(2), 220–4.
48 *Edep* is defined as *terbiye*, that is, 'good morals' in Sami 1317 [1900], 83.
49 Fortna 2000, 379–84.
50 Sami 1317 [1900], 1361.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

ideas and fabricated news, while 'they were supposed to eliminate the oppositions to the government.' It is added that the 'excitement of minds' (*tahdiş-i ez̲han*)[51] and hostility between communities caused by publishing unfounded news could not be ignored, even though the government 'wished to allow gazettes to publish ideas to some extent with the expectation that they would contribute to government affairs as well as to the reformation and 'progress' (*terakki*) of society.' 'Necessary corrective actions and preventive measures, in addition to the provisions of the Press Law, would thus be taken by the government.'[52] The two ambiguous terms *tahdiş-i ez̲han* and *mużır* served to legitimise censorship in aforementioned provisions and numerous archival documents in the 19th century.[53] In this context, the former could be interpreted as something that is 'politically engaging' and the latter as 'anything contradicting with the policies of the government.'

It could be contended that 'morality' served as a pretext for the government to put a damper on satire, caricatures, and political opposition, although not arguing that this was a case unique to this period or to this geography. The form of humour allowed by the regulations was an impersonal, non-political humour aimed at instruction of morals and amusement through wit, jokes, and gentle satire rather than lampoonery and direct political satire. *Diyojen* acknowledged this by describing the aims of the gazette as 'to serve as the voice of the government and the instruction of morality.'[54] Again, *Latife* highlighted instruction of morality as its purpose in its foreword.[55] Rare cases of direct satire, especially political satire, would be punished, as in the case of Kasap's humour periodicals. For example, *Diyojen*'s publication was interrupted on numerous occasions for that reason.[56] *Hayal*, another humour periodical of Kasap, published a caricature criticising legal restrictions brought on the humour press in 1876, and its publisher was even subjected to imprisonment for three years.[57] *Tiyatro* was suspended due to its undesirable content in 1875[58] and reported the suspension of *Latife, Letâif-i Âsâr*, and *Hayal* a few weeks later.[59] *Latife* verified this by announcing that the gazette was being put on hold because of a piece of allegedly harmful (*mużır*) content in the previous issue.[60] Another humour periodical *Meddah* (1875), which announced its aim as entertainment, also ironically wrote

51 *ibid.*, 388.

52 This decree was published without title in the official gazette, see *Takvim-i Vekayi* 9, no. 875, 5 March 1283 [17 March 1867], 2, URL: https://dijital-kutuphane.mkutup.gov.tr/tr/Periodicals/Catalog/Issue/?IssueId=27916 (accessed 25 October 2022).

53 These terms would be more widely used later in the 19th century during the Hamidian period, as can be quickly verified by a keyword search in the catalogue of the Ottoman Archives, URL: https://katalog.devletarsivleri.gov.tr.

54 *Diyojen*, no. 1, 12 Teşrin-i Sāni 1286 [24 November 1870], 1.

55 *Latife*, no. 1, 22 Mart 1291 [3 April 1875], 1.

56 Çeviker 1986, 70–2; Özdiş 2010, 82.

57 Çeviker 1986, 72–3.

58 Baronyan, the editor of *Tiyatro* ironically notes that the paper had ceased operation for the previous two months because it was diagnosed with an illness, apparently referring to interruption by regularity authorities: *Tiyatro*, no. 62, 28 Kānūn-i Evvel 1290 [20 December 1874], 1.

59 *Tiyatro*, no. 66, 25 Kānūn-i Sāni, 1290 [6 February 1875], 3.

60 *Latife*, no. 37, 24 February 1290 [8 March 1875], 1.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

that ‘unlike those humour gazettes publishing personal satire (*şahsiyet aleyhine*), it would not use language that might lead to the gazette’s closing’ as an indicator of self-censorship.[61] Whether any punishments were imposed on *Zuarchakhos* is as yet unknown, but it may have been discontinued due to closure after the third issue.

4. Discursive Formations: the First Ottoman Caricatures

In alignment with the administrative language, Ottoman humour gazettes in this period called their prints ‘pictures’ (*resim*), whether the image in question was a caricature or a comic print. In contrast, *Zuarchakhos* called its prints *karikatura*.[62] Probably due to censorship and self-censorship, the first Ottoman humour gazettes limited their topics to everyday life in the city with a discourse of morality, which also shaped the character of the visuals. Generalising these periodicals with their *resim*s as ‘satirical’ would thus be a category error, considering that most of them during the first years, particularly in the official language roughly until 1875–1876,[63] were rather humoristic[64] and normative,[65] in line with the permitted forms of humour laid down in press regulations. Again, probably due to censorship and the lack of artists and technology, one does not come across a great number of caricatures in the humour press of early 1870s in the Ottoman Turkish language and script. This may be because the caricaturing techniques of distortion and exaggerations are what make a visual ‘satirical.’ It is thus fascinating to see that *Zuarchakhos* started with four prints mostly in the form of caricature, using caricaturing techniques such as distortion, exaggeration, and bewilderment. It may be the fact that this gazette was not in Ottoman Turkish script that afforded it a certain degree of freedom at the time, or perhaps it passed unnoticed by the administrators? These questions remain unanswered. Yet, there are known cases of censorship imposed on humour gazettes of Ottoman Armenians in the 1870s, as in the case of Baronyan’s humour periodicals.[66] It should also be noted that *Zuarchakhos* was started following the *Tanzimat* Decree (1839) and a few months after the Reform Decree (*Islahat Fermanı*), improving the rights of Christian communities. *Meghu* would also publish caricatures even after the ban brought upon visual satire by the Penal Code of 1858.[67]

61 *Meddah*, no. 1, 10 Muharrem 1292 [16 February 1875], 1.

62 ‘Mukaddime-i Gazete:…beher gazetede birer sayfa ekalli dörder resimle donatılmış olarak karikaturalar…derc olunacaktır.’ *Zuarchakhos*, no.1, 25 October 1856, 1.

63 For satirical caricatures in the 19th-century Ottoman humour press, see Elmas 2016 and Özdiş 2010.

64 In this article ‘humoristic’ means humour based on comedy, using jokes and gentle satire blended with ‘wit’ rather than direct satire and lampoonery.

65 For a collection of these caricatures, see Çeviker 1986, 139–265.

66 Bardakjian 1979, 12–5; 88; 144–5.

67 See *Meghu*, no. 9, 31 March 1859, and no. 12, 30 April 1859. Baronyan simultaneously published *Tiyatro* and its Armenian version *T‘adron*. He could more freely publish political criticism in the latter, according to Bardakjian, whereas *Tiyatro*, being written in Ottoman Turkish, ‘came under stricter control than *T‘adron*.’ See Bardakjian 1979, 302.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

For the Ottoman Empire, the long 19th century was marked by nationalist movements and continuous wars alongside the integration into the world capitalist market. Transition to a free-market economy, the hegemony of commodities of industrialised European states on the local market,[68] early globalisation of Ottoman capital with global business connections, and an increased number of foreign visitors, especially of Europeans,[69] all dramatically transformed lives in Istanbul. *Zuarchakhos* was published in the aftermath of the Crimean War (1853–1856), which had fostered change in the city.[70] During the war, Pera (Beyoğlu), which Lady Hornby referred to as the 'Frank quarter,' was filled with British and French soldiers, in addition to various other nationals.[71] When it comes to the 1870s, urbanisation gained momentum. Stories of these caricatures are usually set in Pera and Galata, and sometimes in Kağıthane, the favourite leisure sites of the time, while the stories in the first issue of *Zuarchakhos* were set in the Princes' Islands (Büyükada) of Istanbul. Galata was the central business district where the banks were situated and the first stock market was founded, while Pera was a hub for *alafranga* social life. Galata and Pera were home not only to European company offices and diplomatic spots but also to newly opened hotels, French cafes, European restaurants, modern theatre, photo studios, department stores, and shops selling European commodities and French fashion.[72]

Many of the urban reforms and modern transport means, which were popular subjects of the Ottoman humour press in general, were introduced at a time later than could be discussed by *Zuarchakhos*. Although the concession for steam-powered ferries was already granted in 1851, the contracts for horse-drawn trams would be signed in 1869.[73] The fact that only two issues of this gazette are accessible so far, makes it difficult to interpret these caricatures due to lack of context. The topics of the caricatures paralleled those of the textual parts, while not every point of discussion was addressed in the caricatures.[74] Miscellaneous subjects in *Tiyatro* and *Latife* include, but are not limited to, the stock market, economic problems, peddlers, and drunkards, all mocked with a discourse of morality. The diversity of the topics approached from a moral perspective show that the discourse in these gazettes was not generally one of westernisation or modernisation, but rather one of morality. Morality in this case is quite all-encompassing in the humour press and included, but was not limited to, manners or etiquette, literature, and language, consumption and entertainment habits, professions, commerce, and urbanisation. The present study will mainly focus on *alafranga* cultural trends, urbanisation, and transport means among the most popular topics.

68 Pamuk 1987, 29–31.
69 Keyder 2018, 25–37.
70 Neumann 2011, 428–9.
71 Hornby 1863, 85, 32–500.
72 Akın 1998.
73 Ergin 1995, 2291–2, 2398–400.
74 These topics and the discourse of morality also can be found in other humour periodicals of this period. See Çeviker 1986; Özdiş 2010.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

4.1. Alafranga *and Fashion*

Zuarchakhos focuses on the theme of *alafranga* in caricatures. To date, the topic of *alafranga* has been discussed as a Turkish-Muslim phenomenon particularly based on the Turkish literature of the 19th century.[75] It is thus striking to find this topic in a gazette of the Armenian-Christian community. Caricatures appearing in *Zuarchakhos* are evidence that *alafranga* fops or their equivalent *chics* (*şık*s) had entered the vocabulary of the Ottoman periodical press long before they were epitomised in Ahmet Midhat's famous novel *Felâtun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* (1875).[76] Usage of the term *şık* (*chic*) and of this typology by *Zuarchakhos* also constitutes an important continuity with the later Ottoman humour press in Ottoman Turkish script in the 1870s. *Bey*s and *Efendi*s, who were called *şık* and usually represented socio-economically higher class men in *Tiyatro* and *Latife*, were the main target in ridicule of *alafranga*. Though the term '*Bey*' is not found in the issues of *Zuarchakhos* accessible now. Young Ottomans used the title *Beyzâde*, 'son of a Bey' for satirizing young fops of 19th century, who were usually sons of ministers and used the power and wealth of their fathers to be appointed to high bureaucratic posts.[77] According to Hanioğlu, *alafranga* as a term was used by the elite to refer to objects (such as personal items) during the 18th and early 19th centuries and later came to mean a Europeanised lifestyle in the *Tanzimat* period (1839–1876).[78] Although *Alafranga* generally meant 'in a European manner,' it more specifically denoted French cultural trends. *Alafranga* was associated with cultural refinement and becoming civilised and was not always condemned in literature, as seen in Midhat's above-mentioned novel. Accordingly, getting a proper education (for both men and women), mastering French, learning to play the piano, wearing modern clothes properly, and acting according to European rules of etiquette in interaction with Europeans were among the attributes encouraged by the *alafranga*.[79] Humour periodicals focused on those aspects that they found laughable by depicting the supposed *alafranga* as involving pretentiousness, superficiality, and a propensity to show off. When this type of *alafranga* is embodied in a male typology, it was represented by a fop or a *chic*. *Tiyatro* illustrated this by a mention of *chic*s pretending to read French gazettes, holding the gazette upside down, as they could not actually read French.[80]

Zuarchakhos also categorised *alafranga,* with the words: 'What *alafranga* means? There are both good and bad *alafranga*s... Which one is bad and which is good?' Then it moved on to describe *alafranga* for both men and women. Specifically for men, it was

75 For *alafranga* as a Turkish-Muslim phenomenon, see Mardin 1974, Moran 1983, Parla 1990. Parla outlines the paternalistic and normative nature of Ottoman Turkish novels.

76 Balcı 2019. Midhat's novel was also published in Armeno-Turkish in 1879 and can be accessed at the National Library of Armenia.

77 Mardin 2000, 123.

78 Hanioğlu 2008, 100.

79 See Balcı 2019. In the preface to his booklet, in which Midhat states his aim to teach European manners to Ottomans, he notes that the term *alafranga* is either misunderstood or not truly known. See Midhat 1312 [1894] in Gökçek 2016.

80 'Çingene Falı', *Tiyatro*, no. 68, 31 Kānūn-ı Sāni 1290 [12 February 1875], 2.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

wearing fashionable clothing and accessories such as tight trousers and gloves, as well as polite forms of address mixed with French and 'other similar states of being' (*bunlara emsal aher haller*). In the case of women, it was things such as 'hats, ribbons, slim waist, smoking cigarettes, having elegant long conversations....' It is added that '[e]ven sheer veiling (*yaşmak*) instead of thick veiling is considered *alafranga*.'[81]

The first caricature from *Zuarchakhos* (Fig. 1), titled *Alafranga*, features a young woman trying to play the piano, flanked by her parents. Even if the girl was not able to speak French fluently, her parents are still happy because also learning to play the piano would be sufficient to give her an *alafranga* image. This reminds us of one of the heroines in Midhat's novel, the young slave Canan, who is juxtaposed with the neighbour's flamboyant and spoiled girls. Unlike the latter, Canan manages to perfectly play the piano and speak French, because she not only had the skills but also desired to perform them with all her heart, not just to become *alafranga*. The butts of the joke in *Zuarchakhos* seem to be pretentious individuals who had superficially equipped themselves with *alafranga* practices merely to show off.

It must be on the same grounds that the habit of mixing everyday language with French is ridiculed in Ottoman humour gazettes, including in *Zuarchakhos* (Fig. 2). According to Şerif Mardin, this was a continuity with verbal traditions of humour. The 'esoteric' language of the ruling class was one of the main factors that estranged the ruling class from the ruled in cultural terms. In shadow theatre, *Hacivat*, representing the culture of the non-taxpayer ruling class, mixed Turkish with Arabic and Persian. *Karagöz*, representing the Turkish-speaking, taxpaying ruled classes, as a result, did not understand Hacivat's language. Now French was starting to be used in addition to Arabic and Persian as a sign of erudition for the ruling class. This vanity and pretentiousness on the part of the upper classes were laughable elements in both Hacivat and *alafranga* fops and allowed for an indirect political opposition, resistance to oppression, and criticism of social and economic inequalities through indirect satire of the ruling class.[82]

The butts of the joke in the caricature in Figure 2 are apparently those so-called fops, who have adopted French fashion and manners and are peppering their language with French, addressing each other as *mon cher*. Due to the flamboyance of their attire, *alafranga* men were usually mockingly labelled *şık*, derived from the French word *chic*. Along with the clothing, such as tight trousers, the fashionable accessories shown in this caricature, such as a walking stick (*baston*) and the glasses, were also ridiculed. *Zuarchakhos* mentions these glasses as a *lorgnette*, which *alafranga* men favoured. Fops are usually also depicted as drunkards and womanisers. It should also be noted that, this personality could not be described simply as one who drinks alcohol, since the subject of ridicule here is 'drunkenness,' rather than the act of 'consuming alcohol.' In all humour periodicals discussed in this article, it is only the drunkenness that is mocked. This assertion was

81 'Alafranga: Alafranga ne demek?: Alafranganın eyisi fenası var…yohsa hangisidir eyisi, hangisidir fenası: …' *Zuarchakhos*, no. 3, 8 November 1856, 1.

82 Mardin 1974, 424. In definition of *Alafranga*, for example, usage of *estağfirullah* (an Arabic expression) are listed together with the French words: See, *Zuarchakhos*, no.3, 8 November 1856, 1.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 1. Zuarchakhos*, no. 3, 8 November 1856, 3.*
'Our daughter can speak a little bit of French…. If she can also learn to play the piano, she will become completely alafranga.'

supported by Midhat's novel, where the fact that relatively conservative Ottoman families of middle-class origin also enjoyed alcoholic drinks, especially the local punch (*punç*), was not criticised if consumed in moderation. Baronyan himself is said to have consumed alcohol moderately, and in *Tiyatro* it was only drunkards that he ridiculed.[83]

83 Bardakjian 1979, 16.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 2. Zuarchakhos, *no. 3, 8 November 1856, 3.*
'Mon cher, you know that Talman has completely become chic (şık). –Ah bah!, Mon cher… Quel he has become chic….'*

* French, *Ah bah!*: an expression of disbelief. See Darqué 1878, 70.

In the next caricature (Fig. 3), both *alafranga* men and women are ridiculed. Women are unable to look around due to the large size of their hats, whereas the womaniser fop is trying to make a move on the women but is unable to see their faces.

Both men and women were the target of fashion humour in *Latife* and *Tiyatro*, as in *Zuarchakhos*. Çeviker suggests that fashion with excessive lines was a good fit for caricaturing for technical reasons and may have led to the popularity of this topic.[84] Yet, caricatures about French fashion and *alafranga* are very rare in *Latife*, even though it allocated many pages to this topic in writing. The caricatures from *Tiyatro* (Fig. 4) and *Latife* (Fig. 5)

84 Çeviker 1986, 40.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 3. Zuarchakhos*, no. 1, 25 October 1856, 3.*
'If it were not for these hats, I would see a lot more... –Uff! This hat of mine... Can't see anything... Who is that coming up...'

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 4. Tiyatro*, no. 12, 27 April 1290 [9 May 1874], 4.*
'Those who want to accompany alafranga mademoiselles will have to learn acrobatics from now on!!!'

poke fun at the extravagance of fashion–its so-called superficiality and ostentation–in a parallelism with *Zuarchakhos*. Yet, the second caricature (Fig. 5) is not only about fashion. Intertwined with caricatures on urban infrastructure, it presents another layer of meaning implying the incompatibility of the new fashion with dirty streets. This incompatibility had already been a source of laughter in *Zuarchakhos*, where 'taking walks in mud and dust with an outfit normally worn to balls' is a ridiculed *alafranga* habit.[85]

Textual parts of *Tiyatro* and *Latife* provide a very good context for further interpretation of fashion caricatures. The targets of fashion humour were both the shoppers and economic actors. All three gazettes often ridiculed indulgence in French fashion and European commodities, which were being consumed in increasing quantity and frequency. In *Lat-*

85 '...baloya gider hesabında tozda yahod çamurda gezinmeye gitmek...' *Zuarchakhos*, no. 3, 8 November 1856, 1.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 5. Latife*, no. 7, 2 September 1290 [14 September 1874], 4.*
'Are you blind? Don't you see the huge road? –I gave you a shout about your dress getting dusty, but you did not hear me.'

ife, a penniless *bey* is pushed by his wife to finance her constant fashion expenditures.[86] In *Tiyatro*, a father complains about his son wishing to buy every new fashion, ordering tight trousers and *redingot*s every week.[87] Though economic aspects were not very discernible in the limited copies of *Zuarchakhos*, people are portrayed as taking special care in ordering new clothing, such as French-style jackets (*setre* and *raglan*).[88] At any rate, fashion was presented by *Latife* and *Tiyatro* as a commercial trick through which economic actors

86 'Bey ile Hanım', *Latife,* no. 3, 19 August 1290 [31 August 1874], 2–3; For numerous other examples, see 'Eldiven', *Tiyatro,* no. 2, 23 March 1290 [4 April 1874], 1–2; 'İki Hane Beyninde', *Tiyatro,* no. 31, 29 June 1290 [11 July 1874], 1; 'Şıllıkların Mükâlemesi', *Latife*, issue 14, 22 April 1291 [4 May 1875], 2.

87 *Redingot* was a trendy French style jacket. See 'Muhaverat: …Efendim bir terzi Mir var imiş. Ona her hafta bir dar pantolon bir de alafranga radingot mu imiş ne imiş işte ondan ısmarlamalı imiş…Hem efendim birçok şeyler daha istiyor. Bir baston almalı imiş. Bir şemsiye almalı imiş. Eldiven almalı imiş. Moda ne çıkarsa almalı imiş…Buna para mı dayanır?...' *Tiyatro*, no. 39, 31 July 1290 [12 August 1874], 2.

88 'Geçen gün iki dost bir mahalde buluşup, şu yolda bir sohbetleri vuku bulmuştur', *Zuarchakhos*, no. 3, 8 November 1856, 1; 'Büyük Ada', *Zuarchakhos*, no. 1, 25 October 1856, 1–2.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

profited. *Tiyatro* lists the winners of the time as dressmakers sewing fashionable clothing and deceptive shopkeepers, as well as chic *bey*s who ordered garments without paying the dressmakers.[89] About a year later, *Latife* followed with a list of additional winners, which again included the producers and dealers of fashion commodities. The list also included bankers, tram and steamboat companies, for reasons discussed in the foregoing section on urbanization and transportation.[90] These criticisms at times sound as if they are striving to protect the local economy against European economic intrusion, a sentiment clearly expressed in *Meghu* back in 1856, when locals preferring French tailors to Armenian ones were criticised, considering that the latter allegedly offered higher quality at a lower rate.[91]

A discourse of moral economy encouraging moderation, which for Şerif Mardin was almost akin to the Protestant ethic, can be felt in how *alafranga* were laughed at.[92] In both *Tiyatro* and *Latife*, people including socially higher-class men referred to as *Bey* or *Efendi* were not paying their debts to the butcher, baker, or grocer, while at the same time they continued to spend on *alafranga* fashion and leisure activities at European restaurants, cafes, and other spots, which the caricatures below are related to.[93] To give a few examples from *Tiyatro*, two penniless *şık bey*s, who had been fired from their jobs in an Ottoman civil bureaucratic office (*Kalem*),[94] attempt to order new clothing from a tailor with the promise of paying later (although they had done so many times before and had not paid) and make plans to defraud the grocer and to spend their last money to have some drinks in Galata. On another occasion, an *efendi* gets caught in a tavern (*meyhane*) by the unpaid butcher and the grocer.[95] This again recalls the Felâtun Bey character in Midhat's novel, who casually goes to work at the *Kalem* while spending all his money and time on leisure in Pera. A caricature from *Tiyatro* (Fig. 6) must be about these penniless chic characters also found in Ottoman literature of the 19th century. Allegedly, money burned a hole in their pocket (*cebi delik şık*).

Latife attributes trousers with hole-ridden pockets to men spending the entire fortunes of their wealthy fathers.[96] In a later issue, *Tiyatro* also mentions a penniless chic spendthrift (*cebi delik parasız şık*) trying to buy a new shirt without paying the store owner and

89 'Kazanan numaralar: …Terazinin altına balmumu yapıştıran fıstıkçılar…Zengin beylere huni paçalı pantolon diken terziler, Beyoğlu'ndaki modistrolar, veresiye elbise diktiren şık beyler…' *Tiyatro*, no. 37, 24 July 1290 [5 August 1874], 2.

90 'Kazanan numaralar: ...Bir Doğru Yol mağazası, bir şapkacı dükkanı, bir sarraf, bir tüccar, şirket vapurları, bir pudracı, bir gözlükçü, bir eldivenci, bir bastoncu, bir saç boyacısı...' *Latife*, no. 2, 25 March 1291 [6 April 1875], 2.

91 'August Gine', *Meghu*, no. 1, 15 September 1856, 19–24.

92 Mardin 1974, 415–6.

93 i.e. See *Tiyatro*, no. 71, 17 Muharrem 1292 [23 February 1875], 1–2, and 'Müsta'id Uşak', *Tiyatro*, no. 12, 27 April 1290 [9 May 1874], 1–2.

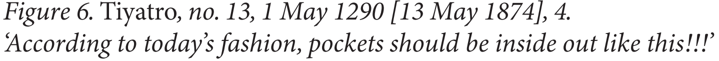
94 For the emergence of the new civil bureaucracy, see Findley 2014. Members of this civil bureaucracy, who knew French and were more familiar with Europe, were among the possible targets in the ridicule of *alafranga*.

95 'İki Şık Beyin Muḥaveresi', *Tiyatro*, no. 75, 9 Safer 1292 [17 March 1875], 3.

96 'Ticariye: Emtia-i *Latife*', *Latife,* no. 5, 26 August 1290 [7 September 1874], 3.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 6. Tiyatro*, no. 13, 1 May 1290 [13 May 1874], 4.*
'According to today's fashion, pockets should be inside out like this!!!'



promising to send the money later with his servant.[97] Other caricature from *Latife* (Fig. 7) depicts one of those *efendi*s at an entertainment venue, not paying his debts to the grocer and to the butcher standing at his side. In the same issue where this caricature appeared, *Latife* also ridicules people going to leisure sites (*mesire*) on borrowed money.[98]

It could be said that *alafranga* caricatures mainly targeted the ruling classes, including Ottoman civil bureaucracy, Armenian aristocracy, and wealthy merchants, represented by *Bey*s and *Efendi*s. For the purposes of this study, the topic of *alafranga* can be thought of as an egalitarian criticism, attempting to close the growing cultural and economic gap between the ruling classes and the ruled in the 19th century, a gap that had already existed since earlier centuries. This topic provided a space for indirect social satire and political satire of the ruling classes by ridiculing their vanity and pretentiousness. Both the

97 'Geçen nüshamızdaki muḥavereden māb'ad', *Tiyatro*, no. 85, 15 Rabi'ul Evvel 1292 [21 April 1875], 2.

98 'Vay, vay, vay canım…borç edip de eğlenmek için mesirelere gidenlere.' *Latife*, no. 2, 15 August 1290 [27 August 1874], 4.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 7. Latife*, no. 2, 15 August 1290 [27 August 1874], 4.*
'Bravo! … I waive all my debts! –Oh, efendi! Please don't do this to your grocer and butcher.'

Armenian and Turkish ruling classes were criticised by reformist intellectuals for their unwillingness to embrace the parliament and the constitution. Neither were they taking sufficient steps towards improving public welfare, instead being concerned with their *alafranga* luxuries, further distancing them from the ruled classes.[99] Such criticisms were suggested as valid for Baronyan's satire by Bardakjian, as mentioned. While the political stance of *Latife*'s editor Beykozluyan remains unknown, the content of the gazette looks very concerned with the needs of the general public while targeting ruling classes. *Zuarchakhos*, too, must be mainly targeting the vanity of Armenian dominant classes of *Amira*s and merchants, who could afford an *alafranga* lifestyle. Its intention might even have been indirect political satire, as the government of the Armenian community was under the hegemony of the *Amira*s at the time.[100] Somewhere in the gazette, *alafranga* social circles were mentioned as 'Society' (*Cemiyet*), apparently referring to ruling classes, including the Armenian aristocracy and commercial bourgeoisie.[101]

99 Yet, Ottoman intellectuals were not uniform in their political thoughts as reflected in their writings. See Mardin 2000, 115; Mardin 1974, 414–6, 425–9; Parla 2001, 223–33.
100 See Barsoumian 1982; Artinian 1988, 75–82.
101 Kiraz 2024, 67.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

In the 19th century, a middle class of artisans and craftsman with their moral values such as moderateness in spending formed the base of Ottoman traditional, conservative communities in Istanbul.[102] Many Ottoman authors in this century, some of whom were of middle-class origin themselves, such as Ahmet Midhat, were 'social mobilisers' who wrote from the perspective of the middle class, with a communitarian attitude. Mardin suggests that Ottoman authors instrumentalised morality with the topic of *alafranga* to promote their own ideologies. This populist discourse addressing moral sensibilities of 'little culture,' taking up the theme of 'moral decline,' was deemed an effective way to 'mobilise the masses' as well as the conservative segment of the ruling class, such as the religious class of the *ulema*, to gain public support for the reformist zeal. Thus, the topic of *alafranga* did not necessarily mean that the authors were opposed to *alafranga* trends. Indeed, the authors had *alafranga* habits themselves.[103] Authors' criticisms of the *alafranga* directed at the ruling class should thus be read critically and may have also been motivated by their frustrated career ambitions and exclusion from *alafranga* wealth.[104] Furthermore, it was hard to speak of an independent intelligentsia, as many journalists in the 19th century were an extension of the government, either working as civil servants or chasing careers in state offices.[105] Motivations to make a career and to sell their gazettes should also be considered before making any conclusions about the real political stance of the editors of these humour gazettes. In case of caricatures, for example, when juxtaposing the traditional and the modern, an ambiguous humour accommodating multiple strands of thoughts would be helpful 'for winning audiences or patrons' by playing both sides.[106] However, it is difficult to discern the political views of the editors, if any, due to censorship and government patronage.

4.2 Urbanisation: Municipal Services

Urban reforms of the 19th century in Istanbul were major subjects of caricatures in the early 1870s. These reforms entailed things such as cadastral works and the widening of the roads; installation of pavements, sewers, and gas lamps along streets; development projects such as the construction of buildings and bridges; and introduction of modern means of transport.[107] Moving away from the paradigms of modernisation or westernisation, these developments are now being approached from the perspective of internal dynamics and the role of local and international actors as well as the state. These revisionist studies underscore that the integration of the Ottoman capital city into the world capitalist system in this century went hand in hand with profitable urban projects involving spatial segre-

102 About this communitarian structure and the conception of morality in Ottoman communities in Istanbul, see Işın 1995, 15–144. Also see Ülgener 1981.

103 Mardin 1974, 414–42. Mardin uses the 'little tradition' vs 'great tradition' opposition to refer, respectively, to 'the ruled' and 'the ruling' classes in relation to their cultural capital.

104 *ibid.*, 423, 425.

105 *ibid.*, 427–8.

106 Moores 2015, 12–3.

107 For an overview of urban modernisation reforms, see Çelik 1986.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

gation and urban inequalities, which were absent from elite-biased urban modernisation narratives.[108]

The Sixth District (*Altıncı Daire-i Belediye*), Istanbul's first municipal administration was founded in 1857 to the service of Galata and Pera as a pilot project with the possibility of later extending it to other districts. The first director (*müdür*) of the Sixth District was Kâmil Bey, who is said to be a much-mocked *alafranga* fop of the time, 'a living example of Felâtun.'[109] Commission of the municipality was made up of wealthy merchants and bankers from the two districts, such as Camondo. As was the foundation of the municipality, subsequent restructuring of urban space and introduction of modern transportation systems in the second half the 19th century were rather the initiatives of these economic actors in Galata and Pera, where their properties and businesses were located.[110] 'Poor Greeks, Armenians and Turks living in the ravines behind Taksim, in Kasımpaşa, and on the back streets of Pangaltı did not benefit from' these municipal services.[111] Administrated by wealthy ruling classes, the Sixth District, among all other subsequent municipalities founded in other districts, retained a relatively autonomous and privileged position with a higher budget well into the 1870s. The fact that city improvements were financed and run by the wealthy, privileged classes and by foreigners to their own advantage must have made them a target for the Ottoman humour press. In other words, the reform projects served the financial interests of the ruling classes, lacked a civic dimension, and excluded other districts of Istanbul from the outset. One of the first projects of this municipality, for example, was the erection of a stock exchange building.[112]

The Sixth District could only be efficient with the involvement of the State, following the appointment of Ottoman bureaucrat Server Efendi (later Server Paşa) as the director of the municipal body in 1863.[113] After the foundation of the Istanbul Municipality (Şehremaneti) and the Hocapaşa fire of 1865, restructuring was implemented during the same period in Stamboul proper as those of the Sixth District, as did the opening of a streetcar line in Karaköy and between Eminönü and Aksaray in 1871. Yet, the projects were concentrated on areas defined by the financial interests of the elite and foreigners from Taksim Square to Sirkeci Station.[114]

Both *Latife* and *Tiyaro* often wrote about infrastructural shortcomings. Interestingly, *Latife* did not publish any caricatures on these matters in 1874 and only two in 1875,[115] while *Tiyatro* contained many concerning issues such as foul-smelling streets (Fig. 9),

108 For these critical studies see Baruh 2009; Kentel 2018; Neumann 2011; Rosenthal 1982. Kentel's work gives references to other revisionist studies.

109 Neumann 2011, 435; Ortaylı 1987, 190.

110 For a 'List of real estate owners and investors in Pera, Galata and Stamboul between 1868 and 1914', a 'List of most important investors in urban property (1868-1914)' and for a separate list of 'Camondo property' (as a prominent one), see Baruh 2009, 330–84, 385–6, and 405–22.

111 Çelik 1986, 47.

112 Neumann 2011, 434–7, 444; Rosenthal 1982, 374–81.

113 Neumann 2011, 440-4.

114 See Baruh 2009, 224; 1–236.

115 One caricature in *Latife* was about dusty Street of Balıkpazarı in Galata; see *Latife* no. 19, 3 May 1291 [15 May 1875], 4.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

streets flooded by rain, mud puddles, and dusty roads.[116] However, *Latife* was not indifferent to these topics, frequently tackling these same issues in textual parts. Urban reforms were also motivated by a drive on the part of government to make the city look modern,[117] but according to the humour press, Istanbul, with all its urban shortcomings, was far from being a civilised city. Thus, these caricatures also read as civilisational failures of urban reforms. As a matter of fact, Humourists' frustration with urban modernisation as mirrored in 19th-century Ottoman caricatures was suggested earlier by Georgeon.[118] *Latife* and *Tiyatro* treated other problems, such as non-functional newly installed city lights and deficient bridge constructions, in their textual parts, while these issues were addressed in caricatures in other humour periodicals.[119]

The first caricature below from *Tiyatro* about city hygiene (Fig. 8) depicts passers-by holding their noses due to the stench in Galata, implying that no other solution was being offered by the authorities. On a preceding page to this caricature, those overwhelmed by the unpleasant smell are listed among the main export items of this neighbourhood in a humorous geographical description.[120] Potential causes of the odour could be garbage (*süprüntü*) or piles thereof (*süprüntüceziresi*) and animal carcasses on the streets of Istanbul, as reported by *Tiyatro*.[121] The Sixth District, which was responsible for rubbish collection and street cleaning (*tanzīfāt*) in Galata and Pera at the time, must have been the target of this caricature.[122] Yet, there was a particular street not in Galata but in Aksaray, called 'Mehmed Efendi sokağı,' that *Tiyatro* often mocked in its textual parts for the garbage piling up and ignored by the cleaning officers (*tanzīfāt memurları*).[123]

Other smells were connected to the city's sewer problem, where especially Kasımpaşa, a poor neighbour of Pera, and to a lesser extent Galata, were suffering.[124] Sewage from the privileged upper hills being channelled down to the Kasımpaşa river must have been the real cause of the odour in the following caricature (Fig. 9). The Sixth District Municipality had taken steps to improve the sewer system of Pera at the expense of Kasımpaşa, whose inhabitants were mostly lower-income, working-class people, as opposed to the affluent

116 See *Tiyatro*, no. 5, 3 April 1290 [15 April 1874], 4; *Tiyatro*, no. 78, 19 Safer 1292 [27 March 1875], 4; *Tiyatro*, no. 62, 28 Kānūn-i Evvel 1290 [9 January 1875], 4.

117 Ergin 1995, 1268.

118 Georgeon 1998, 24–8.

119 For these caricatures, see ibid., 26, 28.

120 'İthalat ve İhracat: …hastalar, burnu düşmüşler...' in *Tiyatro*, no. 11, 24 April 1290 [6 May 1874], 2.

121 'Suret-i Nutuk: Ey sokaklar!...Eğer siz olmayaydınız kedi köpek laşelerini göremeyecektik…Bazılarınız dahi süprüntü ceziresine müşabih bir halde bulunuyorsunuz…Ey sokaklar! Bazılarınızdan da geçmek isteyen insanların burnu kopuyor...', *Tiyatro*, no. 39, 31 July 1290 [12 August 1874], 1.

122 Ergin 1995, 912.

123 'Coğrafya:…Aksaray denilen mahal şark cihetinden Mehmed Efendi sokağındaki süprüntü ceziresi… Tanzīfāt memurlarının sokakların süprüntülerini görecek olsalar kaldırmaları şüphesiz ise de her nasılsa göremiyorlar', *Tiyatro*, no. 46, 24 August 1290 [5 September 1874], 1–2.

124 Kentel 2018, 211.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 8. Tiyatro*, no. 11, 24 April 1290 [6 May 1874], 4.*
'According to the advice given by the medical board to those passing through some streets in Galata.'

quarter of Pera. As Kentel shows, 'several infrastructural interventions in Pera's urban space, regarded as the hallmarks of modernization and the necessities of modern civilization, thus resulted in the deepening of inequalities between two neighbouring quarters not only via making Pera better off, but also through worsening the material conditions of Kasımpaşa.'[125]

Another caricature titled 'On the shores of Kasımpaşa' in *Tiyatro* again depicted the unpleasant odour disrupting the locals.[126] With a moral criticism of the priority given to financial interests over the public's well-being in urban projects, these caricatures constituted a space for 'representation and resistance'[127] through indirect satire of the ruling classes. Association of the modernising city with social segregation, inequality, and corruption is more obvious in relation to modern transport means in *Tiyatro* and *Latife*.

4.3 Means of Transport

Steamboats and subsequently horse-drawn trams and omnibuses started operating around the middle of the 19th century.[128] In 1869, Karapano Efendi was granted a con-

125 *ibid*., 216–7.
126 *Tiyatro*, no. 23, 5 June 1290 [17 June 1874], 4.
127 See Göçek 1998, 1–12.
128 See Çelik 1986, 82–103.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 9. Latife*, no. 27, 22 May 1291 [3 June 1875], 4.*
'This is how cleanliness is achieved! No other way of passing through is acceptable due to fetid odour of Kasımpaşa river.'

cession to establish a shareholding company with the purpose of building and operating horse-drawn trams, in addition to omnibuses. Among the shareholders were wealthy banker families such as Zarifi, Christakis Zografos, and Camondo, the creditors of Ottoman government.[129] The first shareholders of the steamboat company *Şirket-i Hayriye* again included members of the ruling class, such as the sultan, the sultan's mother, bureaucrats such as Grand Vizier Reşid Paşa and the Minister of War Mehmed Ali Paşa, and the banker Camondo.[130] Caricatures about means of transport indirectly criticised these elite networks. Even if steamboats were targeted for several reasons in the textual content, the difficulty of getting on and off board, whether due to crowding or technical deficiencies, became subject to caricatures. Both the first caricature (Fig. 10) and the third caricature that Latife published in the first year, 1874, depict this problem.[131]

Later in the same year, *Tiyatro* also contained a caricature on this issue.[132] Yet, the real trigger behind these caricatures was the moral issues discussed in the textual parts of both gazettes. One cause of criticism was the socially exclusive nature of the services. *Şirket-i Hayriye*, to take one example, was attacked by both *Latife* and *Tiyatro* for not providing

129 Ergin 1995, 2398, 2408.
130 Çelik 1986, 84.
131 See, *Latife*, no. 3, 19 August 1290 [31 August 1874], 4.
132 See *Tiyatro*, no. 55, 25 September 1290 [7 October 1874], 4.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 10. Latife*, no. 1, 12 August 1290 [24 August 1874], 4.*
'Oh, Efendi! Is everything okay with you? Have you had an accident? –No, man! I just get off the boat of the Üsküdar line. Thankfully, I haven't injured myself!'

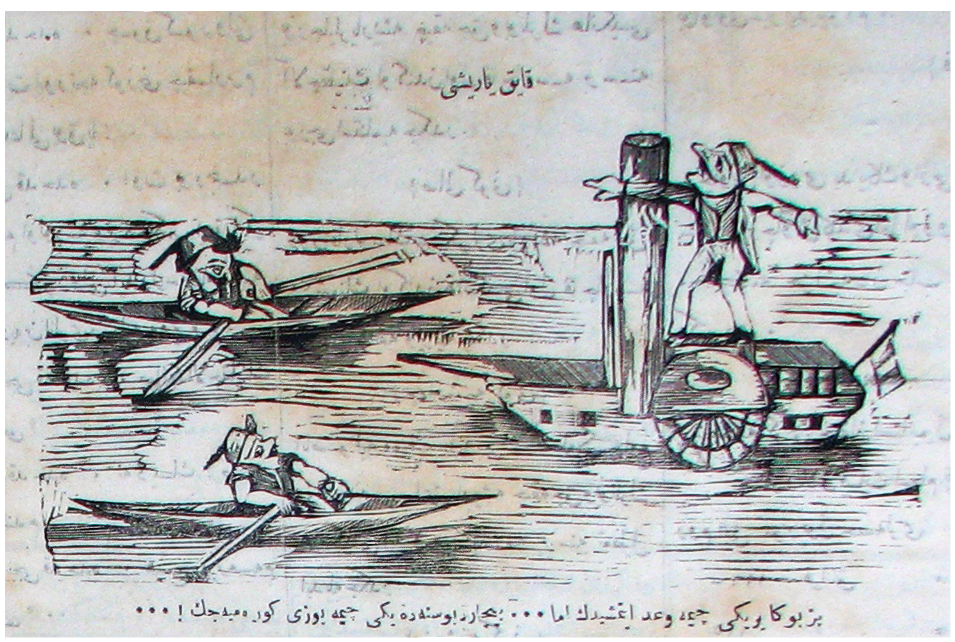
decent sitting places for passengers unable to afford seats, which were only available in the first-class area (*mevki*).[133] *Latife* also complained that the company was only looking after its own interest, had no concerns for the public wellbeing, and was not spending its profits to improve the transport experience for the public.[134] As a matter of fact, the first

133 'Şu âlemde bir türlü rahat bir yer bulunamayacak vesselam. Tramvaya binilse ayakta durmaya yer yoktur. Üsküdar vapurunda ise mevkisiz oturacak mahal bulunmaz. Kıç kamarası, yan kamaraları, davlumbaz üstü mevki inhisarına alınmış. Vâkıâ baş şu inhisardan hariç kalmış ise orayı da halatlar, kırık iskemleler, taifeler tuttuğu cihetle avam için tente ve kazgan ve baca üstünden başka yer yoktur. Hâlbuki ki şu günlerde tente üstüne de şilte serilerek mevki yapılacağı rivayet olunuyor. Bu surette avamın haline ah imdat eyleye.' *Tiyatro*, no. 5, 3 April 1290 [15 April 1874], 3–4.

134 'Şirket-i Hayriye: … Mesela adet-i kadimden beri direktör olan zatın maaşından maada hasıl olan ticaretten yüzde on hissesi var. İşte bunun nısfı bari ahalinin istirahatine sarf olunsa herkes de kıvrana kıvrana tahta üstünde oturmaktan kurtulur ya… Velhâsıl Şirket her saniye kendi menfaatini düşüneceğine biraz da ahalinin istirahat ve menfaatini derhatır etse olmaz mı?', *Latife*, no. 3, 19 August 1290 [31 August 1874].

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 11. Tiyatro*, no. 44, 17 August 1290 [29 August 1874], 4.*
'Rowboat Race
Though we had promised a new hawser to this... Poor thing, it won't see a new hawser again this year.'



steamboats were meant to facilitate transport for the ruling classes from Bosphorus, where they had moved their residences.[135]

The next caricature (Fig. 11) from *Tiyatro* is about the miserable state of the steamboats, which may have been a real issue, especially with affordable ones, according to a humorous story in *Latife*. Expensive steamboats were new and decent, and they delivered regular services, whereas the cheaper ones were old, deficient, and not operated regularly.[136] *Latife* reports an excessively long waiting time for the steamboat in Kasımpaşa.[137]Austerity measures were one cause of the slowness, as humorously reported by *Latife*. Accordingly, a steamboat of the Kasımpaşa line had slowed down mid-route due to a lack of fuel. Because it was its last service of the day, the operator did not want to add coal to the boiler. This boat was even slower than the rowboats, prompting a boatman to shout at the steam-

135 Koraltürk 2007, 29–30.
136 'Köprü Üzerinde', *Latife,* no. 13, 23 September 1290 [5 October 1874], 3.
137 'Vay, vay, vay canım…Kasımpaşa'dan Eyüp'e gideceğim diyerek vapur bekleyenlere…' *Latife*, no. 2, 15 August 1290 [27 August 1874], 4.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

boat: 'Either move or clear the way!'[138] It could be that service quality was lower in the lower-income neighbourhood of Kasımpaşa, as a further sign of social segregation. Juxtaposition of a steamboat with the traditional means of transport presents an example of the coexistence of the new and old ways throughout Ottoman humour press,[139] with the humour rooted in the incongruity.[140] This caricaturing method goes back to *Zuarchakhos*, where traditional and fashionable women were also contrasted.[141]

The ridiculing of horse-drawn trams had a moral dimension, one which was not limited to these modern transport means. Transport animals, these gazettes claimed, were undernourished and suffered from overwork, while the operators' sole concern was the profit. The following caricatures from *Tiyatro* and *Latife,* both signed by the Armenian caricaturist Tınghır, depict such treatment of the horses. Not properly fed, they are so skinny that their bones are visible. In the first caricature below (Fig. 12), a starving horse heads towards a coffee workshop (*tahmis*), as written in the upper left, where it smells barley. Here, the reader is confronted with the subtle articulation of multi-layered satire in Baronyan's *Tiyatro*, as the means of transport was not the only target: the issue of food fraud as a matter of morality was often raised in both gazettes, and the adulteration of coffee with barley was but one case mentioned on the page preceding this caricature in the 14th issue.[142]

There was probably more to moral criticism of tramline company, as the service quality might have varied depending on the socio-economic levels of the neighbourhoods. As reported in the late 19th century–although we don't know for how long this was the case–it was rumoured that newly purchased horses were put in service first on the Şişli line and that three years later they were transferred to the Azapkapı line. Finally, after getting much older, they were taken to Topkapı and subsequently to the Samatya line.[143] *Latife* verifies the poor service in Aksaray in 1874 by noting how slow the trams were and how weak the horses were, then holding the tramline company responsible in a witty way.[144] The following year in 1875, *Tiyatro* complained that the tramline company was charging the same price between the stations regardless of the distance. It goes on to recommend that the higher authority that granted the concession to the tramline company to run the operations should be contacted if one wants to end this corruption.[145] Obviously, *Tiyatro* was using the term 'higher authority' to refer to the government.

The second caricature (Fig. 13) below, this time from *Latife*, depicts the slowness of the horse, where even the man with crutches can move faster. At first glance, this might look like a comic print for entertainment purposes, but it was probably addressing the issue

138 'Kasımpaşa'ya işlemekte bulunan vapurlardan 12 numaralı vapur son postasını icra etmekte iken hareketine adeta hiç yürüyemez derece ağırlık gelmiş…Hatta bu aralıkta kayıkçının birinin vapura hiddet edip 'ya al yahut yol ver de geçeyim' diye bağırdığı kemal-i taaccüple işitilmiştir.' *Latife*, no. 17, 7 Teşrin-i Evvel 1290 [19 October 1874], 1.

139 Georgeon 2000, 92.

140 For a discussion on the theory of incongruity, see Billig 2005, 61–3.

141 Kiraz 2024, 117.

142 'Mütalaa' *Tiyatro*, no. 14, 4 May 1290 [16 May 1874], 1.

143 Ahmet Rasim cited in Kayserilioğlu 1998, 86–8.

144 'Ajans Tramvay', *Latife*, no. 2, 15 August 1290 [27 August 1874], 2.

145 'Varaka', *Tiyatro*, no. 64, 31(?) Kānūn-i Evvel 1290 [12 January 1875], 3.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

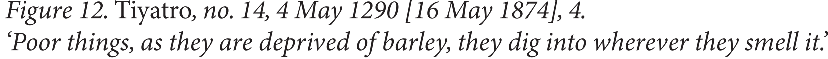


Figure 12. Tiyatro*, no. 14, 4 May 1290 [16 May 1874], 4.*
'Poor things, as they are deprived of barley, they dig into wherever they smell it.'

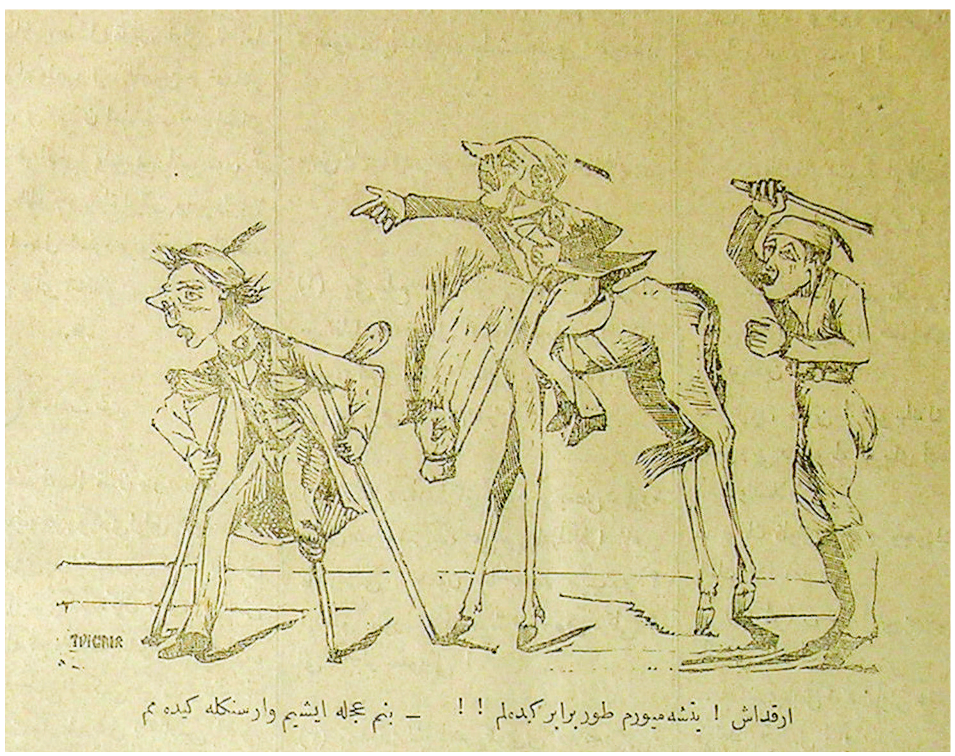
of the 'horses for rent' (*kira beygiri*) suffering from starvation and exhaustion. Another component in the caricature is the driver beating the horse. One week after publishing this, *Latife* complained that drivers in Yenicami and Beyazıt were beating the *kira beygir*s rather than feeding them.[146]

How transport animals are treated was not a modern concern, with regulations to protect them dating back to earlier centuries,[147] but this subject may have acquired another dimension with concerns surrounding civilisational progress specific to the 19th century. Such treatment of transport animals would not have been called civilised behaviour, particularly in an urban setting, and, for sure, would have damaged the modern image of the city. In the 19th century, the beating and overloading of transport animals and burdening of the weak animals was indeed forbidden by municipal law.[148] While addressing animal abuse as a moral issue in the case of the *kira beygir*s could be thought of as indirectly targeting the administrators for letting this happen, the direct targets in other caricatures were the tramline and steamboat companies.

146 'Bir Varakadır ki Re'y el-a'yn Görüldü', *Latife*, no. 8, 5 September 1290 [17 September 1874], 3.
147 Article 156, Code of Sultan Selim, in Akgündüz 1991, 110.
148 Ergin 1995, 1670, 1798.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 13. Latife*, no. 6, 29 August 1290 [10 September 1874], 4.*
'Hey! I can't keep up with you. Wait, let's go together!! –I have an urgent business. I can't go with you.'



The last caricature (Fig. 14), again from *Latife* and signed by Tınghır, is about the subway (Tünel) project between Taksim and Galata. The figure of a man, probably representing the ruling class, towering over the poor old woman representing ordinary people or the ruled class, contrasted in size, is quite symbolic of power relations. As the caricature shows, entry to the tunnel was restricted, especially since one is normally not expected to walk through a subway line. Yet, upon a second look at this caricature, a silent protest, a struggle over the control of urban space, almost reminiscent of today's 'commoning' movements, becomes visible.[149] The woman was claiming, in a sense, a Lefebvrian 'right to the city' in trying to use the passage to Taksim. After the opening of the tunnel, *Latife* this time published news (probably fictitious) about a penniless man managing to walk through the tunnel but then getting caught by the conductor on the other side, reminding the man that 'there is no passage, even underground, for men without money' (*parasız*

149 On city commoning, see Büyüksaraç and Özkan 2020.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 14. Latife*, no. 13, 23 September 1290 [5 October 1874], 4.*
'Where are you going?! Hey! Look at me! –Well, I'm going to Taksim.'

adam için yer altından bile yol yoktur).[150] Indeed, *Latife* did not expect the Tünel project to provide 'public good,' even before it opened.[151] Elsewhere in gazette, the tunnel turns into a monster prepared to swallow people.[152]

Still shuttling today between Karaköy and the lower end of the Grand Rue de Pera (today's İstiklal Street), Tünel is the world's second oldest subway and is also known to

150 'Bir züğürt adamın birisi Galata Tüneli'nin bu başındaki biletçilerin her nasılsa gözlerini boyayıp içeri girebilmiş ve yürüyerek yukarı çıkmış ise de öbür baştaki biletçi merkumu yakalayıp para istemiş...' *Latife*, no. 1, 22 March 1291 [3 April 1875], 2.

151 'Şaşarım, Şaşarım...Galata Tüneli'nin vatana edeceği hizmetten fayda hasıl olacağına...'*Latife*, no. 23, 7 Teşrin-i Sāni 1290 [19 November 1874], 3–4.

152 'Latife'ye Mahsus Telgraflar, Galata Tüneli'nden: Kemal-i dehşet ile adamları yutmaya hazırlanmış isem de henüz nasibim çıkmadı!' *Latife*, no. 11, 16 September 1290 [28 September 1874], 4.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

be the shortest, having only two stations. Undoubtedly a shocking project for its time, the subway was received with suspicion, apart from its potential symbolic value to be used as a manifestation of civilisational progress for Ottoman government. *Tiyatro,* did not contain a caricature on this, but shared *Latife*'s bias through some fictional public reactions published upon the opening of the subway line in January 1875: someone had allegedly found it scary to travel underground, while for some others 'one must be crazy to take the subway.'[153] The major driving factor behind these reactions must have been the concessions, of which both *Latife* and *Tiyatro* were very critical, as shown in the example of tramline company.

French Engineer Eugene Henri Gavand was granted the concession to construct the subway by the Ottoman government in 1868. To put the plan into action, Gavand established a company first in Paris and then in London in 1872. Supposedly designed to provide convenient access from the finance district Galata to Pera, the subway must have been seen as a very profitable venture, attracting numerous local and international investors from the ruling classes, spanning wealthy bankers, merchants, and Ottoman bureaucrats, aside from the significant number of shares held by the engineer Gavand himself. Shares were distributed among the companies in Istanbul, France, and England, as shown by Kentel. The French banker d'Erlanger from London and Camondo, the famous banker of the Ottoman State and the owner of many properties in Pera, held the biggest shares of the subway company. Other shareholders included Charles Helbig, a Levantine businessman from Istanbul; Émile Deveaux, the deputy general manager of Ottoman Bank; Edhem Paşa, the Minister of Public Works; and Ahmet Vefik Efendi, the Minister of Education. More to the point, construction materials and mechanical components were supplied from Europe, particularly France and Italy.[154]

A few months before the subway's opening, *Tiyatro* let its opinion on the project be known by writing: 'as if the Tünel company provided a significant public good for the residents of Istanbul.' It then went on to estimate monthly and annual revenues of the company based on the planned fare (40 *para*) for a single passenger, claiming that revenues would far exceed the cost of construction that the company incurred.[155] Both *Latife* and *Tiyatro* shared the view that the tunnel project was meaningless and did not benefit anyone other than the company. As a matter of fact, 'public good' was supposedly a criterion of the Ottoman government in the decision-making processes before the concessions are given.[156]

Caricatures falling under the themes of *alafranga*, urban reforms, and transport means could thus be thought of as subverting the government and dominant classes through indirect satire. Yet, the question remains: How much did they influence public opinion? Information about the reception and the political impact of Ottoman caricatures

153 'İstanbul ahalisince Tünel'in Tesiri: Muhaverat', *Tiyatro*, no. 65, 18 Kānūn-i Sāni 1290 [30 January 1875], 2.

154 Kentel 2018, 108–13.

155 'Galata'nın Tüneli: –Ey ne olmuş bakalım. Sanki Tünel Şirketi Dersaadet ahalisine büyük bir hizmet etmiş…' *Tiyatro*, no. 57, 2 Teşrin-i Evvel 1290 [14 October 1874], 2.

156 Çelik 1986, 50–1, 74–5.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

in the 19th century is the most difficult to retrieve, also because no subscription lists are available. It has been shown that Teodor Kasap was a politically influential figure of the 19th century[157] and that Baronyan's *Tiyatro* was a fierce correspondent of Teodor Kasap's humour gazette *Hayal*. Baronyan must also have been a noteworthy individual, considering that Bardakjian notes that his humour gazettes were closed after criticising some Ottoman Armenian bureaucrats and the Patriarchate, bothering them enough that they filed a complaint against him.[158]

5. Conclusion

Roughly from 1874 to 1875, the visuals in *Tiyatro* and *Latife* could mostly be characterised as straightforward illustrations rather than caricatures. It is thus astonishing to see that *Zuarchakhos* contained plenty of illustrations using caricaturing techniques about 15 years before the first caricatures appeared in humour gazettes in Ottoman Turkish script. The freedom of the Ottoman humour press, however, did not follow a steady or progressive line of development in the 19th century. Press regulations requiring moral instruction, while banning political satire and lampoonery, again allegedly for moral reasons, defined the nature of the humour in the caricatures. The forms of humour that these caricatures primarily employed were jokes and wit rather than satire and lampoonery. Even when satire was used, it was usually gentle and blended with wit. Rare cases of political and direct satire were punished, as in the case of Kasap's gazettes. Most caricatures were thus initially normative and humoristic rather than subversive and satirical. Satirical nature of the caricatures increased as of 1875–1876 until the suspension of the humour press during the Hamidian period.

In the 19th century, the discourse of morality, which is still used by politicians as a form of populist discourse, especially in authoritarian states with traditional, paternalistic societies, included elements of Ottoman political discourse. Morality as an ambiguous concept provided the government with the justification they needed to impose a ban on satire, particularly political satire, and lampoonery. Humour gazettes, tasked by the government with moral instruction, were also shaped by a discourse of morality. In this way the government could also sustain the imagined conservative and communitarian society, and thus moral ideology, at a discursive level. Taken as discursive formations, however, these caricatures approached certain topics by raising them as moral issues, allowing for indirect satire and indirect political satire. In *Latife* and *Tiyatro*, represented by *Bey*s and *Efendi*s, Ottoman civil bureaucracy, merchants, traders of fashion commodities, bankers, and entrepreneurs, some of whom were also involved in economic concessions, were depicted as morally corrupt individuals for several reasons, in addition to capitalizing on and profiting from urbanisation and new market conditions with unjust gains at the expense of public well-being, they were all at once listed in the ironic list of 'winners' pub-

157 For most recent studies on Kasap as a political figure see, Elfenbein 2017; Benlisoy, Şahin and Topal 2022.

158 Bardakjian 1979, 88, 12–5; 144–5.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

lished by the two gazettes. *Alafranga* luxuries and overspending on the part of the ruling classes did not comport with Ottoman middle class economic values and further distanced them from ordinary people. Laughter at the vanity, showing-off, and pretentiousness of the dominant classes was just one of many continuities between *Zuarchakhos* and later Ottoman humour press exemplified by *Latife* and *Tiyatro*. The latter then brought in the topics of urbanisation and transportation from the perspective of their own historical background. As an Armeno-Turkish gazette *Zuarchakhos* can be thought of mainly as a community gazette, whereas *Tiyatro* and *Latife* were published for the wider Ottoman public. Of the three gazettes, *Tiyatro* wrote the boldest and most satirical content.

These caricatures are best understood with the accompanying textual parts of the gazettes. A second reading reveals that inner criticism of these caricatures were the social inequalities, spatial segregation, and lack of public responsibility that these gazettes observed and raised as moral issues. These were the results of profit-driven and socially exclusive urbanisation and transportation, providing no 'public good' and only benefiting the ruling classes, according to these periodicals. These aligned with the findings of the revisionist scholarship on the transformation of 19th-century Istanbul, beyond a modernist interpretation. All in all, these caricatures indirectly subverted the government and the ruling classes on behalf of the 'ruled,' maintaining the tradition of Ottoman verbal humour. In shadow theatre, Karagöz always beat Hacivat, providing emotional relief from the dominance of the ruling classes. Caricatures as historical materials are underappreciated, considering the unique evidence they can offer due to their historical context. As a final remark, this article has attempted to contribute to the study of little-known Armeno-Turkish humour gazettes, as an integral part of the Ottoman humour press. Indeed, there were many continuities between *Zuarchakhos* and later humour press, although the gazettes of the Ottoman Armenian community were conceived as isolated cases in both Armenian and Turkish national historiography.

Bibliography

Unpublished Primary Sources

T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri (Osmanlı Arşivi), Istanbul

Hariciye Nezâreti, Tahrirât-ı Hariciye Odası (B.O.A, HR.TH.) 155-40.

Rare Books (Ataturk Library of Istanbul Municipality, Google Books)

Aucher, Father Paschal and Brand, John. 1825. *A Dictionary Armenian and English*. Venice: Armenian Academy of S. Lazarus.

Darqué, Félix Émile. 1878. *A French Grammar in Two Parts for the Use of Public and Middle-Class Schools: Part I*. London, Edinburgh: Gall and Inglis.

Garabedyan, Bedros Zeki. 1907. *Medz Paṛaran Ḥayeren Osmaneren*. G.Bolis [Istanbul]: V. Ev Ḥ. Der Nersesyan.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Hagopian, V.H. 1907. *A Dictionary English-Armenian*. Constantinople [Istanbul]: Press of H. Matteosian.
Lady Hornby. 1863. *Constantinople During the Crimean War*. London: Richard Bentley, Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty.
Redhouse, Sir James William. 1880. *Redhouse's Turkish Dictionary in Two Parts. English and Turkish, and Turkish and English*. London: Bernard Quaritch.
Salâhî, Mehmed. 1313 [1897]. *Kamus-i Osmanî. Türkçede Kullanılan Arabi, Farisi, Ecnebi Kaffe-i Lugata Havidir*. Vol. 2. *Kısm-ı Evvel*. Istanbul: Mahmut Bey Matbaası.
Sami, Şemseddin. 1317 [1900]. *Kamus-i Turkî*. Dersaadet [Istanbul]: İkdam Matbaası.
Vartanyan, Hovsep. 1852. *Boşboğaz Bir Adem*. Kostantaniye [Istanbul]: Mühendisoğlu.

Periodicals (Mekhitarist Congregation Library Vienna, National Library of Armenia, Beyazıt State Library Hakkı Tarık Us Periodicals Collection TUFS, Ataturk Library of Istanbul Municipality, The AGBU Nubarian Library).

Baronyan, Agop (ed.). *Tiyatro*. 1290–1291 [1874–1875]. Istanbul.
Beykozluyan, Zakarya (ed.). *Latife*. 1290–1291 [1874–1875]. Istanbul.
Kasap, Teodor (ed.). *Diyojen*, no. 1. 12 Teşrin-i Sāni [24 November 1870]. Istanbul.
– (ed.). *Hayal*, no. 6. 8 Teşrin-i Sāni 1289 [20 November 1873]. Istanbul.
Meddah, no. 1, 10 Muharrem 1292 [16 February 1875]. Istanbul: n.p.
Mehmet Arif Efendi (ed.). Şarivari Medeniyet, no. 3, 6 Teşrin-i Sāni 1290 [18 November 1874]. Istanbul.
Râşid, Ali (ed.). *Terakki*, no. 6–8. 1 Rabiʿul-āhir 1287 [1 July 1870]. Istanbul.
Sıvacıyan, Harutyun. *Meghu*. no. 1. 15 September 1856. Gosdant'nubōlis [Istanbul]: Yeghpartsʿ Arabyan.
Zuarchakhos. 1856. no. 1.3. Constantinople [Istanbul]: Yeghpartsʿ Arabyan.

Primary Sources

Akgündüz, Ahmed. 1991. *Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukukî Tahlilleri III. Yavuz Sultan Selim Devri Kanunnâmeleri*. Istanbul: Fey Vakfı Yayınları.
Azatean, Tʿ. 1948. *Zhamanak: Kʿaṛasnameay Ḥishatakaran 1908–1948*. Galata: Becid Basımevi.
Balcı, Emrah (trans.). 2019. Ahmet Mithat Efendi. 1292 [1875]. *Felâtun Bey ile Râkım Efendi*. Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
Cankara, Murat (trans.). 2017. Hovsep Vartanyan. 1852. *Boşboğaz Bir Âdem*. Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları.
Cezā Ḳānunnāme-i Hümāyûn 1858. 1289 [1872]. Article 139. In *Düstur* (Tertib 1). 1.1. Istanbul: Matbʿaa-i Āmire. 568. URL: https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/items/943870e6-d252- 4eeb-a24d-eddaad616be8 (last accessed 18 August 2025).
Ergin, Osman Nuri. 1995 [1330/1914]. *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*. Vols. 2–5. Istanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı.
Matbûʿât Nizamnâmesi 1864. 1289 [1872]. Article 1. In *Düstur* (Tertib 1). 1.2. Istanbul: Matbʿaa-i Āmire. 220. URL: https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/items/943870e6-d252-4eeb-a24d-eddaad616be8 (last accessed 18 August 2025).
Şahin, Seval, Topal, Alp Eren and Benlisoy, Stefo (eds.). 2022 (1873). *Çıngıraklı Tatar. Bütün Sayılar* by Kasap, Teodor. Istanbul: İstos Yayın.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Tietze, Andreas (transl.). 1991. Vartanyan, Hovsep. 1851. *Akabi Hikyayesi. İlk Türkçe Roman*. Istanbul: Eren Yayınları.
Us, Hakkı Tarık (ed.). 1939. *Meclis-i Mebusan, 1293–1877 Zabıt Ceridesi*. Istanbul: Vakit Gazete-Matbaa-Kütüphane.

Secondary Sources

Abou-El-Haj, Rifaʿat ʿAli. 1988. 'The Ottoman nasihatname as a discourse over morality'. In Temimi, Abdeljelil (ed.). *Mélanges Professeur Robert Mantran*. Zaghouan: Centre d'Études et de Recherches Ottomanes, Morisques, de Documentation et d'Information. 17–30.
Akın, Nur. 1998. *19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Galata ve Pera*. Istanbul: Literatür Yayıncılık.
Artinian, Vartan. 1988. *The Armenian Constitutional System in the Ottoman Empire,1839–1863: A Study of its Historical Development*. Istanbul: n.p.
Bardakjian, Kevork. 1979. 'Hagop Baronian's Political and Social Satire'. PhD dissertation, Oxford University, Oxford.
Baruh, Lorans İzabel. 2009. 'The Transformation of the "Modern" Axis of Nineteenth-Century Istanbul. Property, Investments and Elites from Taksim Square to Sirkeci Station'. PhD dissertation, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul.
Barsoumian, Hagop. 1982. 'The Dual Role of the Armenian Amira Class Within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian Millet (1750–1850)'. In Braude, Benjamin and Lewis, Bernard (eds.). *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*. Vol. I. *The Central Lands*. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers. 171–184.
–. 1997. 'The Eastern Question and the Tanzimat Era'. In Hovannisian, Richard G. (ed.). *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times 2*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 175–201.
Basmajian, Gabriel, Hacikyan, Agop Jack et al. (eds.). 2005. *The Heritage of Armenian Literature*. Vol. III. *From the Eighteenth Century to Modern Times*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. London: Sage Publications.
Brummett, Palmira. 2018. 'Censorship in Late Ottoman Istanbul. The Ordinary, The Extraordinary, The Visual'. *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*. 5.2. 75–98.
–. 2000. *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908–1911*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press.
Cankara, Murat. 2011. 'İmparatorluk ve Roman. Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Romanları Osmanlı/Türk Edebiyat Tarihyazımında Konumlandırmak'. PhD dissertation, Bilkent University, Ankara.
–. 2014. 'Reading Akabi, (Re-) Writing History. On the Questions of Currency and Interpretation of Armeno-Turkish Fiction'. In Balta, Evangelia and Ölmez, Mehmet (eds.). *Cultural Encounters in the Turkish-Speaking Communities of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Istanbul: ISIS Press. 53–75.
–. 2015a. 'Rethinking Ottoman Cross-Cultural Encounters. Turks and the Armenian Alphabet'. *Middle Eastern Studies*. 51.1. 1–16.
–. 2015b. 'Çifte Maduniyet, Çifte İşlev: Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Basında Dil ve Kimlik'. *Ankara Üniversitesi İlef Dergisi*. 2.2. 105–130.
Cebe, Günil Özlem Ayaydın. 2016. 'To Translate or Not to Translate? 19th Century Ottoman Communities and Fiction'. *Die Welt des Islams*. 56.2. 187–222.
Çelik, Hülya and Sargsyan, Ani. 2022. 'Introducing Transcription Standards for Armeno-Turkish Literary Studies'. *Diyâr*. 3.2. 161–189.
Çelik, Zeynep. 1986. *The Remaking of Istanbul. Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Çeviker, Turgut. 1986. *Gelişim Sürecinde Türk Karikatürü-I. Tanzimat ve İstibdat Dönemi, 1867–1878/1878–1908*. Istanbul: Adam Yayınları.

Demirel, Fatmagül. 2007. *II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Sansür. İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık.*

Der Matossian, Bedross. 2019. 'The Development of Armeno-Turkish (Hayatar T 'rk 'erēn) in the 19th Century Ottoman Empire. Marking and Crossing Ethnoreligious Boundaries'. *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*. 8.1. 1–34.

Duman, Hasan. 2000. *Başlangıcından Harf Devrimine Kadar Osmanlı-Türk Süreli Yayınlar ve Gazeteler Bibliyografyası ve Toplu kataloğu, 1828–1928*. Ankara: Enformasyon ve Dokümantasyon Hizmetleri Vakfı.

Elfenbein, Madeleine. 2017. 'No Empire for Old Men: The Young Ottomans and the World, 1856–1878.' PhD dissertation, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

Elmas, Elif. 2013. 'Teodor Kassab's Adaption of the Ottoman Shadow Theatre Karagöz'. In Harder, Hans and Mittler, Barbara (eds.). *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair,* Transcultural Research-Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer. 245–271.

–. 2016. *Die Balkankrise von 1875 bis 1878 im Spiegel osmanischer und westlicher Karikaturen*, History of Culture of the Modern Near and Middle East. Bern: Peter Lang Publishing.

Farber, Jerry. 2007. 'Toward a Theoretical Framework for the Study of Humor in Literature and the Other Arts'. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 41.4. 67–86.

Findley, Carter Vaughn. 2014. *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Fortna, Benjamin C. 2000. 'Islamic Morality in Late Ottoman "Secular" Schools'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 32.3. 369–393.

Georgeon, François. 1998. '*Şehrin Aynası: Osmanlı Mizah Basını'. Elif Akçetin (çev.). Toplumsal Tarih*. 49. 24–28.

–. 2000. 'Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Gülmek Mi?' In Georgeon, François and Fenoglio, Irène (eds.). *Doğu'da Mizah*. Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları. 79–101.

Gerçek, Selim Nüzhet. 1942. *Türk Temaşası.* Istanbul: Kanaat Kitabevi.

Göçek, Fatma Müge. 1998. 'Political Cartoons as a Site of Representation and Resistance in the Middle East.' In Göçek, Müge (ed.). *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers. 1–12.

Gökçek, Fazıl (trans.). 2016. Ahmet Mithat Efendi. 1312 [1894]. *Avrupa Adab-ı Muaşereti Yahut Alafranga*. Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları.

Hanioğlu, M. Şükrü. 2008. *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Harder, Hans and Mittler, Barbara (eds.). 2013. *Asian Punches. A Transcultural Affair*, Transcultural Research-Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context. Berlin/Heildelberg: Springer.

Heinzelmann, Tobias. 1999. *Die Balkankrise in der osmanischen Karikatur*. Stuttgart: Steiner.

–. 2004. *Osmanlı Karikatüründe Balkan Sorunu. 1908–1914*. İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi.

Işın, Ekrem. 1995. *İstanbul'da Gündelik Hayat*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

Kayserilioğlu, R. Sertaç. 1998. *Dersaadet'ten İstanbul'a Tramvay I*. Istanbul: İETT Genel Müdürlüğü.

Kentel, Mehmet Koca. 2018. 'Assembling "Cosmopolitan" Pera. An Infrastructural History of Late Ottoman Istanbul'. PhD dissertation. University of Washington, Seattle.

Keyder, Çağlar. 2018. 'Imperial, National and Global Istanbul. Three Istanbul "Moments" from the Nineteenth to Twenty-First Centuries'. In Fisher-Onar, Nora, Pierce, Susan C. et al. (eds.). *Istanbul. Living with Difference in a Global City*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 25–37.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - cc BY

Kiraz, Elif. 2024. *Osmanlı Mizah Basınının Başlangıcı: Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Mizah Gazetesi Zvarcakhos* '*Latifeci'(1856)*. Istanbul: Libra Kitap.
Koraltürk, Murat. 2007. *Şirket-i Hayriye: 1851–1945*. Istanbul: İDO.
Marcella, Valentina. 2022. *Laughing Matters. Graphic Satire Reckoning with the 1980 Coup in Turkey*. Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino.
–. 2021. '"A Satirical Magazine in Its Own Way." Politicisation and Dissent in Gırgır (1972–1983)'. *Diyâr*. 2.2. 329–348.
Mardin, Şerif. 1974. 'Super Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century'. In Benedict, Peter, Tümertekin, Erol et al. (eds.). *Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. 403–449.
–. 2000. *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought. A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*. USA: Syracuse University Press.
Mildanoğlu, Zakarya. 2014. *Ermenice Süreli Yayınlar 1794–2000*. Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık.
Moores, John Richard. 2015. *Representations of France in English Satirical Prints, 1740–1832*. New York/Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
Moran, Berna. 1983. *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış*. Istanbul: İletisim Yayınları.
Nalbandian, Louise. 1963. *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement. The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Neumann, Christoph K. 2011. 'Modernitelerin Çatışması. Altıncı Daire-i Belediye, 1857–1912'. In Köse, Yavuz (ed.). *İstanbul: İmparatorluk Başkentinden Megakente*. Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi. 426–455.
Oğuz, Çiğdem. 2021. *Moral Crisis in the Ottoman Empire. Society, Politics, and Gender during WWI.* London.
Okyar, İlkim Büke. 2023. *Arabs in Turkish Political Cartoons, 1876–1950: National Self and Non-National Other*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
Ortaylı, İlber. 1987. *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*. İstanbul: Hil Yayın.
Oshagan, Vahé. 1997. 'Modern Armenian Literature and Intellectual History from 1700 to 1915'. In Hovannisian, Richard G. (ed.). *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times 2*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 140–174.
Özdiş, Hamdi. 2010. *Osmanlı Mizah Basınında Batılılaşma ve Siyaset, 1870–1877. Diyojen ve Çaylak Üzerinde Bir Araştırma*. Istanbul: Libra Kitap.
Özkan, Derya and Büyüksaraç, Güldem Baykal (eds.). 2020. *Commoning the City: Empirical Perspectives on Urban Ecology, Economics and Ethics*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
Pamuk, Şevket. 1987. *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913*. Vol. 12. *Trade, Investment and Production*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Pamukciyan, Kevork. 2002. *Ermeni Kaynaklarından Tarihe Katkılar -2. Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Metinler*. Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık.
–. 2003. *Ermeni Kaynaklarından Tarihe Katkılar -4. Biyografileriyle Ermeniler*. Istanbul: Aras Yayıncılık.
Parla, Jale. 1990. *Babalar ve Oğullar. Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
–. 2001. 'Tanzimat Edebiyatı'nda Siyasi Fikirler,' In Alkan, Mehmet Ö., Gültekingil, Murat and Bora, Tanıl (eds.). Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 1: Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası, Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet'in Birikimi. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları. 223–233.
Price, Richard Geoffrey George. 1957. *A History of Punch*. London: Collins.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Rosenthal, Steven. 1982. 'Minorities and Municipal Reform in Istanbul, 1850–1870'. In Braude, Benjamin and Lewis, Bernard (eds.). *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*. Vol. I. *The Central Lands*. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers. 369–385.

Shaw, Stanford Jay and Shaw, Ezel Kural. 1976. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey.* Vol. I. *Empire of the Gazis. The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1280–1808*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

–. 1977. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey.* Vol. II. *Reform, Revolution, and Republic. The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Step'anyan, G. Kh. 1963. 'Hay Liragrayin Tsaghrankarch'ut'yan Skizbě'. *Haykakan SSṚ Gitut'yunneri Akademiayi Teghekagir*. 3. 83–86. URL: https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/119934 (last accessed: 1 June 2023).

Stepanyan, Hasmik A. 2005. *Ermeni Harfli Türkçe Kitaplar ve Süreli Yayınlar Bibliyografyası (1727–1968)*. Istanbul: Turkuaz Yayınları.

Strauss, Johann. 2001. 'Notes on the First Satirical Journals in the Ottoman Empire'. In Pistor-Hatam, Anja (ed.). *Amtsblatt, Vilayet Gazetesi und Unabhängiges Journal, die Anfänge der Presse im Nahen Osten*, *Heidelberger Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des modernen Vorderen Orients* 27. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH. 121–138.

–. 2003. 'Who Read What in the Ottoman Empire (19th–20th Centuries)?'. *Arabic Middle Eastern Literatures*. 6.1. 39–76.

Uygur, Kübra. 2021. 'Understanding a Hybrid Print Media and Its Influence on Public Opinion: The Case of Armeno-Turkish Periodical Press in the Ottoman Empire, 1850–1875'. PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, Birmingham.

Ülgener, Sabri Fehmi. 1981. *İktisadî Çözülmenin Ahlâk ve Zihniyet Dünyası*. İstanbul: Der.

Yosmaoğlu, İpek K. 2003. 'Chasing the Printed Word: Press Censorship in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1913'. *The Turkish Studies Association Journal*. 27.1/2. 15–49.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Juho Korhonen

Department of Central Eurasian Studies,
Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies,
Indiana University Bloomington, USA
Jukorho@iu.edu

Scoffing at Empires: Late Ottoman Empire in the Political Satirical Imagination of the Grand Duchy of Finland

Abstract

The Ottoman Empire is examined through the eyes of the satirical press in the Grand Duchy of Finland of the Russian Empire from 1908 to 1914. A view from the periphery and through visual satire offers a more encompassing understanding of world politics at the time. Empires, nations, and their metropoles promoted essentialised, monolithic representations that continue to resonate today and have actively occluded from sight a much more contested structure of global politics based on a variety of intra- to inter-imperial configurations. What was portrayed at the time as a stark divide between the Ottomans and Europe becomes merely a staged theatre act played out by empires when seen through the eyes of Finnish peripheral observers. The Ottoman Empire represented just another reference point through which the ills of the wider system could be portrayed and inter-imperial conflicts could be critically compared against intra-imperial politics. As such, the need for transnational analyses is highlighted across metropole–periphery and Eurocentric divides to understand what was comparable and commensurate in the eyes of contemporaries and how. By doing so, I contribute to works that seek to deconstruct historical dichotomies and metropole-centrisms.

Keywords: visual satire, Grand Duchy of Finland, Ottoman Empire, intra- and inter-imperial, periphery

1. Introduction

This contribution offers a perspective on the Ottoman Empire on the stage of world politics in the early 20th century as viewed from the periphery of the Russian Empire, specifically the Grand Duchy of Finland. As a consequence of its struggles to maintain autonomy within the Russian Empire, Finland fostered a lively political imagination of world affairs, including the publication of several visual satire magazines commenting on local and world affairs. Following the developments of world politics and different empires was a means for the Grand Duchy to position itself most prudently within global developments and thereby secure a more advantageous place within the Russian Empire. As such, Finnish views of the Ottomans highlight the global circulation of ideas and also present a non-sovereign peripheral view, against the grain of imperial sovereign power.

From this perspective, the depiction of the late Ottoman Empire in the Finnish satirical press, first, underlies a view of hypocritical and greedy Great Power politics that detrimentally undermine their own foundations. Second, the importance of comparisons across empires and their peripheries is a key aspect of the Finnish imagination around

Diyâr, 7. Jg., 1/2026, S. 51–76, DOI: 10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1-51

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

the Ottoman Empire. Finnish actors sought to navigate global politics as a peripheral, non-sovereign state amidst sovereign empires. To make this distinction, an important comparative aspect was to juxtapose intra-imperial and inter-imperial relations and politics against each other.[1] Finns then did not view the Ottomans as a comparable 'other' or engage in direct comparisons as most imperial metropoles did.[2]

The political satirical imaginary about the Ottoman Empire in the Finnish perspective pitches imperial power politics, which Finland saw itself subjected to as well, against the desire for maintaining and abiding by an international status quo of almost apolitical imperial sovereignty, distanced from local and national politics. Lastly, this chapter reflects on how, from this Finnish perspective, the rise of independent nation-states and finally the Turkish Republic, through the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, appeared to signal the ills of the era for weak, non-sovereign nations. Perhaps paradoxically, the decline of the empire was largely considered a tragedy and an unfortunate event.

1.1 Visual Satire, Symbolic Power and Historical Analysis

Visual satire makes fun of political developments by exposing true intentions and drawing connections between actors and positions that otherwise aim to portray themselves as separate. The Finnish views on the Ottoman Empire are a case in point. By comparing the Ottomans to other empires, these satirical images could question the constructed images of European empires versus others as well as their self-proclaimed reasoning and motivation on the world stage. Satirical images, then, offer a particular window especially into analysing history as it was seen unfolding by contemporaries and as such also into symbolic contestations that were being played out.[3] What did the peripheral Finns point their finger at and laugh in looking at the Ottomans? By asking this question, we can begin to unpack those contestations and the pretensions that were going on at that time and distance them from the mainstream historical narratives constructed retrospectively, and often from more metropolitan, methodologically nationalist, or Eurocentric perspectives.[4]

1 This comparative framework between intra-imperial and inter-imperial politics, based on the historical context of the time, is followed in this paper. For more on the intra- and inter-imperial framework, see Korhonen 2025a.

2 This highlights the need for transnational analyses across metropole-periphery and Eurocentric divides to understand what was comparable and commensurate and especially how things were seen as comparable and commensurate in the eyes of contemporaries. For example, a focus purely on the Ottoman metropole—or the British metropole for that matter—will provide a limited understanding of the visual satire of the era. See also Kollatz and Wagner forthcoming.

3 Korhonen forthcoming.

4 This article joins recent efforts in using visual satire in historical analysis not as representations of past events 'as they really were' or as supplementary to other sources, but as having a particular kind of agency in their own right in shaping historical narratives and offering a view into the politics of history of the time, often especially as it played out on the international stage. See also Scully et al. 2025.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Particularly, in bringing complexity into our historical understanding and incorporating a viewpoint that seeks to critique imperial relations as they were constructed by the empires themselves–a perspective replete with Orientalism and self-appraisal in the case of other empires' views on the Ottomans in the early 20th century–this analysis of visual satire of Ottomans on the world stage, but from a non-imperial and peripheral perspective, also builds upon the work of Aydin-Düzgit et al.[5] They argue that 'stressing the historical variations in identity representations and images [...] bears a high degree of contemporary political relevance.'[6] They suggest that historical variation helps counter the re-production of previous antagonistic historical representations of the Other in today's politics. In this case, a focus on the one-sided, orientalist views of European empires towards the Ottomans have been mobilised to justify neo-Ottoman views and have as such reproduced some of the same symbolic contestations and projections that the Finnish satirical press was making fun of and the European powers asserted.

This analysis is based on images selected from four major political satire journals published in the Grand Duchy of Finland between 1905–1915 (*Fyren*, *Tuulispää*, *Kurikka*, and *Velikulta*).[7] This was the period during which the Ottomans featured most prominently in these visual satires, due to the constitutional reforms in Russia and the Ottoman Empire as well as the Balkan independence movements, the Balkan Crisis and Wars, and thereafter the Ottomans' participation in the First World War.

Here it is useful to point out, as will be discussed below, that at the time in the Finnish press and in the images included here the concept of Turkey (Turkki), the Sultan (sulttaani), and Ottomans (Osmania) are used interchangeably to denote the Ottoman Empire and specifically its sovereign status. Specifically in visual satire, the Ottoman Empire was in fact more often referred to as Turkey.

For this study, I identified 31 images that clearly made reference to the Ottomans or Turkey. Minor references, sidenotes, or portrayals were more abundant but not useful for analysing the Finnish view on the Ottomans in particular. After a preliminary analysis, 11 images that most directly depict the Ottomans and Turkey and also offer varied views on them were selected for a more detailed description below. The images left out did not offer alternative views differing from those presented here.

I begin by describing the Finnish political satirical imagination of the Ottoman Empire. I then contextualise that description through how the Ottomans were generally perceived and portrayed in Europe and–against that background–by highlighting what was specific

5 Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2022a, 2022b.

6 Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2022b, 22.

7 The four journals represent four different political movements in the Grand Duchy of Finland. Now and then Finland was a bilingual state, and one of these periodicals—*Fyren*—was published in the Swedish language and the three others in Finnish. While the journals' political stances varied domestically, they all supported Finnish autonomy, and their views on imperial and global politics were close to each other, as the analysis in this paper also shows. *Kurikka* had the fewest relevant images, and as such perhaps the most domestic focus. As a result, no images from *Kurikka* were ultimately included in the analysis. I have discussed these journals in more depth in other publications; see Korhonen 2019 and forthcoming.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

about the Finnish imagination regarding the Ottomans and what this difference might contribute to wider historical analysis.

2. Perceptions and Portrayals of the Ottoman Empire in Finland

Here I analyse and describe 11 representative portrayals of the Ottoman Empire in the Finnish satirical press. The images here run from 1908 to 1914 and are connected to constitutional reforms and then the Balkan Wars and the First World War and international diplomacy around them. Main identifiers of the Ottoman Empire are clothing, the Sultan's recognisable face, the crescent moon, and references to a 'sick man' or to a fur coat. The latter is based on a wordplay in Finnish that featured often in the satirical images. In Finnish, '*turkki*' means a fur coat and 'Turkki' means Turkey. The sultan is therefore often represented wearing a fur coat. In one image even just a fur coat and a fez hat are sufficient to denote the Ottoman Empire/'Turkey.' In my empirical sources, the concepts 'Turkki' or '*Turkin sulttaani*' meaning the Sultan of Turkey were used interchangeably with the concepts of the Ottomans or the Ottoman Empire.[8]

Throughout the images certain general themes and motives are recognisable. Most of the time, the Ottomans are depicted in comparison or interaction with empires or with the small states of the Balkans such as Bulgaria, Montenegro, or Serbia.[9] In many cases, the Ottomans are being mistreated by the others in concert. The Ottomans are usually seen as not worrying about change and the dangers to them and around them or being oblivious to them. Relatedly, the Ottomans are seen as identifying with the international 'status quo' vis-à-vis change. Unlike the other empires, and in contrast to portrayals in the French or British press, the Ottomans are not portrayed as conniving but rather as simply being left out.

Following the creation of imperial constitutions in the Russian and the Ottoman Empires, the satirical journal *Fyren* compared the two constitutions. Giving a positive view of the Ottomans, the visual satire in question made fun of the Russian constitution by also displaying the two constitutions as the physical constitutions of the characters representing the two empires. Similarly, the term hangers refers here to clothes hangers or gallows, which one can see pictured on the Russian side.

This visual satire follows a long-term trope in the satirical press of the Grand Duchy of Finland. From the perspective of a non-sovereign, small, and peripheral state, comparisons of various empires lent themselves to mockery and political ridicule, especially of Finland's own host empire, Russia. The topic of Russian failures at its constitutional reform was made even more politically comical by Finland's own success in parliamentary reform. Reading the caption we notice that the satire also pokes fun at Russia's attitude toward the Ottoman Empire. The two empires often compared themselves to each

8 In the one Swedish-language Finnish source that I analyse, the journal *Fyren*, the Finnish play on words does not work and we find the term 'Osmania' in use.

9 Though in many cases in these portrayals, it was not even deemed necessary to specify which small state was in question.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 1. Fyren*, 29 August 1908.*
'Two Constitutions.' 'Osmania: Won't you congratulate me, little mother, on my new constitution? Russia: What a constitution! Without pads and bandages, without hangers! A Turkish "constitution", Thyi!'

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - cc BY

other, and Russia sought to portray the Ottomans as even more uncivilised and barbaric than Russia itself; in effect they competed at modernisation efforts. The Finnish portrayal, however, makes fun of the hypocracy underlying these projections.

While the new Ottoman constitution was celebrated, at the same time the position of the empire on the international stage was recognised as declining. It is important to note, that from the Finnish perspective these two aspects were not problematic. An empire with a strong constitution but little strength and ambition was seen as beneficial for small nations and autonomous politics. However, as the caricature in Figure 2 shows, this brings about the problem of what other powers would do. In the picture, Germany, Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, France, Russia, and England are shown as supposedly peacefully smoking an Ottoman-style pipe together, with Turkish tobacco. However, we can see that in reality they are 'waiting for the inheritance,' getting ready to attack each other to claim the spoils from Turkey's downfall (depicted by the ailing sultan).

This image represents a Finnish viewpoint that was repeated several times in my sources, highlighting the bad intentions and greedyness of other international powers regarding the Ottomans' weakened position. This visual satire was published following the Bosnian Crisis, the announcement by Austria-Hungary in early October 1908 of the official annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As a result of the Balkan Wars starting in early October 1912 and the Italo-Turkish War preceding it, the Finnish journal *Fyren* portrays the death of Status Quo in Figure 3. Only the Ottomans are shown as trying to uphold the symbolic Status Quo, while the Balkan nations are attacking it. Importantly, the other Great Powers and international diplomats are shown to be happily looking with no intention to intervene. This was seen as the end of the post-San Stefano geopolitical order, as referenced in the visual satire. In an imagological interpretation, 'His Excellency Status Quo' here is a personification of the changing imperial politics and the instrumentalisation of the nationalities question as part of inter-imperial conflicts.

The fact that international and specifically inter-imperial status quo could be upset and the question of national development could be made a tool of Great Power interests, brought in from the intra-imperial sphere of politics, was a troublesome prospect for the Finns. Other empires and inter-imperial politics were seen as crucial for upholding autonomy and resisting metropolitan interference in Finland's national matters within the Russian Empire.[10] Even if acting for reasons of self-interest, the Ottoman Empire is seen and depicted here as the only party true to its word and the agreed upon order of things. As the caption points out, at the time of his death this symbolic Status Quo was still a young man of favourable appearance and in the prime of his age. It is as if those who brought it to the world, except for the Ottomans, had now failed him and allowed him to die prematurely.

The Balkan wars were followed keenly in Finland, as the Finns saw new small states challenge imperial power. Using an imagery similar to the previous one, the caricature in Figure 4 made a mockery of the predicted outcome of the war vis-à-vis its actual outcome and of the failure of traditional imperial diplomacy, represented again as the diplomat Status Quo, to approach this new situation. We see the positions change between the Otto-

10 Korhonen 2019.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 2. Tuulispää, *23 October 1908.*
'Waiting for the inheritance.' 'And smoking the peace pipe while waiting.'

TUULISPÄÄ

N:o 43. — 6:des vuosik. Lokakuun 23 p. 1908. Hinta 20 p.

Odottavat perinnön jakoa

ja polttavat odottaessaan rauhanpiippua.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 3. Fyren*, 2 November 1912.* (see next page)
'His Excellency Status Quo.' 'From the Balkan peninsula we receive the deeply painful news that the famous gentleman, His Excellency and statesman Status Quo has passed away, who has also recently often been talked about in our newspaper press. He has died in battles–the battles of Podgoritsa, Kumanovo, Kirk-Kilisse, Yskub, Elassano, Servia, etc. The unexpected death has caused public consternation everywhere. All embassies are flying flags at half-mast, and several courts have instituted 7–14 days of mourning for members of the ruling houses. His Excellency Status Quo was still a comparatively young man of favourable appearance. Born in Saint Stefano in the memorable year of 1878, he was barely 35 years old at the time of his death and has thus been pushed away in the prime of his age.'

man Empire and the Status Quo with the 'united states of the Balkans' from the start of the war to how it developed.

While taking a more favourable perspective on the Balkan states, this image continues along the same lines of pointing out the loss of the stable existing world order. As such, this visual satire juxtaposes empires and small states in war and in diplomacy and makes fun of the fact that international diplomacy based on the agency of sovereign empires no longer reflects the situation with international politics, as displayed by the Balkan war and the Great Powers' treatment of and with the Ottoman Empire. However, the success of national movements against the Status Quo and empire was not seen as a favourable development in Finland, who rather pinned its hopes on autonomy within imperial sovereignty and saw conflicts between empires and nations as detrimental to the latter, driven by inter-imperial interests and possibly erasing intra-imperial concessions and benefits for small nations.[11]

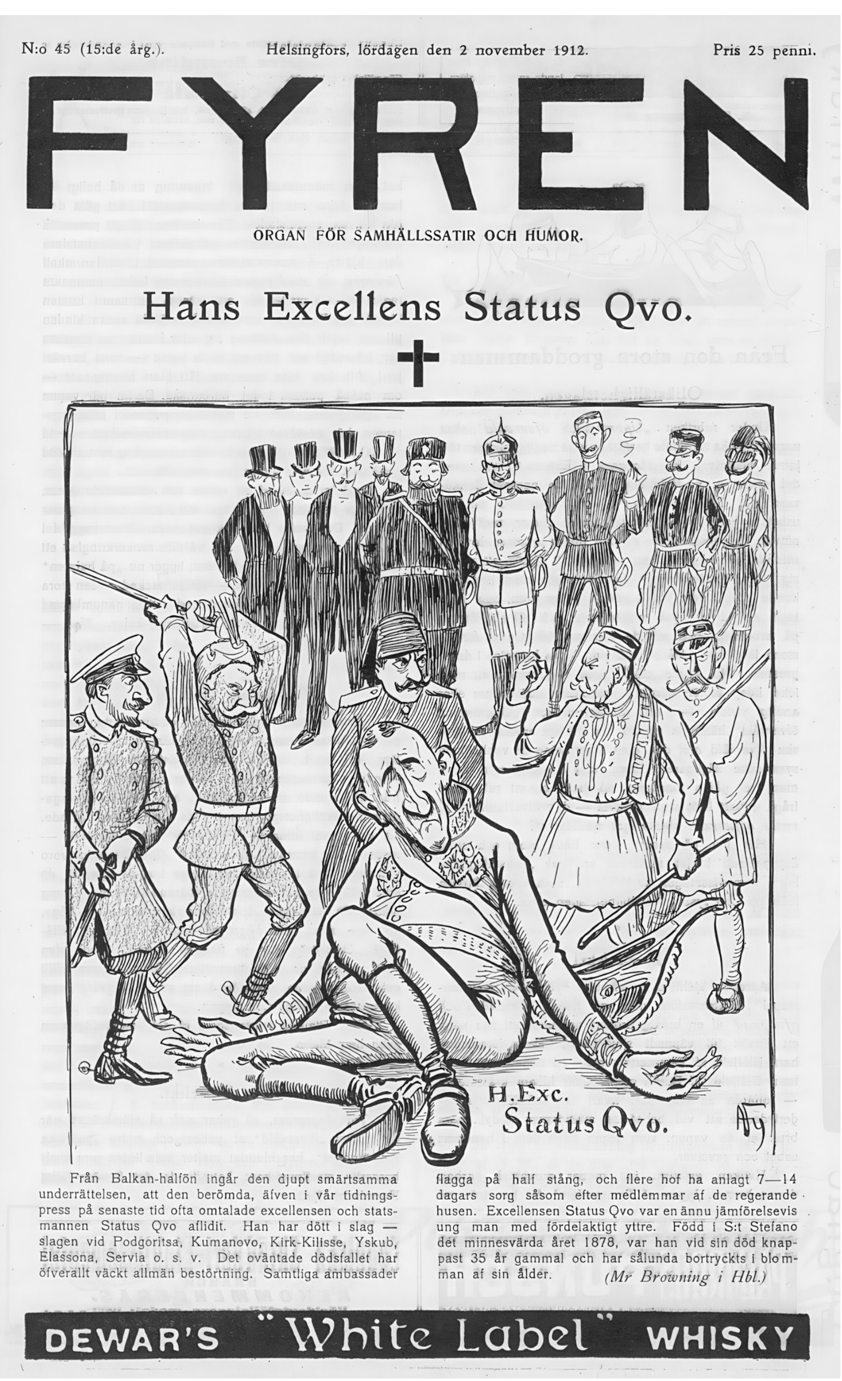
In an interesting intra- to inter-imperial connection, the caricature in Figure 5 suggests that the actions of small states and peoples against the Ottomans were orchestrated by the Russian Empire or at least ended up aligning with the Russian Empire's aims. The satirical dimension of this image highlights how inter-imperial machinations can undermine intra-imperial struggles as the separate national movements of the Balkans become instrumentalised for the same Russian inter-imperial aims.

From a Finnish perspective, it would be much more beneficial for small states and nations to live under pacified, weakened, or, as the picture depicts, sleeping empires rather than participate in or take sides in inter-imperial conflicts. In other words, as we can interpret imagologically through the hidden strings orchestrating each individual nation's actions, without Russian puppeteering the Balkan nations could have better advanced their individual goals, while also remaining true to the idea of pursuing separate endogenous national interests that was seen as the foundation of small nations' right to autonomy. Weakening the Ottomans and strengthening Russia was not seen as a favourable development for the small nations under the Russian Empire. In this vein, many of the images I analysed find some of their satirical power in juxtaposing a universal

11 See, for example, Korhonen 2019, 2025a, 2025b, forthcoming.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Fig. 3. (for caption see left)



N:o 45 (15:de årg.). Helsingfors, lördagen den 2 november 1912. Pris 25 penni.

FYREN

ORGAN FÖR SAMHÄLLSSATIR OCH HUMOR.

Hans Excellens Status Qvo.

✝

Från Balkan-halfön ingår den djupt smärtsamma underrättelsen, att den berömda, äfven i vår tidningspress på senaste tid ofta omtalade excellensen och statsmannen Status Qvo aflidit. Han har dött i slag — slagen vid Podgoritsa, Kumanovo, Kirk-Kilisse, Yskub, Elassona, Servia o. s. v. Det oväntade dödsfallet har öfverallt väckt allmän bestörtning. Samtliga ambassader flagga på half stång, och flere hof ha anlagt 7—14 dagars sorg såsom efter medlemmar af de regerande husen. Excellensen Status Qvo var en ännu jämförelsevis ung man med fördelaktigt yttre. Född i S:t Stefano det minnesvärda året 1878, var han vid sin död knappast 35 år gammal och har sålunda bortryckts i blomman af sin ålder. *(Mr Browning i Hbl.)*

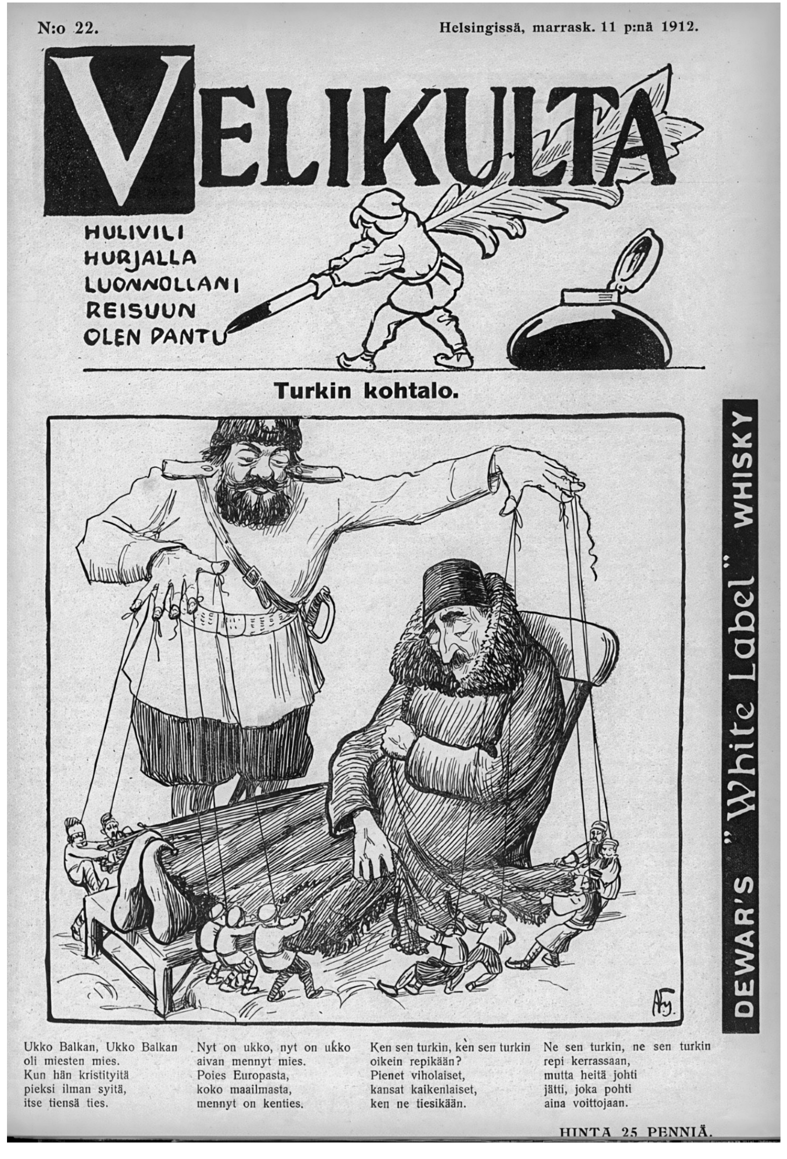
DEWAR'S "White Label" WHISKY

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 4. Tuulispää*, 8 November 1912.*
'Tuulispää*'s War Map.' 'As the war started: the Sultan of Turkey and the diplomat Status Quo pity the united states of the Balkans. As the war continued: The united states of the Balkans pity the Sultan of Turkey and the diplomat Status Quo.'*

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 5. Velikulta, *11 November 1912.*
'The faith of Turkey/the fur coat.' 'Old man Balkan, Old man Balkan, was a manly man. When he beat Christians for no reason, he knew his own path. Now he's an old man, now he's an old man, a man completely gone. Out of Europe, out of the whole world, he has possibly passed. Its fur coat, its fur coat, who tore it apart? Small enemies, peoples of all kinds, whomever they knew. Its fur coat, its fur coat, they tore up it once and for all, but they were led by a giant, who was always thinking of his own profit.'



https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

understanding of the lot of small nations in a world of Great Powers against the particular developments in the Balkans.

Continuing along similar lines with the four previous images, the caricature in Figure 6 made a mockery of the Great Powers' efforts at peace. The visual satire portrays the small state (Albania?) as the real hero against the disappointed Ottoman. Moreover, it portrays the European powers as intervening with false intentions, as the real pack of robbers in the Balkans, falsely presenting themselves as 'doves of peace' when in fact they are ravens coming to claim the spoils of the conflict. The visual satire critiques how the Great Powers positioned themselves as arbiters of peace, while, in reality, they were complicit in escalating tensions and sided with different factions depending on their own interests. Their supposed 'peacekeeping;' efforts were seen as a pretext for maintaining a balance of power that favoured their inter-imperial geopolitical goals over the interests of the small nations fighting for their rights.

The visual satire takes the side of small states against imperial diplomacy and specifically European powers, who are intervening only once it has become clear that the sovereign Ottoman Empire would be on the losing side. Overall, the imperial politics around the Balkan Wars were seen as a dangerous factor that undermined existing power relations even when supporting the cause of small nations locally.

From the Finnish perspective the ambitions of the newly independent states were seen as dangerous, in that by relinquishing older forms of imperial rule and often somewhat autonomous intra-imperial politics, independence exposed the states to ruthless inter-imperial Great Power politics and interests as seen here as the arrival of the false 'doves of peace' once the fighting has ended. It was considered easier to fight intra-imperial struggles against the metropole in one empire, than it was to expose them to the full gamut of inter-imperial power struggles. Finns themselves did not at this point seek independence from Russia or imperial rule in general, but hoped for a peaceful and non-intervening sovereign rule, kept at bay by the international system. In short, strong peripheral autonomy within sovereign imperial rule, enforced by the international system, was seen as the most favourable solution for a small state.

This leads us logically to the caricature in Figure 7, which makes fun of what happened to Bulgaria, Montenegro, Serbia, and Greece after they challenged the Ottomans. The visual satire is a commentary on what followed from the Balkan nations victory over the Ottoman Empire. It symbolises how empire has the last laugh despite the seeming initial success of the small states. The Finnish perspective expressed here is one of irony and criticism, pointing out the absurdity of the Balkan states' behaviour and how their actions ultimately led to further conflict. The visual satire reflects Finland's awareness of the volatility and dangers of shfiting intra-imperial struggles to the inter-imperial sphere. The next caricature published just a day later follows this theme as well.

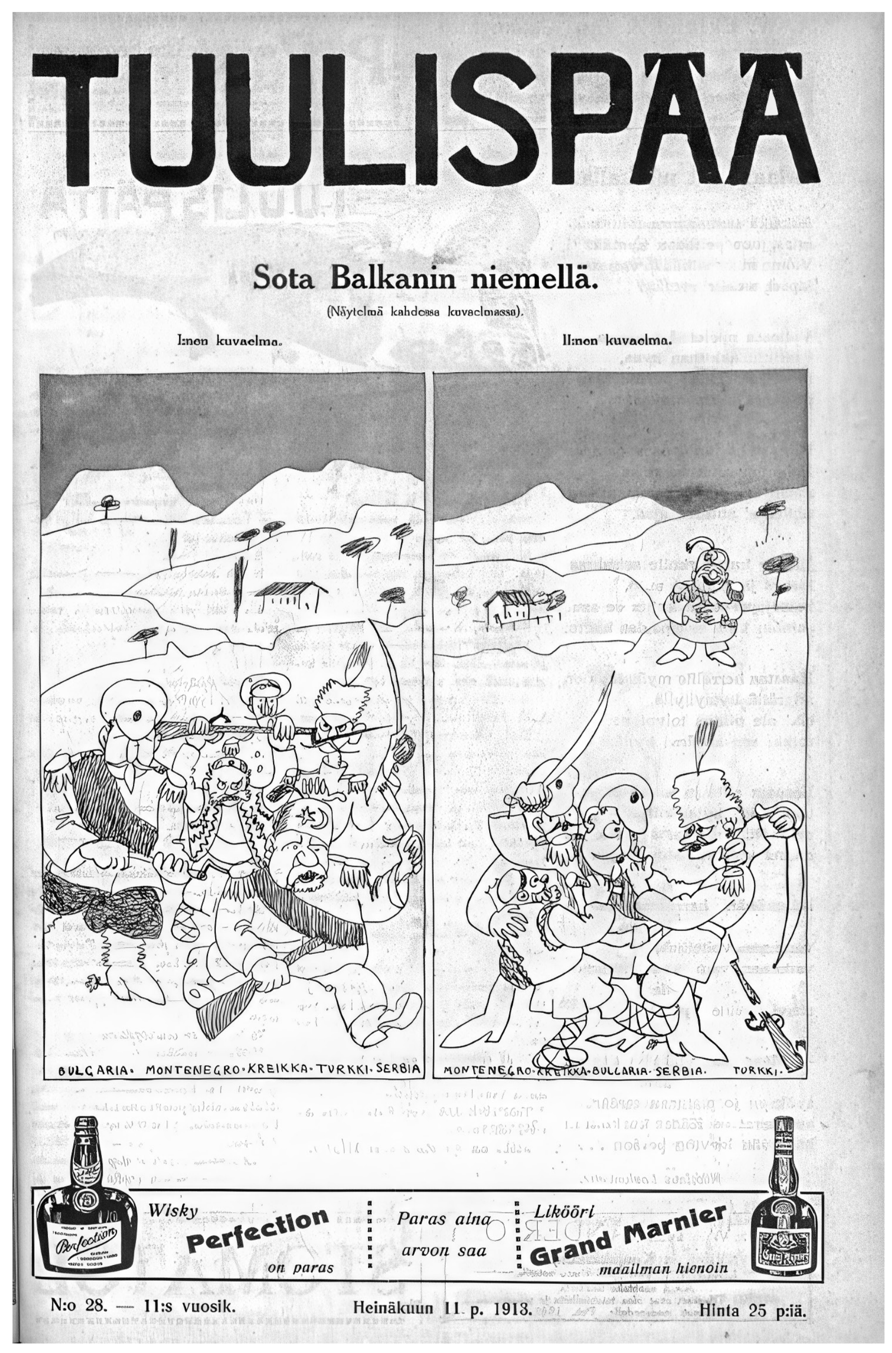
The caricature in Figure 8 brings the previous viewpoints on the Balkan Wars nicely together and portrays political developments in the Balkans as a puppet show where larger imperial powers (in this case again Russia) use small states for their own benefit. Then, despite initial success, the end result will not be beneficial for the smaller actors, as the caption clearly states.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 6. Fyren*, 24 May 1913.*
'The "pack of robbers" of the Balkans', 'The European doves of peace are coming.'

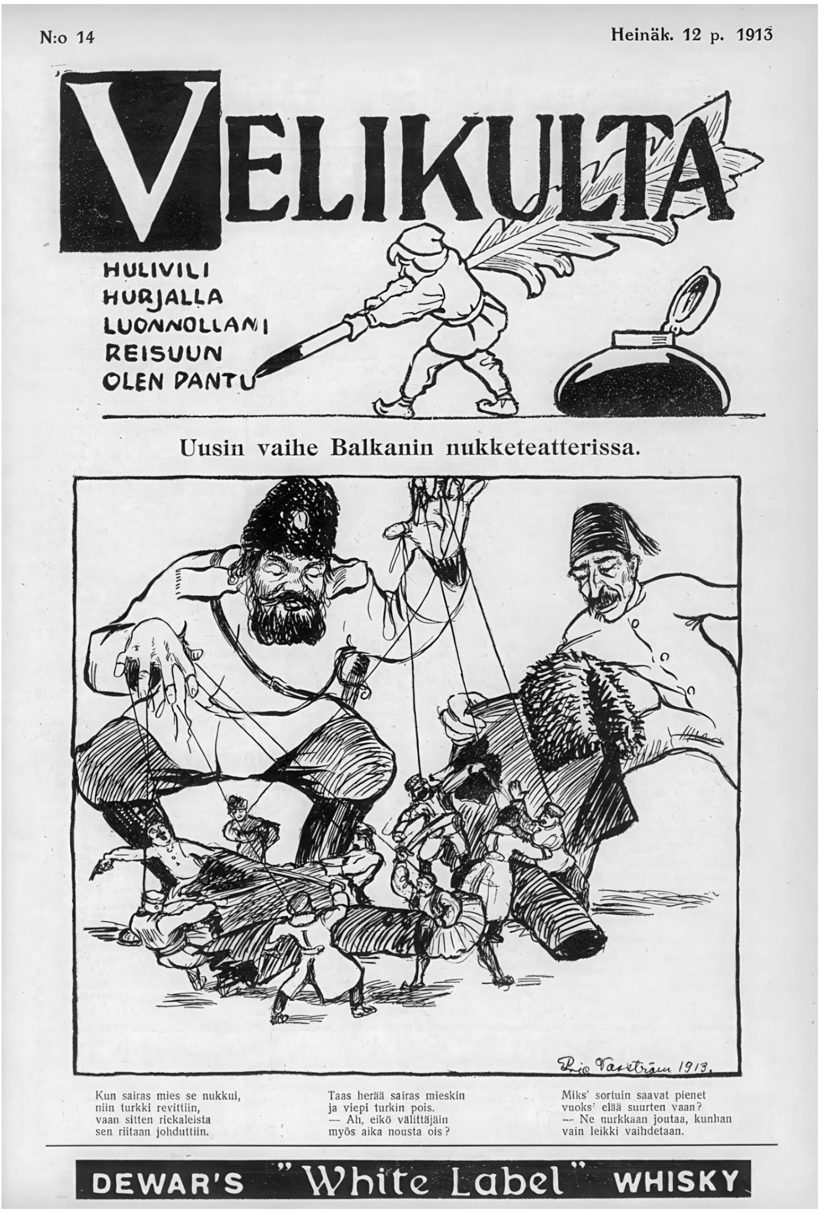
https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 7. Tuulispää*, 11 July 1913.*
'War on the Balkan Peninsula. A play in two acts. First act. Second act.'



https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 8. Velikulta, *12 July 1913.*
Captions: 'The latest stage in the puppet theatre of the Balkans.' 'When the sick man slept, his fur coat was ripped away, but then about its pieces, they got into a fight. Now the sick man awakens and takes the fur coat back.–Oh, should those who care also not awaken now? Why must the small live precariously for the sake of the big? They can be thrown away, once a new play commences.'


N:o 14 Heinäk. 12 p. 1913

VELIKULTA

HULIVILI
HURJALLA
LUONNOLLANI
REISUUN
OLEN PANTU

Uusin vaihe Balkanin nukketeatterissa.

Kun sairas mies se nukkui,
niin turkki revittiin,
vaan sitten riekaleista
sen riitaan johduttiin.

Taas herää sairas mieskin
ja viepi turkin pois.
— Ah, eikö välittäjäin
myös aika nousta ois?

Miks' sortuin saavat pienet
vuoks' elää suurten vaan?
— Ne nurkkaan joutaa, kunhan
vain leikki vaihdetaan.

DEWAR'S "White Label" WHISKY

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

As in Figure 5, the puppet show metaphor draws attention to how the smaller Balkan states were used and discarded by the Great Powers, in this case Russia. The satire also mocks the nationalism of smaller states when it becomes instrumentalised for the ends of inter-imperial conflict. While Balkan nationalism was a significant force, this visual satire suggests that the Great Powers undermined its significance on the imperial stage. Additionally, the comedic elements–such as stealing Turkey's fur coat–are more than just humourous; they are a pointed commentary on the absurdity of the geopolitical struggles of smaller states in the larger imperial game, fighting for tiny pieces of the Ottoman's fur coat without changing their actual lot and fate.

This questioning of international diplomacy of the Great Powers vis-à-vis smaller states was a persistent trope in the satirical press of the Grand Duchy of Finland. A similar obsevation was made by Tobias Heinzelmann in his comprehensive study of the Balkan Crisis from the perspective of the Ottoman satirical press, though with the crucial difference that for the Ottoman press the small Balkan states themselves begin to lose meaning and the satire turns its focus purely on the inter-imperial puppet show.[12] Heinzelmann writes that 'The Balkans are no longer even the object of their dispute, but merely a tool.'[13] Whereas the Finnish gaze was to a larger extent anchored on the similarity of Finland with the small Balkan states as the 'stage' of that puppet show and the satire focused on what would happen to them afterwards.

The same difference is reflected in how the idea of nationalism is approached in the visual satire. The Ottoman satirical press inclines towards taking at least Turkish nationalism seriously, finding its sources of satire elsewhere.[14] Whereas the Finnish press continues to mock the idea of serious or real nationalism in contrast to the much more real Great Power politics. In my analysis this difference highlights the contrast between satire about international politics from the periphery versus the metropole.

The caricature in Figure 9 takes us to the First World War. While the Ottomans are no longer portrayed as the last and lone defenders of the status quo, their role in the war is compared positively against that of Germany. Ottoman wariness is understood in relation to Germany's war-mongering, both stemming from futile imperial ambitions and connecting the earlier Balkan Wars to the First World War. Indeed, in other visual satires depicting only Germany, we can detect general criticism of Germany's politics in the First World War, even if Germany were to arrive to help the Finnish Whites in the civil war in 1918. While censorship likely affected the fact that Finnish visual satire during WW1 focused on the Central Powers, this did not matter so much from the Finnish perspective, which, as we have seen, liked to compare and connect the imperial ambitions and conflicts of all the Great Powers with each other, often highlighting general futility and hypocracy over taking sides. In this tradition, during the war indirect criticism could address the wider geopolitical situation without directly targeting the Russian Empire in the same way as we see in the earlier images.

12 Heinzelmann 1999, 264.
13 *ibid.*
14 *ibid.*, 272

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 9. Velikulta*, 12 October 1914.*
'During Autumn Rain.' 'Frans-Joseph: Listen Willy! These Autumn rains ended up lasting longer than you predicted. My umbrella is nearly broken, and no clear skies or salvation are in sight. Willy: Nothing in sight but that sick man, who always turns away when I look at him. But let us hope, Frans, because it is good to 'live in hope'. Frans-Joseph: If it keeps going like this, we will turn into sick men too.'

N:o 20 Lokakuun 12 p:nä 1914.

VELIKULTA

HULIVILI
HURJALLA
LUONNOLLANI
REISUUN
OLEN PANTU

STOMATOL
HAMMAS-TAHNAA
STOMATOL

Syyssateilla.

Hj. Löfving
1914

Frans-Jooseppi: — Kuulehan Ville! Nämä syyssateethan herkesivätkin pitemmiksi kuin ennustit. Minun suojani on jo melkein rikki, eikä vielä näy poutaa eikä pelastusta.

Ville: — Ei näy muita kuin tuo sairas mies, joka aina kääntyy pois kun häneen katson. Mutta toivotaan, Fransu, sillä „toivossa on hyvä elää".

Frans-Jooseppi: — Mutta kyllä tässä meistäkin pian tällä kurin sairaita miehiä tulee.

RAVINTOLA METROPOL Oy.

Helsinki, P. Esplanadik. 39. 2 kerros. **Huom.! I luokka. Uusi johto. Aamiaista** klo 9—2, johon kuuluu voileipäpöytä ja useita lämpimiä ruokalajeja à 1:25. **Päivällistä** klo 3—7, johon kuul. voileipäpöytä, liemiruoka, kala tai paisti ja kahvi à 1:50, useamp. lämpimiä ruokalajeja korkeampiin hintoihin. **Illallista** klo 8—12, voileipäpöytä ja useampia lämpimiä ruokalajeja à 1:25. Huom.! Teatteri-illallisia. A la carte koko päivän. Huom.! Äsken korjailtuja yksityishuoneita löytyy yleisön käytettävinä. Useampia huoneita pianoineen. Huom.! Isompia huoneustoja kokouksia ja seuroja varten. Huom.! Auki koko vuoden ympäri. **Tilauksia puhelimella 13 66. Huom.! Uusi johto.** —— Kunnioituksella **C. A. GRÖNHOLM** —— **Huom.! Uusi johto.**

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

The caricature in Figure 10 suggests the need for reforming and reinvogorating the Ottoman Empire, with the fez, coat, and crescent moon pointing to abandoned symbolic claims for empire. Following its downfall, similar opinions could be read in the Finnish press, regretting that the new Turkish republic had thrown away its claims to sovereign imperial rule and opted for the route of an independent nation-state.[15] Turkey, with its double meaning, also referring to the fur coat (turkki) that we have seen the sultan wearing in the previous images, is shown without its wearer and in need of a cleaning. Indeed, the downfall of imperial rule was seen as a dangerous development in Finland that could compromise the nation's gains in autonomy and democracy, especially against Finland's own imperial metropole in Russia. Up until the very last moments, Finnish actors sought imperial realignment rather than following the path of national sovereignty, which was considered to expose a small nation to detrimental inter-imperial conflicts, as the previous images have shown.

Finally, the last caricature (Fig. 11) presents the supposed passivity of the Ottomans in a more understandable light. The German and Austrian empires are shown as luring the Ottomans into war through a 'thousand and one lies.' Against this comparison, the Sultan's inaction appears more reasonable and intelligent, not simply as the weakness of a 'sick man.' This again highlights dislike towards inter-imperial conflicts from the Finnish non-sovereign perspective and reflects the larger Finnish critique seen in the earlier portrayals of how imperial powers use deception and manipulation to drag smaller states into wars. The Ottoman passivity, in this context, becomes a form of strategic resistance and the Sultan's inaction might be seen as a deliberate choice to avoid the destructive consequences of inter-imperial warfare.

3. Perceptions and Portrayals of the Ottomans in the Russian Empire

In the Russian Empire, of which the Grand Duchy of Finland was a part, the Ottomans were a subject of intrigue, not the least because 'Russia was more frequently at war with the Ottoman Empire than with any other power.'[16] Secondly, the Russian Empire itself was subject to European Orientalism and sought modernisation in parallel to the European empires. The Ottomans therefore represented an important comparison of another similar case.

Viktor Taki writes that

> at some point, Russian accounts of the Ottoman Empire started to follow closely the Western model of Orientalist description. While reproducing these tropes, Russian authors made their own contribution to the growing currency of Orientalist discourse– one that was distinct not so much because of Russia's special historical relationship to Asia as due to its persistent marginality within the symbolic geography of Europe. Continued references by Westerners to Russia's 'semi-barbarous character' were merely one manifestation of this marginality.[17]

15 Bavbek and Korhonen 2024.
16 Taki 2011, 321.
17 *ibid.*, 323.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 10. Velikulta*, 19 November 1914.*
'Time for a major cleaning! I see! So I must still brush the old fur coat [turkki] too and beat it clean. It might not survive the cleaning. But cleaned it must be.'

1914 VELIKULTA N:ro 23

O/Y John Paischeff A/B Huonekaluliike
Helsinki, Mikonkatu 7
Agros-yhtiön liikepalatsi
on Suomen suurin ja parhaiten lajiteltu huonekaluliike. Monipuolisin varasto parhaita rautasänkyjä. Hinnat tunnustetusti huokeimmat.

Suursiivouksen aikana.

— Vai niin! Vai on vanha turkkikin piiskattava. Ei mahtane kestää. Mutta piiskattavahan se on.

Valoa ja varjoa.

He kulkivat kaitaista metsäpolkua sydämiensä' sykkiessä, ihanasta rakkaudesta ja silmistään loistaen suloinen elämän onni. Aivan sanattomina saapuivat he järvenrannalle, jossa tuuli leppeästi vesiheinää heilutteli sekä sorsapari rauhassa uiskennellen nautti miellyttävää olemassaolon tunnettaan.

— Ehkä ensi talveen mennessä voimme oman kodin perustaa, lausui vihdoin poika ja tarttui hymyillen tytön käteen kiinni.

— Niin, jos voisimme! sanoi kainosti tyttö, luoden katseensa maahan ja kasvoilleen lehahti vieno puna.

He istuutuivat ja olivat ääneti kotvan aikaa, kunnes poika lausui:

— Emmehän me voi enempää aikaa elää erillämme, emmehän, ja samalla veti hän tytön hellävaroen lähemmäksi itseänsä.

— Emmehän me voi, virkkoi tyttö, ja antautui kokonaan pojan syleilyyn.

Hetken kuluttua herkesivät he syleilystä, poika katsoi sivulleen ja huudahti:

— Katso tuolla rannalla on ruuhi! Mikä suloinen sattuma, nyt voimme siis järvenpinnalla viilettäen nauttia kesäillan ihanuudesta.

Samalla teljolla istuen meloivat he ruuhen jonkun matkaa loitommaksi rannasta, päästivät sen sitte vapaasti lipumaan pitkin kahiliston reunaa sekä antoivat katseensa käydä yli rauhaisan maiseman.

— Miten ihana ilta! äännähti vihdoin tyttö.

— Aivan jumalallinen! päästi sanat

Tilatkaa ajoissa Welikullan Joulunumero!

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 11. Fyren*, 27 November 1914.*
'A thousand and one lies. Schecherazade told a new tale every night, one more beautiful than the other, but the Sultan put off striking from one day to the other.'

N:o 43—45. (Årg. 17.) Helsingfors den 27 november 1914. Pris 50 penni.

FYREN

ORGAN FÖR SAMHÄLLSSATIR OCH HUMOR.

Tusen och en lögn.

„Schecherazade berättade hvarje natt en ny saga, den ena vackrare än den andra, men sultanen uppsköt dag från dag att slå till".

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Moving beyond this empire-to-empire comparison, a view from the periphery of the Russian Empire allows us to decentre the perceived and constructed dichotomies of imperial and civilisationalist politics. In contrast to what Taki writes, a view from the Russian Empire is in fact a composite view that includes the metropole and various peripheries. One can only guess what Taki means by a 'Russian account,' as many marginalised or peripheral groups participated in activities also in the metropole or published in Russian in the peripheries. And as I have shown here, at least one account from the Russian Empire did not abide by Taki's analysis. Taki's methodologically problematic definition of his units of analysis is unfortunately quite prevalent and tends to follow the imagined and metropole-centric constructions of Great Power politics instead of analysing and unpacking them.

While empires and their metropoles may have sought essentialised and monolithic representations, in reality those political imageries actively occluded from sight a much more composite structure of politics and worldviews based on a variety of intra- to inter-imperial configurations. For metropolitan colonial powers, the interest was to isolate their intra-imperial rule from harmful comparisons and even possible alternatives, as Deliana discusses regarding the Dutch East Indies and the colonial regime's portrayals of the Ottomans there.[18]

Representing another such composite viewpoint discussed here, in the Grand Duchy of Finland there was widespread interest in borderlands comparisons, that is, understanding and analysing the world through cases outside metropolitan imperial rule. In this regard, Finnish observers stood out from the metropolitan views in the Russian and other imperial metropoles.

On the other hand, Finns followed Taki's undefined generalisation of 'the Russians' in that

> another, no less important, aspect was a certain distance from the Western nations that Russians maintained in their role as both 'apprentices' and 'critics' of European civilization. Through their manipulation of Western Orientalist idioms, Russian observers of the Ottoman Empire both asserted their membership in this civilization and questioned its meaning.[19]

Especially through comparisons and complexifications, Finns sought a similar escape from strict essentialised and monolithic dichotomies, such as European and non-European, civilised or barbaric. As we have seen, the Finns were more interested in comparisons of inter-imperial politics in general, especially in the context of their reality versus their image and their relations to small states and nations.

As such, for the Finnish observers of the turn of the 20th century, the Ottoman empire was not the oriental or Eastern 'Other,' but rather an imperial power equally implicated in the oppressive politics of Great Powers against progressive local and autonomous movements in smaller polities. In this role, the Ottoman Empire often represented a reference point through which the ills of the wider system could be portrayed and inter-imperial politics critically compared against intra-imperial politics.

18 Deliana 2024.
19 Taki 2011, 324.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

3.1. Finnish and European Portrayals of the Ottomans

The Ottoman Empire was commonly portrayed in European journals through what de Smaele calls 'the persistent power of Orientalist frames of reference,' such as 'latent Orientalism' and the so-called Eastern Question.[20]

In France, the construction of the Other sought

> not only to explore Turkish other in a given context but it was also to construct cultural differentiation, comprising of material characteristics such as their physical appearances (fez, turban, gown, beard, angry and hunched look, etc.), and their abstract characteristics (lack of intelligence, wisdom, and talent).[21]

In the Finnish case similar physical characteristics and differentiation are applied to highlight the hypocrisy of imperial relations and diplomacy, where the more powerful exploit the weaker and in doing so reveal their true colours in the sense of becoming comparable and similar to the Other.

In Britain, according to Odams, perceptions of the Ottoman were based on a more general racialised civilisationalist logic:

> Even in less negative accounts Turks were represented as a declining race, incapable of attaining the standards of Modern civilisation. […] Underpinning British ideas were unequal relations of power. The overwhelmingly negative nature of representations was part of the general change in perceptions towards the non-European world resulting from European expansion.[22]

For example, the British visual satire magazine *Punch* would repeatedly portray the Ottoman Empire as a fat, older man scheming against or twisting the good intentions of Europe portrayed as Lady Liberty. Alternatively, the Ottoman Empire was represented as a young boy pupil scolded by Europe the teacher, again in the form of Lady Liberty. In both cases, the images convey that the Ottoman Empire does not want to get on board with the programme of civilisation that Europe is offering.[23]

Importantly, according to Odams, the Eurocentric discourse where race, civilisation, and progress combined into a global hierarchy developed only at the turn of the 20th century. As such, the Finnish perspective offers an alternative way of portraying the Ottomans at the same time, before the First World War, and suggests that we should not take the views of the Great Powers for granted and allow them to serve as the exclusive lens through which we interpret events.

Odams continues, that in Britain 'societies that were defined as "Oriental" were judged in a comparative framework with Europe, which reinforced ideas about the superiority of the latter.' This framework was based on otherness of the non-European. Indeed, the

20 De Smaele 2017, 193–224; see also online abstract of the chapter. See also Tiryakioglu 2015.
21 Anaz and Anaz 2021, 414.
22 Odams 1995, 272.
23 See for example *Punch Magazine* from these dates 23 April 1913, 30 July 1913, 4 June 1913, 14 January 1920, and 2 April 1913. Accessed at punch.co.uk on 18 December 2025.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

reason for portraying the Ottomans was not similar to the Finnish perspective. As an imperial power, the Ottomans could be a reference point for the Grand Duchy in assessing sovereign imperial politics as a whole. In other words, through the inclusion of the Ottomans, the Finns could also question the reality and political motivation of empires' portrayals of each other, beyond dichotomous divisions of European and the Other.

The Finnish were promoting an alternative framework of comparison. This framework did not abandon ideas of progress or civilisation, but emphasised the role of small nations as equal but oppressed seekers of progress who could also highlight the colonial and inter-imperial underbelly of European metropolitan standards of progress. Effectively, as the visual satires discussed in this paper tell us, the Finns attempted to bring nuance into this comparative framework through two means. First, through comparisons of the imperial powers between each other. Second, through comparisons of the treatment of empires towards their intra-imperial minorities as well as comparisons of those minorities based on their inter-imperial location and status, such as their treatment of the Balkan nations. In short, the Finnish perspective sought to complicate various dichotomy-based comparisons upon which the more Eurocentric perceptions were based. Whereas the British perception of the Ottomans during the same period was one where '[t]he image of the Turk as racially and religiously outside of Europe was the most significant and frequently reiterated idea.'[24]

The British perception, not unlike the French, sought to display racial and civilisational hierarchies as essentialised and inherent–and as such pre-determined–to certain nations and societies: 'negative and often offensively racist language could only be justified by the demotion of the Turk to the 'anti-human specimen of humanity' as the Liberal statesman, Gladstone expressed it.'[25] As I argue elsewhere, the Finns themselves were looking to move up the ladder of civilisational hierarchies and as such promoted a relational view, where the position of a given society on the 'ladder of progress' was to be understood and analysed only through their position within global inter- and intra-imperial relations.[26] This meant that sovereign metropoles were not automatically more civilised. Their position was also linked to intra-imperial relations, or their treatment of their peripheries and colonies.

Questions of European versus non-European thus mattered far less. As the visual satire analysed above shows, the Finns sought to make imperial powers comparable and would not have wanted to give, for example, the Russians a free pass for oppression simply because they were seen as a backward non-European empire. Similarly, comparisons of the empires to each other promoted the idea that progress and civilisation could be achieved through multiple paths, which also meant that some paths could be more benign and less oppressive, especially regarding the metropoles' treatment of colonised and minority peoples.

Finnish women's activists, for example, ranked the British metropole much lower due to the fact the despite its great resources it had not achieved full women's suffrage, an

24 Odams 1995, 273.
25 *ibid.*, 274.
26 Korhonen 2025b.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

idea and achievement that was seen as a universal standard of progress, not one specific to any given race or country. For the Finns then, peoples and states could move both up and down the civilisational ladder. The Ottomans were seen as moving down, but the European Powers were equally seen as exploiting the misfortunes of the Ottomans and in doing so denigrating themselves vis-à-vis others, like the Finnish and the Balkan states, whereas, for the British, '[w]riters express the idea that the decline of the Ottoman Empire was both natural and inevitable and presented this process as a vindication of the superiority of European progress and civilisation.'[27] The Finnish perspective offers an almost opposite view to this.

4. Conclusions

How we understand historical perceptions and symbolic imageries of unequal relations matters for today's politics. As Aydin-Düzgit et al. suggest, anti-Western historical myths in Turkey today are largely based on the similar dichotomous divisions that underpinned the original Western orientalisms and their construction of the Other. They write that the 'mythologization of late Ottoman Empire's relations with European powers in the 19th century mobilizes contemporary populist anti-Westernism in Turkey.'[28] A limited and dichotomous idea of how Turkey was perceived hides from sight marginal and minority positions just like that of the Finnish image of the Ottomans in the early 20th century. As such, Turkey's usage of history today, in focusing purely on European metropolitan orientalist views of the Ottomans, does the same work as those orientalist views themselves originally did in hiding from sight a more nuanced and complex understanding of the Ottoman Empire's place in international politics.

Aydin-Düzgit et al. continue,

> the mythologized reduction of the historical process to an eternal struggle between the binary dichotomies of friends versus enemies empowers populist leaders in unifying their support bases in society around a national Self defined through a mythic history and morally discrediting their opponents using the judgements of history.[29]

This was exactly the outlook on the self and the Other in international politics that the Finnish political imagination tried to deconstruct and complexify by making fun of imperial politics through comparing them to each other and to smaller nations.

In the case of the Ottoman Empire, the satirical press of the Grand Duchy of Finland decentres the typical Eurocentric discourse and questions the legitimacy of imperial power structures. Humour, irony, and visual exaggeration are used to complicate the dichotomies of civilised vs barbaric and instead advocate for a relational understanding of history and politics–one that takes into account the perspectives of smaller states, their experiences within larger imperial systems, and the difference between non-sovereign

27 Odams 1995, 274.
28 Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2022a, 514.
29 *ibid.*, 518.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

intra-imperial and sovereign inter-imperial politics. Such an approach remains relevant in today's political climate, where historical myths and simplified narratives often dominate discourses and the international order, despite its rhetoric, is unable to guarantee the sovereignty of small states against Great Power politics.

From the viewpoint of a small peripheral state, I contribute to and build on Aydin-Düzgit et al.'s work on complexifying our idea of historical perceptions and their construction. For this particular purpose, visual satire is an excellent type of source material, as I argue elsewhere regarding its capacity to reveal historical alternatives and to identify–as Aydin-Düzgit et al. also suggest–more polymorphous agencies of historical actors against the monolithic agency of essentialised Europeans and their others.[30]

The analysis of visual satire across traditional comparison points can highlight the importance of symbolic contestations in delimiting our understanding of historical narratives and developments. This is crucial in countering the kind of uses and abuses of history that Aydin-Düzgit et al. point to in writing that 'history is often invoked to cement a representation of the Other as the eternal enemy in order to justify exclusion and antagonism. That is why stressing the historical variations in identity representations and images [...] bears a high degree of contemporary political relevance.'[31]

Bibliography

Anaz, Mehtap and Anaz, Necati. 'French Orientalism Representations of Ottoman in Caricatures in *Le Petit Journal*'. In Tombul, Işıl and Sarı, Gülşah (eds.). *Handbook of Research on Contemporary Approaches to Orientalism in Media and Beyond*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. 398–420.

Aydin-Düzgit, Senem, Rumelili, Bahar and Topal, Alp Eren. 2022a. 'Challenging Anti-Western Historical Myths in Populist Discourse: Re-visiting Ottoman Empire–Europe Interaction during the 19th Century'. *European Journal of International Relations*. 28.3. 513–537.

Aydin-Düzgit, Senem, Chovanec, Johanna and Rumelili, Bahar. 2022b. 'Europe and the Ottoman Empire: Images of Self and the Other'. In Bouris, Dimitris, Huber, Daniela and Pace, Michelle (eds.). *Routledge Handbook of EU-Middle East Relations*. New York: Routledge. 15–25.

Bavbek, Yasemin and Korhonen, Juho. 2024. 'A Country of White Lilies: Inter-Imperial Nation-Making and Development from the Russian Empire's Periphery to Post-Ottoman Turkey'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 66.2. 417–442.

Deliana, Nia. 2024. 'Stereotyping the Turks: Images from Dutch colonial newspapers in Indonesia'. Paper presented at the XIX Turkish Historical Conference. URL: https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14576/338 (last accessed 28 January 2025).

Heinzelmann, Tobias. 1999. *Die Balkankrise in der osmanischen Karikatur. Die Satirezeitschriften Karagöz, Kalem und Cem, 1908–1914*. Istanbul: Franz Seiner Verlag Stuttgart.

Kollatz, Anna and Wagner, Veruschka. Forthcoming. *Cartoons and Caricatures in a Global Perspective: 1850–1950*. Heidelberg University Press.

Korhonen, Juho. 2019. 'Empire, Democracy, State, and Nation: Sociological Occlusions of the German and Russian Empires'. PhD dissertation, Brown University, RI, USA.

30 Korhonen forthcoming; Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2022a.

31 Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2022b, 22.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

–. 2025a. ‘Why Historical Research Frameworks Matter for Sociological Methods and Decolonial Approaches? Empire and Nation Compared with Intra- and Inter-Imperiality.’ *Sosiologia*. 31.1. 3–19.

–. 2025b. ‘Women as Producers of Global Historical Knowledge. Women’s Suffrage in the Periphery of the Russian Empire, the Grand Duchy of Finland, 1890s–1910s.’ Special Issue: Women’s Movements and Formations of Knowledge–Political and Epistemic Practices, eds. Johanna Gehmacher and Dietlind Hüchtker. *Austrian Journal of Historical Studies*. 36.2. 86–114.

–. Forthcoming. ‘Visual satire’s historical agency: Peripheral politics in the Grand Duchy of Finland, 1905–1919’. In Kollatz, Anna and Wagner, Veruschka (eds.). *Cartoons and Caricatures in a Global Perspective: 1850–1950,* Heidelberg University Press.

Odams, H. J. R. 1995. ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire’. PhD dissertation, St. Antony’s College, Oxford.

Scully, Richard, Fernandes, Paolo Jorge and Khanduri, Ritu Gailrola. *Cartoon Conflicts: Contemporary Controversies and Historical Precedents.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

de Smaele, H. 2018. ‘Covering the Ottoman Empire: Orientalism and the Mass Media’. In Alloul, H., Eldem, E. and de Smaele, H. (eds.). *To Kill a Sultan*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 193–224. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48932-6_7

Taki, Victor. 2021. ‘Orientalism on the margins: The Ottoman Empire under russian eyes’. *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History.* 12.2. 321–351.

Tiryakioglu, Nevsal Olcen. 2015. ‘The Western image of Turk from the Middle Ages to the 21st century: The myth of the ‘terrible Turk’ and ‘lustful Turk’’. PhD dissertation, Nottingham Trent University.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Eberhard Dziobek

University of Heidelberg, Islamic Studies, Germany
eberhard.dziobek@stud.uni-heidelberg.de

Caricatures as a Means of Communication in the Late Ottoman Context: Rifqī's Cairo in the 1920s, a Scene on the Tram

Abstract

The cartoonist Rifqī (died 1939?) began his career around 1919 in Istanbul. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, he emigrated to Italy and later to Egypt to continue his work there. Little is known about his biography, including his name. In Cairo, he quickly gained fame as the chief cartoonist of the humour magazine Al-Fukāha, for which he worked from 1926 to 1933. His works can often be described as ethnographic and artistically sophisticated. In addition to simple 'humorous themes,' he was particularly interested in 'modern technology' and 'society in transition.' The image discussed here deals with the question of social emancipation in Egypt, with a particular focus on the appearance of women in public life.[1]

Keywords: Rifqī, cartoonist, the 1920s in Cairo, public transport, women, *Effendiyya*

In this article, I examine a drawing by the cartoonist Rifqī in which he addresses a combination of themes that repeatedly preoccupied him. These are the concepts of 'modern road traffic' and 'interaction between the genders.' To provide some context, I would first like to describe the environment in which the cartoonist worked. Rifqī must have been an unusual personality with a colourful biography; I will therefore first look at some of his personal details before turning to the drawing itself.

Caricatures of the Middle East have only in recent years become the subject of Islamic studies research.[2] Older studies, such as those by Gendzier (1966)[3] and Marsot (1971),[4] have obviously had less of an impact. [5]The reason for this lack of interest can only be guessed at; perhaps it has something to do with the fact that caricatures played only a minor role in the general media discourse of the late 20th century. At least in Germany, political caricature magazines such as *Kladderadatsch* and *Simplizissimus* ceased to play a role after the Second World War; in addition, most caricature and humour magazines from the Middle East were hardly known to Western researchers. It is only in relatively

1 I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Anna Kollatz and Veruschka Wagner for inviting me to the Istanbul Caricature Event and encouraging me to submit my contribution to the publication. I would also like to thank my reviewers for their extremely valuable literature references and for kindly correcting some citation errors.

2 Elmas 2016, 21–2.

3 Zdafee 2020, 6, note 27, with reference to the work of Gendzier 1996, 16.

4 *ibid.*, 7, note 31, with reference to the work of Marsot 1971, 2–15.

5 A good overview of the history of research, including literature on the subject of 'caricature research,' can be found in Zdafee, 2020, 6, note 27, and pp. 7–8, with footnotes.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

recent years[6] that research has devoted itself to the topic of Middle Eastern caricatures on a larger scale, because it has become clear that this medium, which for a long time was considered a cultural fringe phenomenon in Islamic studies, actually offers very direct access to the cultural history of the geopolitical area under investigation. Cartoons have been produced throughout the Middle East since the 19th century and especially since the 1920s. The main 'hotspots' of this scene were–besides Beirut–Istanbul and Cairo.[7] Perhaps one can imagine the journalistic situation at that time as a kind of 'start-up scene': driven by the enthusiasm of publishers, authors and readers on the one hand, with the constant pressure of financial constraints and political repression on the other, and in any case incredibly lively and experimental. The region was undergoing a dramatic period of national and cultural self-discovery, confrontation with the colonial powers, and social and economic development. The outcome of this process varied greatly. The declining Ottoman Empire, for example, experienced a more authoritarian new beginning and behaved differently from Egypt, where the discourse was more pragmatic and emancipatory (and, of course, anti-British). What the two had in common was a population that took a keen interest in current affairs and socio-political issues.

However, acceptance and use of the numerous classic newspaper formats were limited by widespread illiteracy and poverty, which restricted their use. This created a gap for humour magazines, which offered short texts and, above all, numerous caricatures. These humour magazines were often small (*Aydede* and *Ayine* consisted of four pages, presumably a DIN A3 sheet folded in the middle; *Al-Fukāha* was limited to 20 pages) and it can be assumed that they were often displayed in public tea and coffee houses, where they could be seen and explained or discussed by a large number of interested parties.[8] The descriptions by El-Menshawi and Gläser,[9] Kollatz,[10] Quiering,[11] Wagner,[12] and Zdafee[13] provide a good and easily understandable overview of the conditions at that time. In addition, the important collections of the Bonn-based 'Translatio' project, with its digitised journal volumes from the Middle East and Near East dating back to 1860, have made large image and text corpora available to interested researchers for the first time.[14] Anna Kollatz provides the following definition and rationale for the emergence of this new field of research:

6 E.g. through the works of Baron 1989 and 2005; Kholoussy 2010 and Zdafee 2020.
7 Zdafee 2020, 6–7; Kollatz 2022a, 117–8; Wagner 2022, 129–30.
8 Kollatz 2022a, 127 above. Even the last sultan, Vahiettin, was a subscriber to Aydede, as its editor Refik Halit reported: Çeviker 1993, 3 (without pagination).
9 El-Menshawy and Gläser 2022..
10 Kollatz 2022a, 117–28 and Kollatz 2022b, 148–64.
11 Quiering 2022.
12 Wagner 2022, 129–30.
13 Zdafee 2022.
14 Access link: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn. URL: https://digitale-sammlungen.ulb.uni-bonn.de/topic/view/3085789 (last accessed 19 February 2026); for general information about the project: 'Project Translatio'. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Translatio (both last accessed on 27 July 2025).

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

> We assume that caricatures are a multi-graphic form of communication that condenses the social discourse of their time through satirical exaggeration. It follows that these representations can serve as 'signposts' for exploring the social, political and intellectual discourse of their time...[15]

She continues:

> In principle, we encounter two types of caricatures here: Those that make us laugh spontaneously, and those that leave us with question marks in our eyes... but this should not obscure the fact that such a spontaneous impression of understanding may also be based on a misunderstanding, or that a caricature may have other, deeper and possibly coded meanings in addition to the superficial, easily understandable joke.[16]

But the significance of caricatures is not only historical. Their special characteristics also make them suitable for modern language and culture teaching. Another quote describes the importance of the subject for modern research and teaching:

> Caricatures are also well suited as an 'introduction' to the subject matter, as their pointed presentation and relatively small amount of text make them accessible to interested parties, learners and students alike...[17]

My first encounters with Arabic cartoons took place during my initial Arabic studies, when I regularly translated from Egyptian daily newspapers. It was always the cartoons that captivated me first. They were visually much more appealing than the texts and often provided direct access to specific topics of everyday life. In addition, the accompanying texts were usually written in Egyptian dialect. If you wanted to get to the bottom of the punchline, you had the pleasure of discovering the written everyday language on the one hand and, on the other hand, the feeling of having come a little closer to the culture of the host country. By participating in several seminars at the Institute for Islamic Studies at the University of Heidelberg, my interest in the topic of 'cartoons' was rekindled. Among other things, we discussed the caricatures of an artist who can be considered one of the most interesting representatives of this group of works. He is known to us by the pseudonym 'Rifqī,' but we know little more about him than that he began his career in Istanbul around 1919 and continued it in Cairo after 1923. The little information we have about 'Rifqī' comes from two sources:

In a small compilation on early cartoonists in Egypt, the Egyptian journalist 'Abder-Raḥmān Bakr reported what he had learned about 'Ali Rifqī' from his contemporaries: 'Ali Rifqī' grew up in Istanbul, had a professional background as a graduate of a military academy and surveyor, and emigrated after Atatürk's victory to work first in Italy and later in Egypt.[18] In Cairo, where he found a new home with his two brothers, he initially worked as a technical draughtsman and then worked for the humour magazine *Al-Fukāha* until

15 Kollatz 2022a, 121.
16 *ibid.*
17 *ibid.*
18 Bakr 2017, 6, and, specifically on Rifqī, 23–4; another summary in Kollatz and Wagner 2025, 14–5.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

1933. During this time, he became dissatisfied with the editors' increasingly 'pro-Atatürk' stance–after all, this was precisely why he had turned his back on Turkey–and left the newspaper to open a biscuit and pastry factory with his brothers. However, this project failed, and he died not long afterwards as a relatively young man.

In the 1990s, Turkish cartoon expert Turgut Çeviker[19] studied the work of the cartoonist 'Ahmet Rıfkı' and published many of his works from 1921–1924 in a small anthology, together with several chapters of commentary. In his edition, he reports or quotes similar information about Rıfkı's biography to that found in Bakr:[20] The cartoonist named 'Ahmet Rıfkı'[21] came from upper-class circles, as his father had been Minister of Agriculture. During the War of Independence, he worked as a military interrogation specialist for the Istanbul government, an activity that earned him the additional name 'traitor' (Turkish '*hain*').[22] Towards the end of the war, he presumably left the country in September/October 1922, lived in Italy for a while,[23] later worked in Cairo, and died there at a young age. The main source for these statements is the memoirs of Rifqī's former employer and editor of the humour magazine 'Aydede,' Refik Halit Karay;[24] however, Çeviker limits the reliability of these statements from the outset.[25]

We first encountered Çeviker's edition of the early works of the cartoonist, whom he refers to as 'Ahmet Rıfkı,' in the spring of 2024[26] and, based on our knowledge at the time, our first question had to be whether the identity of the cartoonist discussed here could be determined with any certainty. According to Çeviker, 'Ahmet Rıfkı' worked in Istanbul from 1921 to 1923/24 for the magazines *Tatlı-Sert*, *Aydede*, and *Zümrüdüanka*. In Egypt, the name of the chief cartoonist of *Al-Fukāha* is given as ''Alī Rifqī.' The situation was further complicated by the fact that there is also a late Ottoman contemporary poet of the same name ('Ahmet Rıfkı') and with a similar biography. So at first we could not be sure 'whether and, if so, how many' people we were dealing with.

The identity of the late Ottoman writer Ahmet Rıfkı was quickly clarified: he is clearly a separate person, with known dates of birth and death. The poet and theologian lived from

19 Çeviker 1993; Elmas 2016, 21; note 35 illustrates how much Çeviker has contributed to this topic. Unfortunately, Heidelberg University Library does not hold any of Çeviker's works. For more on the author, see also İşik 2001–2004, vol. 1, 525.

20 Çeviker 1993, 1–2 (without pagination).

21 Çeviker uses the Turkish transcription with an ı at the end.

22 Öngören in Çeviker 1933, 11 (without pagination).

23 It is not entirely clear where exactly he stayed there. His own contribution from *Zümrüdüanka*, published by Çeviker 1993, 14 (without pagination), refers to his new home in Naples. But Refik Halit writes about San Remo, Kollatz and Wagner, 2025, 14–5.

24 Wasti 2019.

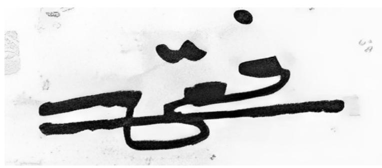
25 Çeviker 1993, 3 (without pagination). See also Kollatz and Wagner 2025, 14–5.

26 During the first Istanbul Cartoon Symposium in March 2024, Erdem Çolak from Middle East Technical University Ankara brought the publication to our attention. He immediately took the trouble to find the small and now out-of-print publication for me in a second-hand bookshop that happened to be nearby, so that I was able to hold it in my hands just a few hours later; I am extremely grateful to him for his kindness.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

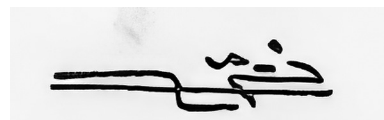
1881 to 1937 and died in exile in Greece.[27] As for the two different first names of the cartoonist in Istanbul and Cairo, closer inspection revealed that none of the signatures known to me–neither in Turkey nor in Cairo–mention a first name at all. Colleagues have informed me that 'Rifqī' or 'Rıfkı' is a kind of 'common name' in Turkey,[28] and if it is correct that the cartoonist came from upper-class Istanbul circles, he or his family may not have wanted to see the family name constantly appearing in the context of caricatures. Therefore, I assume for the time being that 'Rıfqī' was a pseudonym. The main argument for accepting that both names refer to one and the same person is the signature, which can be found in identical form in both the Istanbul cartoons up to 1924 and in the works from the Egyptian period from 1926 onwards. This signature is very distinctive: the initial letter *r* is placed as a horizontal line below the other letters *f-q-ī*. Some signatures appear to be more handwritten:

Figure 1. Aydede*, no. 2, from 5 January 1922, title.*



Later, the letters become more stylised:

Figure 2. Aydede*, no. 47, from 12 June 1922, 2.*



In September 1922, they occasionally resemble graphic cut-outs that could be pasted in (Fig. 3).[29] The basic form did not change later during Rifqī's time in Cairo (Fig. 4).

Further substantial evidence for the assumption of a single identity are the similarities in the motifs: Çeviker's collection of Rifqī's works from 1921 to 1924 shows a number of image and text motifs, particularly in the subject areas of 'Social Situation, Economy/Transport' and 'Women: Fashion, Behaviour, Gender Relations,' which we encounter again in the Egyptian publications from 1926 onwards.[30] The cartoonist Rifqī thus embodies two

27 Topçuoğlu 2001.

28 Conversation with Erdem Çolak and Ilkim Okyar on 24 April 2025, during the '2nd Cartoon Workshop' in Heidelberg, April 2025.

29 Other examples are *Aydede*, no. 76, from 21 September 1922, title, and *Aydede*, no. 84, from 19 October 1922, title.

30 One example can be found in Kollatz and Wagner 2025, 10–1. Another is the topic of 'Traffic and Transport systems of the Future,' cf. Çeviker 1993, 4, (from *Zümrüdüanka*, dated 22 November 1923) with the series 'Egypt in the year 2000' in *Al-Fukāha*, no. 2, 8 December

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 3. Aydede*, no. 74, from 14 September 1922, title page and detail, below.*

Figure 4. Al-Fukāha*, no. 1, from 1 December 1926, title.*

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

different cultures of the early 20th century: the Ottoman-Turkish and the Egyptian. His work offers an insight into both the final years of Ottoman rule and the late 1920s in Egypt.[31] The Istanbul humour magazine *Aydede* and its editor Refik Halit (Karay) were among the opponents of the Anatolian uprising, and after Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) finally seized power, Refik Halit was officially exiled and had to leave the country.[32] Under the presumably very liberal working conditions of the early days in Istanbul–Aydede was published on a small scale every two weeks during 1922–Rifqī produced a wide variety of cartoons on political, cultural and general entertainment topics. His stance can basically be described as 'bourgeois-liberal' and definitely opposed to the so-called 'Anatolian uprising,' but just as important is his non-conformist view on all kinds of issues. The keyword 'against' (*Karşı*) in the title of Çeviker's publication is certainly very aptly chosen for his work and personality. A number of different illustrators worked for *Aydede*, lightening up the editorial section with caricatures. The magazine existed for just under a year. Rifqī made no secret of his criticism of Mustafa Kemal and his party members in his drawings; nor did he refrain from mocking the representatives of the old Istanbul administration and its media. This independence will not only have won him friends and may have been the reason for his emigration. At the end of 1922, when the end of the sultanate was foreseeable, Rifqī left his homeland for good.[33] After a short time in Italy, Rifqī moved on to Egypt, where he came into contact with the publishers Imīl and Šukrī Zaydān from the Dār-al Ḥilāl Publishing House.[34] The two were planning to publish the humour magazine *Al-Fukāha*.[35] Rifqī became the chief cartoonist of the new magazine and from then on probably had to work under time pressure to ensure that the weekly issues were filled, either by himself or by other artists. He also frequently created the front pages. This led to a high degree of professionalisation in his work. The development of his own style is his most impressive achievement. During his Istanbul phase, the range of his early artwork was enormous and was characterised only by the absence of an individual signature style. Rifqī had copied motifs and styles from other cartoonists, among other things.[36] In Egypt, Rifqī developed his own style in full-page, large-format images that make the covers of *Al-Fukāha* look as if adorned by paintings (Fig. 5 and 6). Other drawings resemble sketches (Fig. 7 and 8), while others are rendered in an almost exaggerated style (Fig. 9 and 10). Others, on the other hand, are minimalistic (Fig. 11).

1926, 9; no. 3, 15 December 1926, 9, and specifically see the article by Anna Kollatz in this volume. The special topic 'The Victims of the Trams' is another example: Çeviker 1993, 125 (from *Aydede* no. 15, 20 February 1922) vs. *Al-Fukaha*, 1 December 1926, 7.

31 For a very helpful overview of this period, see Gingeras 2016, esp. 235–6. 'Downfall and Repudiation' and Demirel 2018.

32 Wasti 2019.

33 For the exact date, see Çeviker 1993, 3.

34 Ayalon 1995, 78.

35 Zdafee 2020, 34, 49, 75.

36 E.g. in Çeviker 1993, 200, where Rifqī draws a portrait of his colleague Ahmet Münif Bey 'in his own style,' or in *Aydede*, no. 21 of 13 March 1922, where an unknown artist first formulated the idea of the 'tram as the scourge of humanity' and thus may have been the inspiration for Rifkī's frequent use of this motif.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 5. Al-Fukāha*, no. 34, 20 July 1927, title page.*

For the editors of *Al-Fukāha*, it was important that the new magazine have a broad impact, and certain striking topics such as 'modern society with all its extreme innovations' were perhaps better suited to this than others. The fact that this category also included the so-called classics of humorous literature, such as 'Alcohol-intoxicated Men,' 'Angry Wives,' 'Emancipated Young Women,' and 'Destructive Technology/Modern Road Traffic'[37] was one of the working conditions that Rifqī had to (or wanted to) accept.

37 E.g. Kollatz and Wagner 2025, 26–7, 31 (left); generally on the subject of 'Women in contemporary Egyptian caricature': Zdafee 2020, 137–8.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 6. Al-Fukāha*, no. 37; 10 August 1927, title page.*

I would now like to turn to the image announced at the beginning, which deals with 'modern road traffic' and 'gender interaction.' The full-page image is entitled 'The Well-Behaved Boy' and appeared in February 1928 on the cover of *Al-Fukāha* (issue no. 64, Fig. 12).

The setting is a tram or trolleybus compartment in which there are 15 people of different origins. Most of them are men from the *Effendīyya* class.[38] They are distinguished by their red *ṭarbūš* caps (fezzes), high-necked shirts, and formal European-style suits. The

38 Kollatz 2022a, 117–28, 125 with footnote 31, with reference to El-Menshawy and Gläser 2022.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [CC BY]

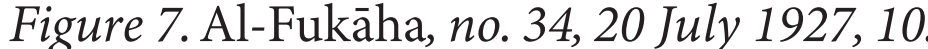
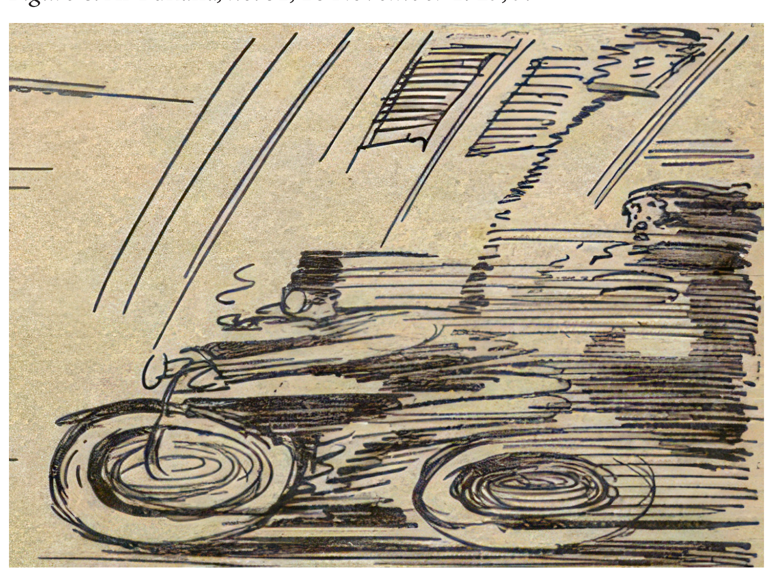


Figure 7. Al-Fukāha*, no. 34, 20 July 1927, 10.*

Figure 8. Al-Fukāha*, no. 51, 16 November 1927, 7.*



https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 9. Al-Fukāha*, no. 1, 1 December 1926, 7.*

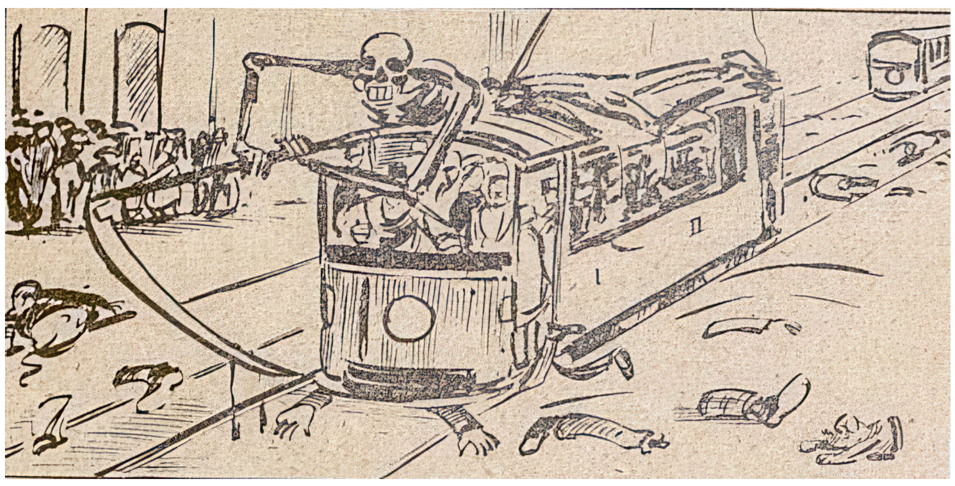
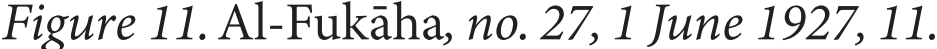


Figure 10. Al-Fukāha*, no. 9, 29 January 1927, 8.*

centre of the picture is dominated by a young woman standing with a suitcase in her right hand and an umbrella in her left; she is wearing modern high heels, and a bob cut covered by a black cap. She is unveiled and wears a short, modern, formal, and inconspicuous dark dress. She is unaccompanied, and the small suitcase in her hand reinforces the impression that she is travelling alone. In the foreground on the left of the picture, a man in traditional

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 11. Al-Fukāha*, no. 27, 1 June 1927, 11.*



Egyptian clothing can be seen: he is wearing a red and white striped *jallābīya*, a long dark robe over it, black shoes, and a small white turban on his head. He is clean-shaven and has a small black moustache. His son sits on his knee wearing a miniature version of the 'Effendi' outfit: a small *ṭarbūš*, striped shorts, tiny elegant slippers, and a sailor's blouse. In the background of the car, a second group of traditionally dressed passengers can be seen: a woman wearing an *ʿabāyah*, a long dark coat that extends over her head. Her face is almost completely covered by a white veil, only her eyes are visible. She is followed by a man in a *jallābīya*[39] and white headdress. Finally, there is a young man on the left who appears to be standing on the outside of the carriage; he seems to be calling out to someone else on the street.

Rifqi's cartoons are usually easy to understand from the image alone, with the captions serving mainly to reinforce the effect.[40] In this case, however, the situation is different. It is

39 Wehr 1958, 116. A long, shirt-like garment worn by villagers; in the city, it is also worn by domestic servants and sometimes by the middle class in private settings.

40 Some examples in Kollatz and Wagner 2025, 10, 12, 27, 31, 33, 35.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 12. Al-Fukāha*, no. 64, 15 February 1928, title page.*

clear that there must have been some interaction between the Effendis, the father with his son, and the young woman in the middle of the compartment. The men around the young woman have their eyes fixed on her; some are grinning and are obviously amused by something. The boy's father looks frightened, his eyes are wide open, his feet are turned inwards, and he seems to be clutching his son with both hands. The young woman herself

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 13. Central figures from Figure 12.

is frozen, her eyes are also wide open, she is blushing, and the umbrella is falling from her left hand. Her gaze is directed at the little boy. However, the actual content of the scene remains unclear until one reads the caption. It says: 'The well-behaved boy,' and the text itself reads:

> 'The boy sitting on his father's lap (to the standing woman):
> "*Would you like to take my place?*[41] (تنفضلي تقعدي مطرحي؟)".'

41 Wehr 1958, 641, does not cite a 7th word stem of this verb so this is most likely a dialectal form.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

From today's perspective, the boy's statement seems only moderately problematic. After all, he is merely following the basic rules of etiquette, according to which children should give up their seats to adults. One would therefore assume that he is simply parroting a learned phrase without considering that he does not actually have a seat of his own to offer. However, the strong reaction of the entire group, including the young woman and his father, suggests that a different dynamic has been triggered here. I would like to try to analyse this in the following. Let us consider the groups we see represented in the carriage compartment:

– The Effendis. They are the majority in the car and they appear amused by the boy's remark and focus their attention on the young woman's reaction.
– The 'Young Modern Women,' represented here by a single individual. Her shocked reaction and the fact that the Effendis stare at them mockingly show that their position seems to be precarious.
– The traditionally dressed women, that is, wearing long robes and face veils, possibly even accompanied by a man in public spaces; represented by the woman in the back, whose face is at eye level with that of the young woman.
– The traditionally dressed country-people, whose typical clothing consists of the *jallābīya*, a long overcoat, sturdy shoes, and a small turban; the most conspicuous representative is the boy's father, another is the companion of the woman at the back left.

The first two groups will be briefly examined below.

The Effendis

This group has been described frequently.[42] As members of a new social group that formed in the late 19th century, they saw themselves as distinct from the traditional peasant milieu. Their formal secular education and their roles in the renewal of the state led to a general self-image as forward-looking, both politically and in their personal lives. Their role models were the modern middle classes of Europe. However, all authors emphasise that the *Effendiyya* was clearly stratified internally, ranging from lower-middle-class civil servants in the state administration, who tended to embody a petty bourgeois milieu, to leading journalists and state politicians. The *Effendiyya* also differed in their ideas about the role of religion and thus also in their cultural demarcation from the West. Finally, the economic situation played a significant role: in the years after the First World War, the number of lower-level employees rose due to increased educational opportunities on the one hand and reduced upward mobility opportunities on the other; many of them lived on the poverty line during the economic crisis of the 1920s.[43] For many of them it was not possible to start a family in accordance with their social status because the material demands of the bride's family were beyond their means. The contemporary term for this generally difficult situation faced by young men was 'marriage crisis' and seems to have

42 Ryzova, 2014. A brief and accurate overview can be found in Kholoussy 2010, 7, and further in Beinin 2008, 309.
43 Ryzova 2014, 9–10.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

triggered a significant social debate.[44] Some of 'our' Effendis, who are seated around the young woman may have found themselves in exactly the situation described by a well-known journalist of the time a few years later:

> You are the victims of this society, which... pays you a miserable salary... and forces you to be an Effendi, to wear a fez and a suit... to ride the tram, read the newspaper and sit in the coffee house... But if you, my brother, wore a galabija... you would find thousands... who would love to marry you.[45]

The 'Young Modern Women'

On the group of 'Young Modern Women' much research has been done, investigating the Egyptian women's struggle for equality, access to education, and the demand to shape their own lives.[46] A key issue in this context was the partial veiling of the face, which was worn particularly by middle- and upper-class women in cities. Many women's rights activists had been rebelling against this since the beginning of the 20th century, and similar public demonstrations had taken place long before Huda Shaarawi's famous self-unveiling at Cairo Central Station in 1923.[47] A year later, Rifqī himself drew a cover page that made his sympathies for the 'unveiling' side quite clear (Fig. 14).

Beyond this demonstrative gesture, there had been a public debate about women's equality since the end of the 19th century,[48] and a key issue was the demand to be allowed to pursue a career outside the home.[49] Nabawiyya Musa, who was one of the first to assert her right to an academic education as a teacher in around 1906, is perhaps the most prominent example.[50] In addition, the women's rights movement was supported by a number of associations, books, and newspapers,[51] the most prominent voice of which from 1923 onwards was the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU).[52] Here, Huda Shaarawi, Nabawiyya Musa, and Saiza Nabarawi published their demands for gender equality. In addition to publishing such gender-specific topics, the leading women's rights activists had entered the political arena alongside men when they came together in 1920 in the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWCC), thus linking the demand for political independence from England with the women's issue. Huda Shaarawi was also a leader here, and Safiya Zaghlul was active as an 'associate member' of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee.[53]

44 Kholoussy 2010.
45 Kholousy 2010, 7, with reference to an article by Ahmad al-Sawi Muhammad in *Al-Ahram*, 11 May 1931.
46 Badran 1995, provides a very good overview of the topic.
47 E.g. by Nabawiyah Musa ca. 1909, Badran 1995, 58, 67, 69, with reference to Baron 1989.
48 E.g. by Zaynab Fawwaz in 1897, see Badran 1995, 65, and Bahithad al-Badiyah in 1911, see Badran 1995, 69, and Qasim Amin in 1898, see Kholoussy 2010, 4.
49 Already represented in the late 19th century by Zaynab Fawwaz, see Badran 1995, 66.
50 Badran 1995, 39, 53–4.
51 E.g. *Al-Mar'a al-Misriyya*, see Kholoussy 2010, 4, or *al-Fatah*, 1892, see Beinin 2008, 312.
52 Badran 1995, 92–3.
53 *ibid.*, 80–1.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

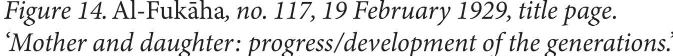


Figure 14. Al-Fukāha*, no. 117, 19 February 1929, title page.*
'Mother and daughter: progress/development of the generations.'

'Our' young woman in the tram compartment in 1927 is thus symbolic of almost two generations of struggle for women's equality and can also claim to be a fellow fighter for the cause of Egyptian national emancipation.[54]

54 Beinin 2008, 314–5.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 15. Detail from Fig. 12, boy's head.

Let us return to the little boy's remark, which apparently had the potential to erupt the emotionally charged atmosphere by making the men around the woman laugh. The simplest explanation for this success is probably that the young woman provides a projection screen for the erotic fantasies of this group of men. The boy's remark puts these fantasies into words with a slight shift ('would you like to sit in my place/on my lap?'). The collective amusement that ensues results from the realisation that apparently everyone has just had a similar fantasy. This in turn strengthens the collective emotion and creates an exclusive distinction between the men and the young woman. Indeed, one could even go a step further in this analysis: On closer inspection, it is noticeable that the boy does not actually look like a child–rather, he has the body proportions of an adult man, and this also applies to his head with its receding hairline and sideburns (Fig. 15).

Rifqī's depictions of children are sometimes drawn in this way, but where he wants to emphasise the difference between them and the grown-ups he follows the conventions, namely with a larger head and childlike hairstyle (Fig. 16 and 17).

If we follow this line of reasoning, we have a young man who deliberately uses a dirty joke to attack the young woman. Either way, the young woman has clearly noticed the vulgarity of the 'invitation.' Rifqī has made an artistic effort to emphasise the drama: the interaction between the woman and the boy is underlined by falling lines from the top right to the bottom left, formed by the arms and heads of the men standing around them (Fig. 18): in this way, even those men who appear to be neutral spectators are drawn into the story. The only other person who is as shocked as the young woman is the father hold-

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 16. Al-Fukāha*, no. 12, 16 February 1927, 4.*

ing the boy on his lap: with wide eyes, feet turned inwards and hands clasped around the boy, he shows how incapable he is of controlling the situation.

But the story does not end here. Rifqī has endeavoured to show that while the situation is entertaining for the men, it is threatening for the woman. Changing the perspective within the image from a frontal to a bird's-eye view of the people involved, it becomes clear how the young woman is surrounded by men (Figs. 19, 20). It is not difficult to understand that for a single young woman to be surrounded by staring and grinning men within a confined public space such as a tram or a bus, must have been just as intimidating a hundred years ago as it is today. This threatening situation is also described in contemporary words:

> As soon as a woman steps onto the street, she is bombarded with obscenities from all sides, causing her to stumble over her skirt. Some of the mob may follow her, insulting

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

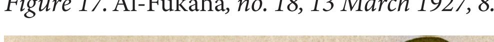
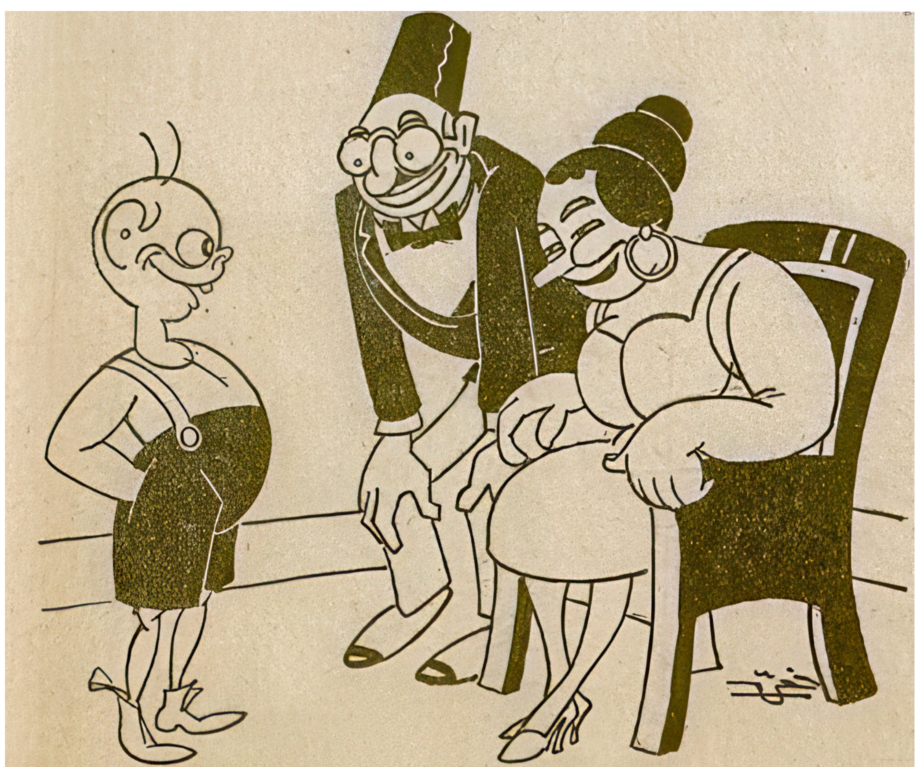


Figure 17. Al-Fukāha*, no. 18, 13 March 1927, 8.*



her reputation in front of those who do not know her and addressing her directly–these immoral people–without embarrassment or shame.[55]

If we match the conflicting parties against their socio-cultural backgrounds we may possibly gain yet another prespective. I would like to assume that the individual stories of the two protagonists–boy and young woman–are quite different: the boy could be understood as the son of a father who–judging by the quality of his clothing alone–is a settled man from the countryside who has decided that his boy should receive a good education in the capital.[56] The boy already wears clothes similar to those of the other 'Effendis' on the tram, and it can be assumed that his goal and that of those around him is that one day he too should become a member of this community. The reaction of the men around him shows that they are willing to consider him one of their own already; in any case, none of them show any disapproval of his remark–rather, they seem to register that he is already capable of reproducing their kind of humour.

55 Baron 1989, 370–86 (with further examples).

56 Ryzova 2014, 1, tells the story from the novel 'The Saint's Lamp' (author Yahiya Haqqi), in which a successful village craftsman sends his son to the city for training.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 18. Illustration of the 'falling lines.'

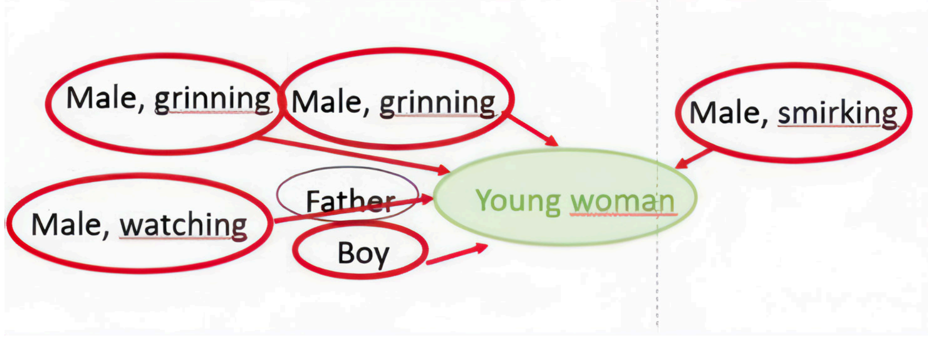
For the young woman, 'background' and 'perspective' appear less linear and more conflictual. Margot Badran[57] and Beth Baron[58] have shown that the removal of the veil was part of a long-running public debate until the late 1920s. While this particular discourse always oscil-

57 Badran 1995, 89–90.
58 Baron 1989.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 19. View of the men looking at the young woman.

Figure 20. Men looking at the young woman, bird's-eye view.



https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

lated between the poles of 'women's right to self-determination; versus 'distancing oneself from Western moral corruption,' clothing became the single most distinctive way of expressing modernity. Ultimately, this will have been a generational issue, as Rifqī has illustrated above in Fig. 14. But of course, the demand for self-determination included the right to education, employment,[59] and physical health, all of which were among the earliest demands of Egyptian women's rights activists.[60] They had to fight against numerous obstacles, from government agencies[61] to their own families.[62] 'Our' main character probably belonged to the small group of young women who not only received a liberal upbringing and education, but also possibly pursued a career. In any case, this can be deduced from her appearance: she is young, wears modern clothes, has short, only partially covered hair, carries a suitcase, and is travelling alone. At that time, she was clearly still in the minority and a provocation to traditionally minded people. The veiled and accompanied woman boarding the tram on the left suggests that the traditional part of society probably still had a very different view of women's behaviour in public.[63] Rifqī has produced a number of examples of how conservative groups imagined the consequences of this progress, primarily that the traditional role of men would be dissolved and ridiculed.[64] The young woman on the tram therefore finds herself in a much more complex situation than the boy on his father's lap: her social and educational status cannot be taken for granted, nor can her right to an appearance that corresponds to this status. All the Effendis involved reinforce the boy's attitude with their reaction, and the only one who seems horrified is his father. One can speculate as to why this is the case: perhaps it was simply a device used by the cartoonist to highlight the outrageousness of the son's remark, or perhaps he also wanted to illustrate how morally questionable the *Effendiyya*'s behaviour is: While on the one hand they proudly demand freedom and equality on the basis of their superior education, on the other hand they pursue completely different principles in their private lives.[65]

Beyond this observation, there may have been yet another level of interpretation that Rifqī had in mind. 'Modern Egypt' was repeatedly illustrated as the image of a young woman, in the round, painted, or in drawings (Fig. 21).[66] The motifs could be very different, ranging from a woman from the countryside to a politician or a young urban woman. In Rifqī's work, the allegory usually wears a flowing dress, often revealing her knees, her face is unveiled, her hair partially covered. Her forehead is crowned with a small diadem bearing three stars above a crescent moon.[67] These represent the flag of the 'Kingdom of

59 Badran 1995, 166–7.
60 *ibid.*, 143–4. and 146.
61 For example, the account of the struggle Nabawiyya Musa had to wage for her right to education, Badran 1995, 38–9.
62 *ibid.*, 144, 148, 149.
63 Nabawiyya Musa described very vividly in her memoirs how severe this bullying behaviour by her male classmates and students was: Badran 1995, 43.
64 E.g. Quiering 2022, 175, 178, figures. 2, 3 and 4.
65 Badran 1995, 171.
66 Baron 2005, 67, 71, 80, 215, 192–3.
67 Figure 21 and p. 22; see also *Al-Fukāha*, no. 8, 19 January 2027, title page.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 21. Al-Fukāha*, no. 21, 20 April 1927, 7.*
'Foreign privileges, monopolistic companies, foreign criminals, cocaine, hashish, white slavery–all these are malicious worms that feed on the blood of Egypt.'

Egypt' (1922–1953).[68] The young woman always appears distinctly feminine, but depending on the theme of the drawing, she is depicted as fragile or combative and occasion-

68 Britannica, 'Flag of Egypt'. URL: https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-Egypt (last accessed 20 August 2025).

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 22. Al-Fukāha*, no. 34, 20 July 1927, 3.*
'The celebrations in London.' Caption: 'John Bull: "Do you like the dance, my dear?" Egypt (while carefully watching out for the sharp nails): "The dance is nice, but God grant that (our) heels remain intact."'

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

ally even erotic, often in direct connection with 'John Bull,' the personification of British imperialism.[69]

Although 'our' young woman in the tram is not explicitly depicted as an embodiment of rising Egypt, the image motif itself, with its underlying themes, perhaps allows for a comparison with another image that Rifqī had drawn almost a year earlier, in December 1926. It is titled 'On the Road to Freedom' and we see a 'young Miss Egypt' depicted as a self-confident, aggressive, and fearless warrior in a chariot. She is racing along a path towards the sun, which is inscribed with the word 'Freedom.' A number of different male figures try to hinder her on her way: there are men wearing *ṭarbūš* and suits, i.e. representatives of the *Effendiyya*, men wearing turbans and long coats, i.e. representatives of the clergy, and in the front right we see a representative of the imperial powers wearing European clothing. They all try to hinder the young woman's journey, either with staves that they stick in the spokes or with stones that they have placed in her path. But the text inscription shows that the combative chariot driver will not be stopped by this (Fig. 23).

It is noteworthy that the men try to dissuade the young woman from her path in two ways: through physical obstacles such as 'stones in her path' and 'holding the horse back,' as well as by putting sticks in the spokes and in addition also through 'psychological warfare' by trying to ridicule her. The term 'ākas-ha' could easily be translated with this meaning.[70]

While the protagonist here remains completely unimpressed by the obstacles and unequivocally explains to her opponents how she will prevail, the sad conclusion from the 'scene in the tram' is completely opposite. Here we see that the *Effendiyya* class does not show solidarity with women in their struggle for political and social participation, but instead abuses the little power it has to humiliate women. In the final consequence this means that by marginalising half the population, the future of the entire country is called into question. As has been noted before, the boy's father is only man who seems genuinely shocked by his son´s remark. His respect for the young Egyptian woman's integrity is obvious, and perhaps Rifqī wanted to show a glimmer of hope here. If the new class of *Effendiyya* was not prepared to understand how important respect and dignity were for the future of their country, then perhaps there remained the hope that at least the traditional rural population, which since Rousseau at the latest has been credited with particular moral integrity, would possess the better moral compass for the path of Egyptian society into the future.

69 'John Bull' is often portrayed as a synonym for 'Great Britain'/'British imperialism' throughout the Middle Eastern media. See Bower and Erikson 1976; Taylor 1992, 95, fn. 6.

70 Wehr 1958, 567, verb stem *'akasa* – in the 3rd stem with the meaning 'to disturb, harass, tease,' etc.; imperative of the 3rd person singular with feminine ending.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [cc] BY

Figure 23. Al-Fukāha*, no. 5, 29 December 1926, 3.*
'On the road to freedom
The reactionaries: "Stop the wheel of the cart, you – put stones in her way,
you–harass/annoy/tease her (عاكسها)
and you–hold on to the horse's tail."
Egypt: 'You deserve it, you who stand in my way, I will destroy you!'

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Bibliography

Ayalon, Ami. 1995. *The Press in the Arab Middle East*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ᶜAbder-Raḥmān Bakr. 2017. *Mağallat al-fukāha va ğarīdat al-balāha*. Cairo: maktaba ğazīrat al-ward.

Badran, Margot. 1995. *Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Baron, Beth. 1989. 'Unveiling in Early Twentieth Century Egypt. Practical and Symbolic Considerations'. *Middle Eastern Studies* 25. 370–386.

–. 2005. *Egypt as a Woman. Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*. The American University in Cairo Press.

Beinin, Joel. 2008. 'Egypt. Society and Economy, 1923–52'. In Daly, M. W. (ed.), *Cambridge History of Egypt*. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 309–333.

Bower, lan W. and Erickson, Robert A. (eds.). 1976. *The History of John Bull*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Çeviker, Turgut. 1993. *Ahmet Rıfkı, Karşı*. Istanbul: Anadolu Yayıncılık A.Ş.

Demirel, Ali. 2018. 'The Relations of Istanbul and Ankara within the Press of Turkish National Struggle (1918-1922)'. MA Thesis, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye. URL: https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/27502 (last accessed on 1 August 2025).

Elmas, Elif. 2016. *Die Balkankrise von 1875 bis 1878 im Spiegel osmanischer und westlicher Karikaturen*. History of Culture of the Modern Near and Middle East. Vol. 38. Frankfurt a. M. et al.: Peter Lang.

El-Menshawi, Yasmin and Gläser, Alina. 2022. 'Stereotype in der ägyptischen Satirepresse. Mohammed Abdel-Moneim Rakha und die Zeitschrift al-Balāgh al-Usbū'ī'. In Burschel, Peter, Cornelißen, Christoph and Sauer, Michael (eds.). *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 2022. 3/4*. Hannover: Friedrich Verlag. 185–204.

Gendzier, Irene. 1996. *The Practical Visions of Yaᶜqub Sanuᶜ*. Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 15. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gingeras, Ryan. 2016. *Fall of the Sultanate. The Great War and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1922*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

İşik, Ihsan (ed.). 2001–2004. *Türkiye Yazarlar Ansiklopedisi*. 3 vols. Yenişehir/Ankara: Elvan Yayınları.

Kholoussy, Hanan. 2010. *For Better, for Worse. The Marriage Crisis that Made Modern Egypt*. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press.

Kollatz, Anna. 2022a. 'Karikaturen im Nahen Osten. Die 1920iger Jahre'. In Burschel, Peter, Cornelißen, Christoph and Sauer, Michael (eds.). *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 2022. 3/4*. Hannover: Friedrich Verlag. 117–128.

–. 2022b. 'Maultier und Motorrad. Fortschrittsdiskurse im Spiegel der Karikaturen ᶜAlī Rifqīs'. In Burschel, Peter, Cornelißen, Christoph and Sauer, Michael (eds.). *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 2022 3/4,* Hannover: Friedrich Verlag. 148–164.

Kollatz, Anna and Wagner, Veruschka (eds.). 2025. *Erst Lachen dann Denken! Karikaturen aus dem Nahen Osten 1850–1940*. Universitätsmuseum Heidelberg, Katalog 18.

Marsot, ᶜAfāf Lutfi Al-Sayyid. 1971. *The Cartoon in Egypt*. Comparative Studies in Society and History 13, no. 1. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Quiering, Miriam. 2022. 'Die Freiheit der Frauen und die Angst der Männer. Karikaturen zum Thema Gender und Emanzipation in der al-Fukāha (1926–28)'. In Burschel, Peter, Cornelißen, Christoph and Sauer, Michael (eds). *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 2022. 3/4*. Hannover: Friedrich Verlag. 165–184.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Ryzova, Lucie. 2014. *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor, Miles. 1992. 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England c. 1712-1929'. *Past & Present*. 134. 93–128.

Topçuoğlu, Hayriye. 2001. 'Bektaşi Ahmet Rıfkı, Hayatı ve Eserleri.' *Haci Bektaş Veli. Arastirma Dergisi.* Mustafa Kemâl Üniversitesi. Antakya. URL: https://isamveri.org/pdfdrg/D01093/2001_19/2001_19_TOPCUOGLUH.pdf (last accessed 19 February 2026).

Wagner, Veruschka**.** 'Die satirische Darstellung des Griechisch-Türkischen Kriegs in der osmanischen Zeitschrift Ayi'ne'. In Burschel, Peter, Cornelißen, Christoph and Sauer, Michael (eds.). *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 2022. 3/4*. Hannover: Friedrich Verlag. 129–147.

Wasti, Syed Tanvir. 2019. 'Refik Halid Karay and his memoirs of exile'. *Middle Eastern Studies* 55(3), 450–463.

Wehr, Hans. 1958. *Arabisches Wörterbuch für die Schriftsprache der Gegenwart.* 3rd edition. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz.

Yılmaz, Nuray Firidinoğlu. 2016. 'Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi'de bir mizah gazetesi: Zümrüdüanka'. MA Thesis, Yıldız *Teknik* Üniversitesi sosyal bilimler enstitütüsü, Istanbul.

Zdafee, Keren. 2020. *Cartooning for a Modern Egypt.* Leiden/Boston: Brill.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Katrin Köster

Research Centre Global Dynamics (ReCentGlobe)[1]
University of Leipzig, Germany
Katrin.koester@uni-leipzig.de

Caricatures in the Newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition'): Fighting for Social Justice in Lebanon, 1921–1936

Abstract

This article examines caricatures printed in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition'), published by Michel Zaccour (1896–1937) in Beirut from 1921 to 1936. Situating these images within the socio-political dynamics of Lebanon under French mandate rule, it investigates how caricatures operated within the intermedial microcosm of a predominantly 'serious' newspaper that nonetheless relied heavily on visual humour. Drawing on approaches from Arab periodical studies and visual history, the article characterises caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* as 'mediating agents' and as 'sites of contestation' within the quest for independence and intra-elite debates on the future of Lebanon. It shows, first, that caricatures amplified the paper's critique of social injustice, economic exploitation, and political dysfunction, particularly in the late 1920s. Second, they reflected an elite perspective on Lebanese society and helped construct the editor's self-image as a heroic advocate of press freedom and Lebanese interests. Third, in conflicts with French mandate authorities–especially through censorship trials–caricatures functioned simultaneously as weapons and as bones of contention, provoking concrete reactions and shaping chains of action and counteraction.

Keywords: caricatures, periodical studies, Lebanese history, French mandate in the Levant, censorship, social injustice

1. Introduction

In March 1926, the Beirut-based newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition', 1921–1936) published a caricature of an armoured knight on horseback piercing a sheet of paper with a lance. Titled *After the court ruling on al-Maʿraḍ*, the image showed editor Michel Zaccour (1896–1937) as the heroic knight, rallying with the caption: *'Al-Maʿraḍ: To the appeal!!! To the appeal!!!'* The pierced sheet of paper symbolised the court order to shut down the newspaper, a decision Zaccour was determined to contest as part of his broader struggle against censorship during repeated closures between 1925 and 1927 (Fig. 1).

The caricature reveals the editor's heroic self-image: he depicts himself as a lone knight in shining armour struggling for his paper's survival while also fighting for press freedom, independence, and social justice.[2] His paper thus was not solely a tool of reporting and analysing current events but was intended to generate political and societal change.

1 ORCID: 0009-0001-5920-2593.
2 See Ayalon 1995, 131, for the intricate entanglements of the fights for national and individual freedoms.

Diyâr, 7. Jg., 1/2026, S. 106–138, DOI: 10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1-106

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 1. Michel Zaccour as a knight in shining armour attacking the court decision to temporarily close his newspaper, al-Maʿraḍ *(Al-Maʿraḍ, no. 5.457, 1926, 7). After the court ruling on* al-Maʿraḍ. Al- Maʿraḍ*: To the appeal!!! To the appeal!!!'*

Furthermore, the image exemplifies that caricatures were (and are) not only humorous commentary but sites of controversy and struggle. They exaggerate and essentialise to challenge existing social and cultural norms as well as political and societal hierarchies.[3] This potential for subversion made caricatures very popular in the Middle East, especially in the 1920s/30s in the context of anti-colonial struggles.[4]

As caricatures continue to enjoy great popularity in the region, this article can draw on a rich body of existing scholarly literature. Researchers have particularly focused on Ottoman, Turkish, and Egyptian caricatures emphasising their roles in anti-colonial struggles

3 On the specific qualities of caricatures see, for example, Achterberg 1998, 73; Coupe 1969, 85; Göçek 1998, 2; Okyar 2023.

4 Kollatz 2022a, 122.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

and nation-building.[5] Research on caricatures in the Levant (or the Gulf) is much rarer and is almost exclusively produced by journalists and artists from the region.[6] Furthermore, most existing scholarship focuses on explicitly humorous and/or satirical magazines[7] or on specific topics tackled by caricatures published across several papers.[8] Less attention has been paid to how caricatures function or act within a given superordinate medium such as a (serious, non-satirical) newspaper or journal, TV channel, or website. This article therefore focuses on *al-Maʿraḍ*, one of the first periodicals to popularise caricatures in Lebanon. *Al-Maʿraḍ* is an ideal source for investigating caricatures within a periodical or text–image interactions more broadly, as it was primarily intended as a serious newspaper but nonetheless included at least one, often more, caricatures per issue, as well as textual jokes, and generally presents itself as a paper that carefully combined diverse textual and visual elements.[9] In this mix of visual and textual, serious and humorous elements it resembles the Syrian satire magazine *Al-Muḍḥik al-mubkī* ('The Weeping Joker', 1925–1966), launched in 1925.

Based on the surviving issues of *al-Maʿraḍ*, this article investigates how caricatures as an integral part of the paper became agents within an anti-colonial struggle. In doing so, it particularly focuses on how caricatures and texts interacted and integrated into a communicative whole to enhance the paper's overall communicative impact, an approach inspired by both Arab periodical studies and newer approaches in visual history.

Arab periodical studies reconceptualise periodicals (newspapers, journals, other serialised print media) as more than vessels of discourses. They stress that periodicals are active agents or actors in themselves that are deeply embedded in networks and social practices. Through this embeddedness as well as their capacity to integrate diverse textual and pictorial elements into a communicative whole, periodicals influence intellectual, cultural, and political transformation.[10] In a similar way, proponents of visual history emphasise that images not only document history but influence its course.[11] Based on this insight, Roßler has developed a sociological model to describe images and works of art more generally as actors. He conceptualises works of art (such as caricatures) as part of 'chains or networks of action' that influence how people understand and consequently shape their realities: once produced by humans, a work of art (periodical, caricature) becomes a 'mediating agent,' which exists independently from its creator. It circulates, interacts with human readers/viewers, shapes their perceptions, and elicits reactions from them through its 'performative, theatrical, dramatic' qualities. In this interaction

5 Awad 2020; El Saied 2019; Göçek 1998; Kollatz 2022a; Kollatz 2022b; Okyar 2023; Wagner 2022.
6 Anonymous 2022a; Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023; Ḥaddād 2023; Ḥammūd 2024.
7 For example: Awad 2020.
8 For example: Okyar 2023.
9 Kaḥḥālah 1925.
10 Albers 2023; Bentlage and Köster 2025; Collier 2015; Ernst and Scheiding, 2022; Glaß 2004; Latham and Scholes 2006; Sheehi 2005; Winckler 2018.
11 Bredekamp 2021; Gerhard 2011.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

with humans, it gains an inherent capacity to effect change, which Roßler terms 'effective power' and 'actorness.'[12]

Applying Roßler's model to this case study, I define *al-Maʿraḍ* and its caricatures as mediating agents. Purposefully created by actors belonging to an emerging professional middle class as instruments in their anti-colonial struggle, they became sites of contestation in debates over Lebanon's future. As iconotexts within the intermedial microcosm of a periodical and through their specific 'performative quality'–that is, their exaggerating and essentialising style–caricatures gained 'effective power' and 'actorness,' becoming battle cries for action against colonial exploitation and social injustice.

The article traces these dynamics across five sections: After outlining the historical context and characterising the set of actors behind periodical and caricatures in the first two sections, it analyses how caricatures interacted with *al-Maʿraḍ*'s textual elements as a third step. In the fourth section it zooms in on a specific set of caricatures crucial to the paper's core agenda of promoting Lebanese independence and social justice to highlight how their emotive and appellative character turned into communicative impact. The final section then highlights caricatures as simultaneous bones of contention and weapons in a conflict between local newspaper editor and colonial power. As they elicited very concrete reactions from the colonial powers, caricatures in this section clearly emerge as key actors within circular chains of action and (re-)action deeply embedded in the colonial realities they were intended to change.

2. Periodicals and Caricatures amidst the Struggle for Lebanon's Future

Al-Maʿraḍ was published in Beirut between 1921 and 1936, during French mandate rule over Lebanon and Syria, a period marked by the struggle for independence, widespread poverty, and sharp socio-economic inequality. Periodicals reflected and intervened in these struggles.

After World War I, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the 1920 San Remo conference placed former Arab provinces under British and French mandates. Officially framed as transitional 'tutelage' towards independence, mandate rule in practice concentrated power in French institutions, while local authorities were largely confined to a consultative role.[13] The war had caused large-scale poverty in both today's Lebanon and Syria, which peaked during the Great Famine (1915–1918) with 30-50% of the population starving to death in some areas.[14]

Despite this dire socio-economic situation, investments in trade and finance and new educational opportunities helped to produce an emergent professional middle class of engineers, doctors, lawyers, and journalists that challenged established elites. This new upper class recognised the potential of journals and newspapers for influencing public

12 Roßler 2023, 237–41, 247.

13 Ṣalībī 2003, 19; Traboulsi 2007, 88.

14 Abi-Rached and Diwan 2022, 8; Harris 1997, 40.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

opinion.[15] Consequently, periodicals became important vehicles for the anti-colonial struggle but also for the gradual development of a Lebanese national sentiment and the articulation of competing political, social, and cultural visions of the country's future.[16] In doing so, they contributed to the gradual consolidation of Greater Lebanon–an externally delineated space–into a political and cultural unit increasingly invested with national meaning.[17]

Against this backdrop, the proliferation of periodicals in 1920s Lebanon is unsurprising.[18] The collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1922) enabled the return of formerly exiled intellectuals, and Beirut re-emerged as a vibrant centre of Arab journalism.[19] Despite continuing censorship and extremely insecure, often rapidly changing legal conditions, 'political passion' motivated a generation of often very young editors and journalists.[20] They considered their periodicals as a service to the people and as leading the struggle for independence. Periodicals frequently acted as mouthpieces for specific political agendas and accompanied the formation of contemporary political parties. They thus became 'an indispensable actor in political mobilisation [...] and the restructuring of political life' in Lebanon as elsewhere in the region.[21]

Humour and satire–especially caricatures–were central to these processes of nation-building and mobilisation. Not only did they enable the circulation of political critique under the guise of entertainment, but they gave visible form to political and societal dynamics and created idiotypic representations of group identities. From the 19th century onwards, Ottoman/Turkish and Egyptian caricaturists, for example, often depicted the nation as a female figure that embodied the nation's virtues and/or its struggles against foreign powers.[22] Stylised representations of corrupt officials, of the 'new woman,' and of downtrodden peasants became similar staples in caricatures[23] reflecting debates in societies undergoing profound political, societal, and cultural transformations.

While Lebanese publishers, journalists, and artists seem to have discovered the power of humour later than their Ottoman/Turkish and Egyptian colleagues, they made strides to catch up during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The first Lebanese satir-

15 Abi-Rached and Diwan 2022, 4; Arsan and Schayegh 2015, 4; Traboulsi 2007, 92.

16 On newspapers as 'platforms for the discussion of issues of national identity and culture [...]' see Ayalon 1995, 81. While he focuses on Egypt during the interwar period here, his observations are applicable to the entire region. On the power of print in creating national awareness also see Okyar 2023, 7.

17 On the complexities of the evolution of a Lebanese national consciousness see Salibi 2003.

18 Ayalon 1995, 91; Méouchy 2002, n.p.

19 Méouchy 2002, n.p.

20 Ayalon 1995, 88–90, 118–9.

21 Méouchy 2002, n.p.

22 Awad 2020, 180; Brummett 1995, 434; Brummett 1998, 13, 25, 29. This is not only true for the Middle East. Somers has shown that American editorial cartoons were crucial for the development of national symbolism, Somers 1998, 2–3.

23 Awad 2020, 171–2; Brummett 1998.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

ical magazines had already been published prior to World War I,[24] and 12 out of 104 periodicals that were launched in Beirut between 1918 and 1939 were humorous in nature, making them the third largest category after magazines on literature, history, and culture (22 titles) and magazines on religion (22 titles).[25] Caricatures first appeared before the Great War in *Habbat* ('Galloping', n.d.), a horse-racing magazine, but they only became a prominent art and media form in the 1920s. Four periodicals are usually credited with their breakthrough: *ad-Dabūr* ('The Wasp', 1923–today), *an-Nadīm* ('Nadeem', n.d.), *al-Aḥrār al-Muṣawwara* ('The Illustrated *al-Aḥrār*', 1926–1927), and *al-Maʿraḍ*.[26]

3. Michel Zaccour and *Al-Maʿraḍ*: a Top-Down Approach to Reforming Lebanon

Periodicals are more than their textual content: they emerge from social networks (publishers, journalists, photographers, artists, readers, printers, typesetters, agents and vendors, etc.),[27] are tied to specific institutions (postal offices, telegram services, publishing houses, literary salons, etc.),[28] and shape social practices (political and societal debate, individual and public reading, letter writing, gifting subscriptions, etc.). Yet the archival visibility of the many actors involved in the periodical's production and consumption is uneven. While Michel Zaccour's biography is well documented,[29] most other contributors remain obscure. This silence itself suggests *al-Maʿraḍ* as the product of a relatively small elite circle, advancing a top-down vision of social change and a highly personalised model of journalistic activism centred on its founder.

Zaccour was the paper's decisive driving force. Most clearly, *al-Maʿraḍ* ceased publication immediately after his death, and early imprints list him as founder without mentioning other key figures.[30] He authored many of the editorials and was among the most prolific contributors: the compiled issues of May 1935, for instance, include nine articles by Zaccour, nine by other named authors, and eight anonymous pieces.[31] This strong position of the founder-publisher-editor was typical of private publishing in the Middle East, especially in its early phases in the second half of the 19th century. As launching a printing business and/or a periodical was relatively easy and inexpensive, many papers were one-man enterprises. Consequently, these owner-publisher-editors profoundly shaped 'their' periodical's political agenda, societal messaging, content curation, and aesthetic design.[32]

24 *Ḥimārat baladnā* ('Our Country's Donkey', 1910), *Ḥimārat al-ǧabal* ('Donkey of the Mountain', 1913), and *Ǧirāb al-Kurdī* ('Haversack', 1914), see: Anonymous 2022a, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79.
25 Méouchy 2002, n.p.
26 Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023, n.p.; Ḥaddād 2023, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79–80, Anonymous 2022.
27 On the new professions created by the print industry see Ayalon 2008, 563.
28 On the technical changes accompanying the print revolution see Gelvin and Green 2013.
29 Mostly thanks to the biography written by Naǧǧār (Naǧǧār 2010).
30 Title pages of *al-Maʿraḍ* May 1921–November 1924.
31 This in addition to a conference report, five reprinted speeches held at a commemoration for al-Mutanabbī, several poems, miscellaneous news, photographs and illustrations with explanations, and advertisements. *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1057–1067 (1935).
32 Ayalon 1995, 195–206, 223–4; Ayalon 2008, 564.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

At the same time, *al-Maʿraḍ* reflects the gradual institutionalisation of journalism in the 1920s. Periodicals that were mid- to large-scale enterprises and thus able to hire paid staff became more common.[33] This development was often contingent on outside funding, *al-Maʿraḍ* for example was funded by Edmund Zaccour, the editor's brother, a wealthy émigré to Colombia,[34] which enabled Michel Zaccour to purchase his own printing press from Leipzig, Germany.[35] *Al-Maʿraḍ* seems to have employed a photographer,[36] and from late 1924 the paper's imprints mention Ḫān Antūn Bek as an administrator in charge of advertisements.[37] If additional staff (clerks, typesetters) existed, they remain invisible in the sources. When Zaccour entered parliament in 1929, Mīšāl Abū Šahlā joined as director;[38] although he occasionally contributed articles, he did not noticeably reshape the paper's curation.

Al-Maʿraḍ was produced by and for the emerging cosmopolitan (upper) middle class described above. Zaccour came from a relatively well-off Christian family from Chiyah and began studying law before joining the first generation of full-time professional journalists.[39] Contributors were likewise drawn from intellectual circles along the Syrian and Lebanese coast and from diaspora communities.[40] The advertising profile–luxury women's fashion and Rolls Royce cars–further indicates an affluent readership. In this sense, *al-Maʿraḍ* resembled many 1920s periodicals whose producers and readers belonged to relatively prosperous social strata combining Western models with local traditions.[41] Nonetheless, Zaccour framed the paper as advocating for all Lebanese people, an agenda which also shaped his political career.

Like many contemporary editors and journalists, Michel Zaccour saw his publishing as patriotic activism. After an unsuccessful campaign in 1925, he entered parliament in 1929 as representative of Mount Lebanon and was re-elected in 1934 as part of the Constitutional Bloc established by his friend Béchara el-Khoury (prime minister in 1927–1928 and 1929; Lebanon's first president, 1943–1952). In March 1937 Zaccour was appointed minister of the interior, consular secretary of state, and minister of education, but his ministerial career ended with his premature death at 41.[42] In his publishing activities as well as his political career he promoted Lebanese independence stressing the mandate's transitory character, lobbied against sectarian divisions, and advocated for more social justice.[43] Additionally,

33 Ayalon 1995, 195–206, 226.
34 Naǧǧār 2010, 20–3, 29; Noun 2010, n.p.
35 Naǧǧār 2010, 56–7.
36 Suggested by the large number of photos published in the paper.
37 *Al-Maʿraḍ* 11, 332–63 (1924), title page.
38 *Al-Maʿraḍ* 27, 798–843 (1929), title page.
39 Naǧǧār 2010, 18–21.
40 They for example include Badawī al-Ǧabal, a well-known Syrian (ʿAlawī) poet, aš-Šāʿir al-Qarawī, an Arab Brazilian diaspora poet, and the Lebanese journalist and diplomate Ġassān Tuīnī.
41 Kollatz 2022b, 154–5.
42 Naǧǧār 2010, 55, 57–8, 72–3, 97; Noun 2010, n.p.; Traboulsi 2007, 95.
43 Noun 2010, n.p.; Naǧǧār 2010, 8–9, 38–41, 101–2.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

al-Maʿraḍ presented itself as a platform for freedom of opinion and speech and as a mediator of plural political perspectives within intra-elite struggles over Lebanon's future.[44]

Caricatures were an integral part of the paper's make-up and crucial to the dissemination of its political and social messages. Although Zaccour positioned *al-Maʿraḍ* as a 'serious' publication rather than a primarily satirical one, almost every issue included at least one caricature (often more) alongside textual jokes. While some caricatures were borrowed from English and French magazines or the Egyptian satire magazine *Kaškūl*,[45] most were original–an unusual feature that, together with the paper's careful content curation, implies that caricatures were likely commissioned specifically for *al-Maʿraḍ*. The commissioning process and editor–artist interactions are not documented, but scholarship on Ottoman and Egyptian caricatures suggests editorial control, with publication decisions tied to political messaging[46] and artists contributing to multiple papers as freelancers.[47] The scant information available on *al-Maʿraḍ*'s caricaturists suggest a similar picture.

While many caricatures were not signed–a usual procedure at the time, as the message was considered to be more important than the person behind it[48]–some contributing caricaturists can be identified. The diversity of their backgrounds[49] reflects Beirut's cosmopolitan character and presents caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* as bringing together European–especially French, Ottoman, Greek and Lebanese–traditions and voices. Early caricatures published during the 1920s had been either drawn by the French artist Doctor Farnago (no further information available)[50] or by ʿEzzat Khūršīd (n.d.), a Lebanese man of Turkish origins commonly regarded as the first Lebanese caricaturist. As he first served as a police officer and then worked in the foreign ministry, he kept his artistic endeavours secret.[51] In 1927 an artist called Vasiliadis, who signed his caricatures in Greek letters, began contributing to Zaccour's paper.[52] In the early 1930s two Lebanese artists joined the paper: Ra'fat Buḥairī[53] and Muṣṭafā Farūkh.[54] While little is known about Buḥairī, the latter was a famous Lebanese artist, critic, and art teacher, whose works combined Ottoman and European influences with popular Lebanese traditions. He contributed caricatures to *al-Maʿraḍ, ad-Dabūr*, and *an-Nadīm*.[55] The paper also printed caricatures with an illegible

44 Zaccour 1921, 1.
45 For example*: Kaškūl.* 1923.
46 Awad 2020, 169–70.
47 Brummett 1998, 15.
48 Brummett 1995, 436.
49 A distinguishing feature from rival Lebanese satire magazine *ad-Dabbūr* that primarily employed Egyptian and Syrian artists (Anonymous 2022b).
50 The employment of foreign caricaturists was not unusual. Al-Kaškūl for example first hired the Spanish teacher Juan Sintes to draw caricatures for the magazine (Awad 2020, 167).
51 Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79; Naǧǧār 2010, 31.
52 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1927, 7,575, 11, and *al-Maʿraḍ*, 1927, 7,617, 20.
53 For example: *al-Maʿraḍ*, 1931, 11,948, 21; 1934, Special Issue, 32.
54 His first contribution to *al-Maʿraḍ* appears in 1932, 11,975, 19.
55 Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79; Anonymous 2022b; Lebanese Artists.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Arabic signature[56] as well as two artists with the French-sounding names HP Garisien[57] and Daniel Lapause[58] for whom no further biographical data is available. The growing number of identifiable contributors suggests the increasing popularity of caricature as a genre, which is further illustrated by a reader of *al-Maʿraḍ* contributing as an amateur or citizen caricaturists. In 1934 Blanche ʿAmūn (1912–2011) contributed an entire page of humorous drawings depicting street life in Beirut.[59]

Given that most caricatures remain unsigned and selection practices are undocumented, no reliable statement can be made on how involved artists were in choosing the topics or in shaping political messaging. Nonetheless, some identifiable caricaturists seem to have had preferred topics. Both Khūršīd and the unidentified Arab artist, for example, focused on the mismanagement of political and public life in Lebanon. These likely reflected challenges they encountered in their professional and everyday lives, which suggests that at least some caricaturists influenced the paper's messaging.

4. Effective Power through Iconotextuality and Intermediality

Since interventions by scholars like W. J. T. Mitchell and Roland Barthes have challenged the historic divide between text and image, scholarship has increasingly shown that the two do not operate as rivals but produce cultural meaning in their interplay.[60] Instead of adding to this literature and contributing general observations on caricatures as iconotexts (media that combine image and text),[61] this section investigates caricatures as components of a superordinate medium, the periodical in which they appeared. In doing so, it demonstrates that caricatures at least partially gained their effective power through being part of a periodical while also enhancing the periodical's communicative impact.

Periodicals are inherently intermedial; they integrate diverse genres of text (editorials, essays, reports, news, short stories, poems) and pictorial media (photographs, illustrations, graphs, caricatures), and they often contain references pointing to other forms of media beyond their pages (books, music, and later radio, movies, etc.). This as Walter Armbrust notes, turned them into labyrinths of text and image that the reader had to traverse.[62] Curating a mix of media, genres, and topics into a communicative whole rendered the periodical a special form of media that has the capacity to instigate debate and potentially also societal transformation.

56 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1927, 7.575, 2.
57 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1929, 9,844, 6.
58 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1935, 13,1077, 4.
59 ʿAmūn 1934, 24. Blanche ʿAmūn and Nina Helou were the first women in Lebanon to graduate in law in 1931. Blanche ʿAmūn then became a famous painter and book author. Fadel 2021.
60 Barthes 1983, Mitchell 2004.
61 This, while recognising the value of this research and agreeing with Göçek's astute observation that the cartoon [or caricature] is a 'significant social medium because of the multiplicity of meanings and forms embedded within: it contains both a visuals and textual message on political events presented through cultural symbols' (Göçek 1998, 2).
62 Armbrust 2022, 88.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Within this curated mix, the caricature's iconotextuality was evident not only in captions within the imagery (headlines, explanations, dialogues), but also in interactions with the periodical's other textual elements. Consequently, as Okyar argues, '[t]hese visual forms [caricatures] combined with the text would invest in the consolidation of symbols that helped construct an imaginary world of perceptions and ideas.'[63] Applying this to Roßler's observations on image agency confirms caricatures as nodes within networks of actors: authors and artists created texts and images, editors curated them into a coherent world of shared ideas and values. As soon as published, caricatures became visual embodiments of these ideas and values. They became mediating agents conveying shared meanings to the readers/viewers in interaction with these readers but also in interaction with the periodical's other elements–pictorial and textual.

Cataloguing[64] the caricatures in the available issues of *al-Maʿraḍ* with particular attention on caricature–text interplay, suggests that Zaccour (potentially in cooperation with other editorial staff, contributing authors and artists) consciously mobilised the mediating potential created by this interplay. Caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ*, especially when tackling social injustice, the oppressive nature of the mandate system, or defects in the Lebanese political system, frequently entered direct dialogue with adjacent articles, amplifying arguments and steering readers towards specific perspectives. Texts and caricatures mutually reinforced their communicative impact turning the periodical as a whole into a site of resistance with caricatures acting as visual vanguards of this resistance.

Tracing the trajectory of caricatures within *al-Maʿraḍ* shows that early humorous illustrations of everyday life were increasingly replaced by biting political caricatures. The first direct attacks on mandate rule and inner-Lebanese political affairs appeared in 1923 alongside several caricatures on international politics, particularly conflicts between

63 Okyar 2023, 27.

64 This quantitative analysis draws on two bound volumes that were posthumously compiled and published by two friends of the periodical's editor and are preserved in the library of the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin. They reduced the original volume of the 1,106 issues, which must have comprised 5,000-6,500 pages, to roughly 1,000 pages. Consequently, the following analysis is based not on a complete set of the paper's issues but on material pre-selected by two editors who intended to honour their friend's legacy. In the introduction to the bound volumes they, however, stress their determination to not interfere with the content of articles or images and to stay as true to the original as possible. A comparison with unbound original issues of the paper archived in the library of the Orient-Institute Beirut and with 48 issues scanned and published by the platform Sharekh Archive revealed that the bound volumes indeed are very close to the make-up and text-to-caricature ratio of the originals. While total numbers thus differ from the original, the overall curation of the paper and the topics tackled still reflect the original. I first conducted a cursory review of all caricatures contained in the two bound volumes. Second, I identified recurring topics and visual tropes, based on which I developed a thematic coding framework. Third, I assigned each caricature to one or more of these topics, noting the frequency and evolution of key themes over time. Finally, I examined each caricature's placement in relation to surrounding textual elements to determine whether adjoining articles addressed the same topic and how the caricatures interacted with or amplified the written content.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

France and Britain as well as the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922).[65] These critical caricatures peaked in number in 1926–1929 and repeatedly addressed topics such as the unjust mandate system, inept and corrupt local politicians, economic corruption, the hazards of modern infrastructure, the exploitation of the Lebanese people, and the struggle for press freedom (Fig. 2). This shift was catalysed by French atrocities during the suppression of the Syrian Revolt in 1925, which intensified anti-French sentiment, and by mounting socio-economic pressures[66] aggravated by the concession of monopolies on certain commercial sectors to foreign companies.[67] Reacting to these developments, caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* abandoned light humour in favour of sharp, sometimes horrifying denunciations of corruption, injustice, exploitation, and poverty.[68]

These harsh, sometimes disturbing caricatures were the most tightly connected to the paper's textual elements. In the surviving issues, more than half of the caricatures addressing injustice and the political inadequacy explicitly refer to matters discussed in articles on the same or an adjoining page (Fig. 2b). This tight image–text connection is considerably less pronounced in entertaining caricatures that address lighter, everyday topics indicating that criticism of injustice, exploitation, and corruption were central to the periodical's agenda (Fig. 2b).

Such caricature-text interactions typically took two forms: caricatures reinforced specific points made in an article or subtly biased readers toward a particular perspective. Very direct connections between an article and a caricature appear for instance in the paper's commentary on violent gang warfare in the Shouf district in 1923. Two short articles–*Al-Ḥukm al-ʿurfī fī-l-šūf* ('Customary Law in the Shouf District') and *Wa-Irḥamatāhu ʿala al-maṣāyif* ('God's grace on the Summer Resorts')–appear alongside a caricature and all three elements are tied together by a frame. The second article, adopting a very cynical view on the matter, comments: 'Graves have become safer and better housing than the summer resorts in the Shouf, Lebanon.' Beside it, a caricature presents a 'panorama' of the Shouf in which two skeletons sit atop a gravestone, visually literalising the text's grim irony (Fig. 3).[69]

A more indirect strategy intended to bias the reader towards one side of the argument becomes visible in the paper's commentaries on modern transport, more specifically the dangers of cars. In 1924, *al-Maʿraḍ* published a largely neutral article on cars, discussing the pros and cons of modern transport. The article nearly takes up an entire page and only leaves room for two caricatures. The first, *Būlīs al-mufāriq* ('Police of the Junction'), shows a horrific car accident caused by a distracted police officer. The second, *Wa-š-šaʿb*

65 For a detailed discussion of the Greco-Turkish War in Ottoman caricatures see Wagner 2022.
66 The common budget was introduced in 1921 for both Syria and Lebanon and a renamed budget for the services of common interest followed in 1928. It was primarily financed by custom tariffs and income generated by the tobacco monopoly. It was exclusively administered by the mandate authorities and was primarily used to cover the mandate's expenditures. Consequently, it constituted a great burden on the local economy. Al-Saleh 2002; Abi-Rached and Diwan 2022, 6.
67 Al-Saleh 2002; Edde 2021, 247; Traboulsi 2007, 89, 92.
68 Similar findings but pertaining to Egyptian satire magazines in Awad 2020, 171.
69 Anonymous 1923, 3.

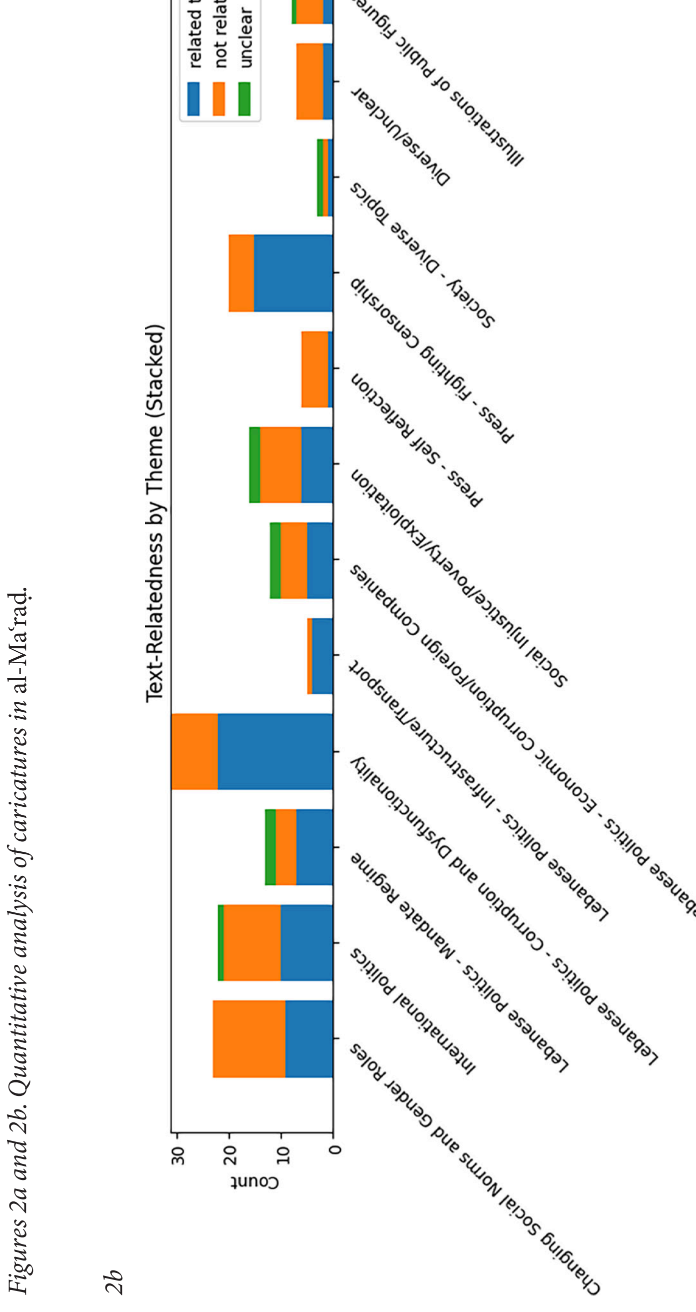
https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figures 2a and 2b. Quantitative analysis of caricatures in al-Maʿraḍ.

2a

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

2b



Figures 2a and 2b. Quantitative analysis of caricatures in al-Maʿraḍ.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

*Figure 3. A horrifying caricature on violent conflicts in the Shouf district right underneath two short articles on the conflict (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 3,204, 1923, 3).*

الحكم العرفي – في الشوف

علمنا من مصدر موثوق ان في نية الحكومة اللبنانية ان تؤلف محكمة استثنائية فوق العادة للنظر بطريقة عرفية في جنايات الشوف وهي تصدر احكامها في يوم ويومين وينفذ الحكم حالا.
وقد علمنا انه يرجح ان تولف هذه المحكمة من القضاة الاتية اسماؤهم نجيب بك ابو صوان رئيساً، نجيب بك القباني، الشيخ بشارة الخوري، كامل بك حميه، شكري افندي قرداحي، راجي افندي ابو حيدر، احمد افندي الحسيني اعضاء.
والكل ممن يشهد لهم بالنزاهة والاخلاص.

***

وارحمتاه على المصايف

قتلى الشوف – الله الله يا دنيا!! لقد صارت المقابر اكثر امنا واطيب مسكنا من مصايف الشوف في لبنان.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

sākit ('And the People are Silent'), shows passengers thrown about inside a tram after sudden braking. Both caricatures are evidently intended to bias the reader by depicting modern transport as sites of injury and institutional negligence (Fig. 4).[70]

Texts and caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* clearly should not primarily be seen as independent and isolated objects but as interacting, coordinated elements within the paper's communication strategy. Caricatures boosted certain perspectives and opinions, guided the readers' eyes, and became visual representations of its political and societal messaging. A comparable technique appears in the Egyptian satirical magazine *al-ʿĀlam* (Cairo, 1926/27), founded by ʿAli Fahmi Kamil (1870–1926). On one page, an illustration of a veiled woman with a dramatically raised arm carries the caption 'I am one of the victims of freedom– Look at page 10,' directing readers to an article detailing how a woman wounded in the 1919 protests confronted politicians about her suffering.[71]

As iconotexts within the intermedial microcosm of the periodical, caricatures interacted with adjoining textual elements to nudge readers/viewers towards the editor's criticism of social and political realities in Lebanon. In some instances, these nudges became veritable battle cries.

5. Caricatures as Sites of Contestation and Battle Cries

Images transport worldviews. This is particularly true for caricatures, which exaggerate and essentialise and thereby ultimately challenge societal and political norms. By mapping social dynamics and hierarchies, they create representations of 'particular groups and individuals [that] retain the power to leave their mark on the collective memory,' feeding back into political decision-making and the perpetuation or alternatively contestation of these very hierarchies.[72] Ottoman, Turkish, and Arab caricatures of the late 19th and early 20th century were therefore preoccupied with foreign hegemony and rapid social transformations that were often perceived as chaotic and threatening.[73] In this preoccupation, they created representations of societal groups which reflected debates within newly emerging nation-states striving for independence and a shared national consciousness while also communicating a top-down elite view of society. Based on the Egyptian satire magazines *al-Kaškūl* and *al-Usbūʿīya as-Sīyāsīya* Sara Awad concludes that '[...] the representations in the images gave visibility to and positioned different actors in society: the powerful corrupt government elite, the interfering foreign powers and the passive actors of the citizen and the nation as an entity.'[74] Such representations identified the enemies of the nation: foreign powers and corrupt officials. As Gerhard notes, distinctive enemy imagery usually implied a call to action.[75] *Al-Maʿraḍ* transformed this call to action into a battle cry against injustice, exploitation, and poverty.

70 Anonymous 1924, 13.
71 Anonymous 1926a, 1926b.
72 Bredekamp 2021, 1–2.
73 Brummett 1995, 434.
74 Awad 2020, 185.
75 Gerhard 2011, 9.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

*Figure 4. Two caricatures showing accidents involving means of modern transport next to an article on cars (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 3,270, 13).*
Upper left corner: ‘Police of the Junction: We saw a policeman looking at a beautiful woman and forgetting his whistle. Two cars crashed, smashing the passengers while the policeman remained entranced.’
Lower right corner: ‘And the people are silent – Every time the tramway passes an earthquake happens and the passers-by see this distressing scene inside the wagon–and despite that the people are silent–and the government is as well?!’

المعرض

١٣ — كانون الثاني نيسان ١٩٢٤

السـيـارات

بوليس الفارق

والشعب ساكت ..

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

One of the most striking examples of these ‘battle cry’ caricatures bore the title ‘Do you see the mandate state?’ and was published in early 1924. Against the backdrop of an apocalyptic-seeming landscape interspersed with gravestones, it shows an emaciated couple obviously close to starvation and clad in rags talking to an anthropomorphised death. The caricature identifies death as ‘the tobacco monopoly company’ who is sitting on a box bearing the label ‘the national wealth’ (Fig. 5). As several other caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ,* it addresses the monopolies on certain goods bestowed by the mandate government on Western companies, especially tobacco, which significantly restricted local economic development.[76] The horrifying imagery denounces this practice and is intended to galvanise readers/viewers into action.

Similarly, the caricature ‘Additional Credits’ (1928) shows a chained skeleton representing the Lebanese people from whom three figures unsuccessfully try to extract even more blood. One restrains the skeleton, while another identified as Dammūs[77] futilely gathers blood in a hat and laments ‘No blood remains within him... haram… oh he… haram.’ A third figure in traditional Lebanese clothes helps pump the skeleton’s blood through the tube (Fig. 6). The caricature thus implicates local elites in the exploitation by the mandate power and dramatizes the severe extraction of resources from the population.

These two caricatures feature the symbolic figures recurring throughout *al-Maʿraḍ*:[78] exploitative ‘big money’ and the downtrodden Lebanese people. ‘Big money,’ that is, (foreign) companies or the exploitative mandate regime and its instruments, such as the oversized security apparatus or an inflated state budget, were typically depicted as extremely obese, engorged by the resources they had taken from the Lebanese people.[79] By contrast, the Lebanese were represented as a destitute male figure (or a couple), emaciated, ragged, and near starvation. Their downward gazes and slumped postures underlined helplessness vis-à-vis corruption and structural exploitation.[80]

This way of depicting the Lebanese people reflected not only widespread poverty but also the specific contours of Lebanese decolonisation and nation building. In contrast to Egypt and Turkey, Lebanon was constituted by foreign intervention; ‘Lebanese’ as a broad identification only became common in the 1940s.[81] Unifying national symbols or figures as the female personifications in Egyptian or Turkish caricature were not yet part of *al-Maʿraḍ’s* repertoire. Moreover, as sectarian tension was a constant danger, *al-Maʿraḍ*’s caricatures steered away from questions of (ethnic and sectarian) identity and sought to

76 Al-Saleh 2002.

77 Šibl Dammūs was a Lebanese poet and participated in drafting the Lebanese constitution. Reindl 2025, n.p.

78 Additional recurring figures in *al-Maʿraḍ* include the teahouse discussant of current developments, the inept politician (usually depicted as a half-bald rather small man) and the ‘modern woman,’ that is a woman who defies traditional gender norms, has a job, goes into politics, and wears Western clothes.

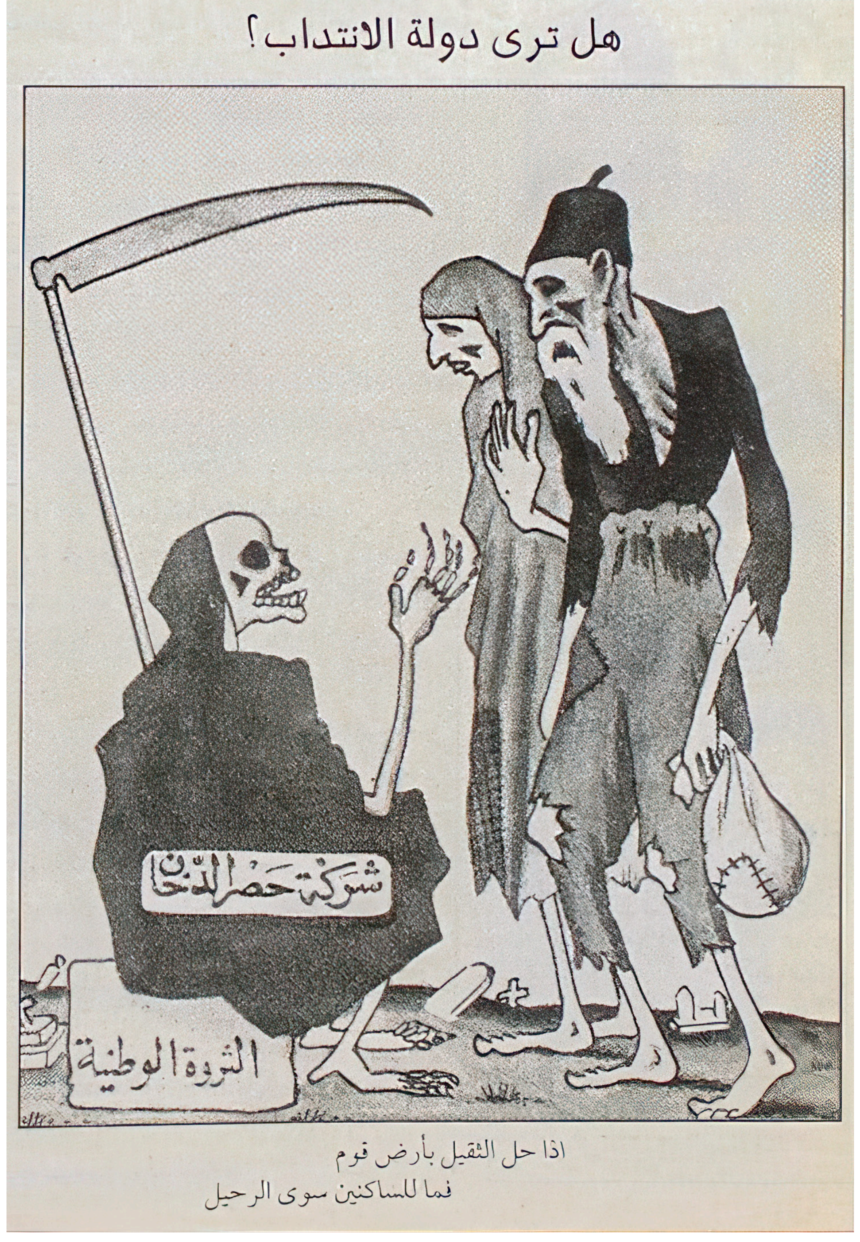
79 Similarly, in *al-Kaškūl* and *as-Siyāsa al-Usbuʿīyya*, greedy government officials were depicted as extremely overweight (Awad 2020, 171).

80 On the importance of analysing the posture of figures in caricatures see Achterberg 1998, 123.

81 Ṣalībī 2003, 71.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

*Figure 5. A destitute and emaciated couple representing the Lebanese people in front of an anthropomorphised death representing foreign companies who held the monopoly on tobacco (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 3,270, 1923–1924, 2).*
'Do you see the mandate state? – When a burdensome presence settles on the land of a people, the inhabitants have no choice but to leave.' (Arabic proverb)



https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

*Figure 6. A horrifying caricature depicting the exploitation and plight of the Lebanese people (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 7,554, 1928, 5).*
'Additional Funds
No blood remains within him... haram… oh he… haram.'

foster a sense of belonging by depicting Lebanese unity through shared suffering and shared enemies: big money, foreign powers, and corrupt or inept political elites.

Furthermore, without negating genuine commitment to furthering social justice, these caricatures clearly represented a 'top-down vision of society.'[82] They constituted sites of contestation between local elites and colonial powers and were intended to mobilise local

82 The use of the term is inspired by Awad 2020, 186.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

elites into action on behalf of the people. While the masses/the poor are featured in many of the paper’s caricatures, they are drawn as types rather than individuals, embodying deprivation and victimhood. Similarly, in Egyptian caricatures, the masses or farmers were depicted as helpless, bent forward, and poorly clothed. The caricaturists showed them as passive, as expecting others to take care of them, as having no agency of their own.[83] While this negative edge is not discernible in *al-Maʿraḍ*, it clearly frames the people as in need of saving and directs its battle cry primarily at educated elites, who are more often represented as recognisable individuals and as agents of action.

A key saviour figure emerges in the heroic journalist or editor, depicted as active, forward-looking, and angled upward–an explicit counter-image to the bowed and starving Lebanese. This is most visible in a caricature from late 1926 that shows the editors of three major Beirut newspapers–*al-Maʿraḍ*, *al-Aḥrār*, and *l’Orient du Jour*–climbing a stepladder towards God while two government officials unsuccessfully try to hinder their ascent (Fig. 7). Editors appear as the mouthpieces and advocates of the people, as determined fighters against censorship, injustice, and social problems. They even bring their complaints directly to God, a motif that also appeared in an earlier caricature printed in 1924 entitled ‘There is nothing left except the door of the Merciful.’ It shows a journalist interviewing God about a new law (Fig. 8). Such imagery reflects the self-understanding of newspaper makers as a nationalist vanguard employing their papers as drivers of change towards a better future.

Beyond reflecting this self-view, caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* were also a material documentation and extension of the editor’s political views and activism. Most caricatures decrying social injustice and political dysfunctionality in Lebanon appeared in 1926–1929 (Fig. 2), years that were not only characterised by severe political and economic conditions but also coincided with two decisive markers in the editor’s political career, his first, unsuccessful campaign in 1925 and his election to parliament in 1929. Denouncing social injustice in Lebanon, creating the figures of oversized big money, the emaciated Lebanese people, and the heroic editor/journalist, as well as ridiculing the dysfunctionality of the Lebanese political system thus also served to present Michel Zaccour as an advocate of the people and a fighter for Lebanese interests.

6. Prompting Reaction, Provoking the Reader: Caricatures as Weapons

‘[T]he fact-creating, performative image act is as effective today as the use of weapons themselves.’[84] This framework captures the spirit of a cluster of caricatures published in *al-Maʿraḍ* in the late 1920s which fought against press censorship. They provoked reactions (censorship) from the French authorities, who were readers even if unwanted ones. Those reactions in turn prompted counteractions by the editor and collaborating artists, often in the form of further caricatures, making Roßler’s ‘chain of actors’ circular. The mandate authorities’ response furthermore suggests that they feared caricatures’ capacity to mobilise Lebanese readers–apparently more than they feared *al-Maʿraḍ*’s texts alone.

83 Awad 2020, 176, 186.
84 Gerhard 2011, 10.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

*Figure 7. Editors/journalists bringing their complaints before God (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 6,523, 1926, 1).*
'Leave us, at least we convey our complaints about the current situation to God, we have no one else left who listens. Turn back promptly and publish another decree that forbids the sons of Lebanon from communicating with the merciful Lord. The three climbing figures are identified as the editors of al-Maʿraḍ, al-Aḥrār*', and* l'Orient du Jour *by the posters they are carrying. The poster attached to the table the trident-wielding government officials are standing on, reads: 'Oh custodian!''*

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

*Figure 8. Editors/journalists bringing their complaints before God (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 4,299, 1924, 3).*
'There is nothing left but the door of the Merciful. The journalist: He has just arrived in heaven to meet God and to ask him for the new licences for his paper 'do you say, oh Lord, about this new law that was unjustly passed by the Lebanese parliament?'
God: Do not fear, my children, the journalists, I will soon retaliate for you against these members of parliament when they are dangling between my hands, but do not forget to write something nice about what you saw here in heaven... and about me.'

The years 1925 and 1926 were marked by a conflict between Michel Zaccour and Léon de Cayla, the then French governor of Lebanon. Zaccour published several articles criticising de Cayla's tightening of press censorship, neglect of border security, and conduct towards the Lebanese population and eventually called for his resignation. The campaign escalated through caricatures,[85] which resulted in a threefold conflict: a personal feud between the governor and the editor, embedded in a broader struggle over press freedom, itself part of the wider contest between mandate power and local society.[86] While Zaccour's articles earned him reprimands, the caricatures resulted in court procedures, fines, and temporary closures of *al-Maʿraḍ*.

85 Naǧǧār 2010, 43–7.
86 On the inextricable link between the battles for press freedom and for national independence see Ayalon 1995, 131.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

*Figure 9. De Cayla in bishop's robes, the caricature that triggered the conflict between de Cayla and Michel Zaccour (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 5,425, 1925, 8).*
'From governorship to bishopric
Monsieur Cayla and the director of his official newspaper 'Y.G.' after the Lebanese Constitution has been passed.'

The first round of conflict was triggered by a caricature showing de Cayla dressed in bishop's robes while the editor of the newspaper 'Y. G.' (n.d.),[87] which is dubbed de Cayla's official newspaper by the caricature, kneels in front of him swinging incense (Fig. 9). The

87 Unfortunately, no further information could be retrieved concerning this paper.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

image primarily targeted pro-mandate newspapers rather than de Cayla himself, yet the governor treated it as an affront, seeking to shut the paper down and impose an exorbitant fine. The case went to court and in a David-versus-Goliath moment Michel Zaccour won. His supporters demonstrated in front of the court, and he managed to rally 50 Lebanese lawyers who attended the trial in support of his case. Consequently, *al-Maʿraḍ* continued to operate, the editor did not have to pay a fine, and de Cayla had to bear the legal expenses.[88] Zaccour's victory became headline news in several Arab and European periodicals, but in the long run it did not endear him to the governor and the French mandate authorities.

The second round was soon ushered in by *al-Maʿraḍ* reprinting a caricature from the French newspaper *Mont Blanc* which showed Gaston Domergue (President of France, 1924–1931), Aristide Briand (French Prime Minister, 1910–1929), and Édouard Herriot (Chamber of Deputies of France, 1925–1926) in bishop robes. Its caption ended with the challenge: 'And what is Monsieur Cayla's opinion of this picture?' (Fig. 10). The reprint exposed a colonial double standard: ridicule of statesmen was tolerated in France yet denied to Lebanese papers under the mandate.[89] De Cayla retaliated by removing one judge from the first trial and demoting another, a gesture that underlined the limits of local institutional autonomy. He then sued again, demanding 1,000 francs in damages. This time he won: the court sentenced Zaccour to one month in prison and a fine of 50 lira. After protests and an appeal presided over by Béchara el-Khoury, the final ruling reduced the penalty to a fine of 75 lira, without imprisonment.[90]

Especially in the months between the second and third ruling Michel Zaccour used caricatures to lobby his case. Caricatures criticised censorship and the editor's opponents and glorified the editor as the defender of press freedom. In early 1925, for instance, *al-Maʿraḍ* printed a caricature showing a defeated-looking representative of the press (not the editor) in a pillory labelled 'Press Law.' Paper and ink sit uselessly above his immobilised hands. In its admission of helplessness and victimhood the caricature constitutes an exception to the general publication strategy of *al-Maʿraḍ*, which glorified the press and Michel Zaccour as fighters for the people's interests.

This glorification is epitomised in the caricature discussed at the beginning of this article, which shows the editor as a knight in shining armour fighting for the survival of his paper (Fig. 1). Other caricatures are less dramatic but similarly heroic. One shows Zaccour striding forward while floating among censor's scissors, surrounded yet untouched (Fig. 12). Another presents him in a courtroom: under the headline 'Enthusiastic Defence and an Imagined Reward' he bangs his fist on the table, sparks flying, while rows of chairs behind him stand empty after lawyers have withdrawn (Fig. 13). Even as his support disappears, the editor remains the lone steadfast hero in the face of adversity.

88 Naǧǧār 2010, 47–9.

89 The caricature thus exposed the practice of what Homi Bhabha called mimicry, the colonial stance towards colonised people that viewed them as 'almost the same, *but not quite*' (italics in original, Bhabha 1984, 126).

90 Naǧǧār 2010, 49–52.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

*Figure 10. A caricature reprinted from a French newspaper showing prominent French politicians in bishop robes. (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 5,457, 1926, 14).*
'Three bishops, not one
On the occasion of Monsieur Cayla suing us for publishing a humorous illustration showing him in bishop's robes, we take this picture from the last issue of Mont Blanc *that shows Domergue, President of France, Briand, the French Prime Minister, and Herriot, President of the Chamber of Deputies of France in bishop's robes. And what is Monsieur Cayla's opinion of this picture?'*

ثلاثة اساقفة لا واحد

في مناسبة اقامة المسيو كايلا الدعوى علينا
لنشرنا رسما هزليا يمثله بثوب اسقف ، نأخذ هذه
الصورة الهزلية عن "المون بلان" في عددها
الاخير وهي تمثل المسيو دومرغ رئيس الجمهورية
والمسيو بريان رئيس الوزارة والمسيو هريو رئيس
المجلس ببدلات اساقفة ، فما رأي المسيو كايلا
بهذه الصورة؟

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

*Figure 11. A journalist in a pillory representing the limitations imposed on editors, publishers and journalists by the new press law (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 5,396, 1925, 1).*

This caricature campaign did not immediately generate a favourable legal outcome, but it earned Zaccour the reputation of an ardent defender of Lebanese interests and press freedom. Even though tensions eased in 1926 when de Jouvenel replaced Sarrail as High Commissioner and de Cayla resigned, the paper’s critical articles and biting caricatures remained contentious. In September 1926 and March 1927 *al-Maʿraḍ* was suspended again.[91] True to form, Michel Zaccour reacted to these shutdowns by publishing the caricature *Al-Maʿraḍ Suspendu* (‘*Al-Maʿraḍ* Hanged’) showing him hanging from the gallows (Fig. 14). The notoriety generated by these conflicts may even have contributed to his election as the parliamentary representative of Mount Lebanon in 1929, which marked the beginning of a steep political career cut short only by his premature death. Interestingly, after 1929 the number of caricatures published in *al-Maʿraḍ*, especially of those

91 Naǧǧār 2010, 52–4.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 12. Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 5,457, 1926, 14.*
ʻAl-Maʿraḍ *To the censor: At least, open up a path for us so we can walk in peace.*ʼ

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 13. Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 5,457, 1926, 13.*
'Enthusiastic Defence and an Imagined Reward – A scene from the trial of al-Maʿraḍ's editor after he and the lawyers had withdrawn from the hearing and their [the lawyers'] seats remained empty.'

criticising the political system, dropped sharply, giving way again to more entertaining caricatures on lighter topics (Fig. 2).

In his conflict with the French and in his attempt to launch a political career Michel Zaccour employed caricatures in a familiar mode, that of the subaltern targeting the political powerful.[92] Caricatures were both the bone of contention and the weapon in his fights

92 Freedman 2012, 87.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 14. After al-Maʿraḍ *had been suspended twice: in 1926 and 1927. Drawing of Michel Zaccour representing his paper 'suspended' from the gallows* (Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 6,549, 1927, 1).* Al-Maʿraḍ *Hanged – 'Azmī: Forgive me, this is all I can do for you, my friend.'*

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

with the mandate regime. As mediating agents, they became the visual-material extension of the editor’s will to act, challenged the limitations imposed on him, and glorified him as well as other representatives of the press as vanguards of the struggle for freedom. If *al-Maʿraḍ* were a motor, caricatures would be its pistons, transforming critique into momentum by condensing political asymmetries and social injustice into provocative, reaction-generating images.

7. Conclusion

Caricatures held a significant space and function within *al-Maʿraḍ* as and gained special force through their interplay with textual elements, that is adjoining articles, and through their embeddedness in the paper’s overall political agenda and communicative strategy. Depending on the topic, caricatures entertained, highlighted specific aspects, or amplified messages and narratives. They illustrated, ridiculed, denounced, and occasionally horrified. In doing so, they enhanced the paper’s criticism of the dysfunctionality of the Lebanese political system as well as social injustice and the exploitation of the Lebanese people by foreign companies and the mandate regime. Additionally, both the drastic imagery and the condensed emphatic messages gave *al-Maʿraḍ* an appellative character, which furthered and amplified the paper’s socio-political agendas and heightened its potential to challenge authorities and galvanise readers into action. This way caricatures became sites of contest and struggle challenging existing hierarchies and power asymmetries.

In specific conflict scenarios such as the feud between Michel Zaccour and Léon de Cayla, caricatures became weapons. They were used to strengthen the editor’s position by glorifying him, by attacking his opponents, and by tying the specific conflict to bigger issues, namely freedom of the press and the injustice of the mandate regime. Beyond furthering the editor’s interests in this specific feud, caricatures also helped link different topics and messages transported by the paper, making its message(s) more coherent. In this way, they provided the paper with a more communicative character; caricatures reacted to current developments, commented and challenged the paper’s adversaries as well as its readers to react and act. These findings confirm that caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* functioned not merely as humorous commentary but were active visual agents that shaped how readers understood, contested, and acted upon political realities. In the context of *al-Maʿraḍ* caricatures undeniably had effective power highlighting the medium’s significance not just as a source for the reconstruction but as actors and drivers of historical developments.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

ʿAmūn, Blanche. 1934. ‘Ṣafḥa fukāhīya’. *Al-Maʿraḍ*, Special Issue 1934, 24.
Anonymous. 1923. ‘Al-Ḥukm al-ʿurfī fī-l-šūf/Wa-irḥamatāhu ʿala al-maṣāyif’. *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1923, 3,204, 3.
–. 1924. ‘As-Sayyārāt’. *Al-Maʿraḍ*, 3,270, 13.
–. 1926a. ‘Ana min ḍaḥāyāt al-ḥurrīya’. *Al-ʿĀlam* 1, 8.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

–. 1926b. ‘Min ḍaḥāyāt al-ḥurrīya’. *Al-ʿĀlam* 1, 10.
Kaḥḥālah, Ḥabīb. 1925. *Al-Muḍḥik al-mubkī*, 1925, 1.
Kaškūl. 1923. ‘Kaifa yaẖdaʿa al-atrāk ūrūba’. *Al-Maʿraḍ* 2,129–203 20.
Zaccour, Michel. 1921. ‘Bi-ism lubnān’. *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1,001–33. 1.

Secondary Sources

Abi-Rached, Joelle M. and Diwan, Ishac. 2022. *The Economic Legacy of the French Mandate in Lebanon. ERF Working Paper Series 1614*. Giza: The Economic Research Forum. URL: https://erf.org.eg/app/uploads/2022/11/1669718266_201_860061_1614.pdf (last accessed 15 October 2024).
Achterberg, Christoph. 1998. *Karikatur als Quelle. Determinanten sozialwissenschaftlicher Interpretation*. Frankfurt a.M. et al: Peter Lang. Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften.
Albers, Yvonne. 2023. *Beirut und die Zeitschrift Mawaqif: Eine arabische Intellektuellengeschichte, 1968–1994*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink/Brill.
Al-Ǧauhīrī, Šaḏḏā and Bazzī, Ǧannā. 2023. ‘Al-Kārīkātūr fī Lubnān. Fann Muhammaš’. *Al-Mourakeb*. URL: https://almourakeb.net/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%83%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%83%d8%a7%d8%aa%d9%88%d8%b1-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d9%84%d8%a8%d9%86%d8%a7%d9%86-%d9%81%d9%86-%d9%85%d9%87%d9%85%d8%b4 (last accessed 11 October 2024).
Al-Saleh, Mohammed Ali. 2002. ‘Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918–1946’. In Méouchy, Nadine (ed.). *France, Syrie et Liban 1918–1946*. Damascus: Presses de l’Ifpo, Institut français de Damas. URL: https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3165 (last accessed 13 December 2024).
Anonymous. 2022a. *Nadwa haula ‘al-Kārīkātīr as-sīyāsī baina al-ams wa-’l-yaum’ fī muʾassat sābā zarīq*. Tripoli. URL: https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9 (last accessed 15 August 2024).
–. 2022b. Ruʾasāʿ lubnān māda dasma li-’l-kārīkātīr. *An-Nabd*. URL: https://nabd.com/s/107560277-0a4148/%D8%B1%D8%A4%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%B1 (last accessed 25 November 2025).
Armbrust, Walter. 2022. ‘Meandering Through the Magazine. Print Culture(s) and Reading Practices in Interwar Egypt’. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 15. 56–91.
Arsan, Andrew and Schayegh, Cyrus. 2015. ‘Introduction’. In Arsan, Andrew and Schayegh, Cyrus (eds.). *The Routledge handbook of the history of the Middle East mandates*. London: Routledge. 1–23.
Awad, Sarah H. 2020. ‘Political Caricatures in colonial Egypt: Visual Representations of the People and the Nation’. In Gorman, Anthony and Irving, Sarah (eds.). *Cultural Entanglement in the Pre-Independence Arab World. Arts, Thought and Literature*. London: IB Tauris. 163–194.
Ayalon, Ami. 1995. *The Press in the Arab Middle East. A History*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
–. 2008. ‘Private Publishing in the Nahda’. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40.4. 561–577.
Barthes, Roland. 1983. *Image-music-text: Essays*. Selected and transl. by Stephen Heath. 5th printing. New York: Hill and Wang.
Bentlage, Björn and Köster, Katrin. 2025. ‘Introduction: Printing Communities on the Islamicate Periphery’. *Oriente Moderno*. 105.1–2. 1–32.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Bhabha, Homi. 1984. ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’. *Discipleship. A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*. 125–133.

Bredekamp, Horst. 2021. *Image Acts. A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency*. Transl. Elizabeth Clegg. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

Brummett, Palmira. 1995. ‘Dogs, Women, Cholera, and Other Menaces in the Streets: Cartoon Satire in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press 1908–11’. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 27. 433–460.

–. 1998. ‘New Woman and Old Nag: Images of Women in the Ottoman Cartoon Space’. In Göek, Fatma Müge (ed.). *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers (reprinted from *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol VI). 13–57.

Collier, Patrick. 2015. ‘What is Modern Periodical Studies?’. *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 6.2. 92–111.

Coupe, W. A. 1969. ‘Observations on a Theory of Political Caricature.’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 11.1. 79–95.

El Saied, Nirvana. 2019. *Satire and Protest: The Middle East through Egyptian Cartoons*. Oxford: Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper, University of Oxford. URL: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-08/Nirvana%20Egyptian%20cartoons.pdf (last accessed 5 March 2024).

Ernst, Jutta and Scheiding, Oliver. 2022. ‘Introduction: Periodical Studies as a Transepistemic Field’. In Ernst, Jutta, von Hoff, Dagmar and Scheiding, Oliver (eds.). *Periodical Studies Today. Multidisciplinary Analyses*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. 1–24.

Fadel, Rosette. 2021. ‘Fī sifr min at-tārīkh: hīlīn al-khāl taktub ʿan blānš ʿamūn ʿar-rassāma al-latī tuḥibb kul mā taqūm bihi…’. *An-Nahār*, Beirut. URL: https://www.annahar.com/arabic/news/arab-world/lebanon/19112021032954197 (last accessed 24 June 2025).

Freedman, Leonard. 2012. ‘Wit as a Political Weapon: Satirists and Censors’. *Social Research*. 79.1. 87–112.

Gelvin, James and Green, Nile. 2013. ‘Introduction: Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print’. In Gelvin, James L. and Green, Nile (eds.). *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1–27.

Gerhard Paul. 2011. ‘Visual History’. *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*. URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.792.v1. (last accessed 12 February 2025).

Glaß, Dagmar. 2004. *Der Muqṭataf und seine Öffentlichkeit, Vol. 1.: Analyse medialer und sozialer Strukturen*, Würzburg: Ergon.

Göçek, Fatma Müge. 1998. ‘Political Cartoons as a Site of Representation and Resistance in the Middle East’. In Göçek, Fatma Müge (ed.). *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*, Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers. 1–12.

Ḥaddād, Vivian. 2023. ‘Al-Kārīkātūr. Fann yaftaqidu mawāhib fī lubnān’. *Aš-Šarq al-awṣaṭ*. Beirut. URL: https://aawsat.com/%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%81%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86/%D8%A5%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85/4377356-%C2%AB%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%C2%BB-%D9%81%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86 (last accessed 15 August 2024).

Ḥammūd, ʿAbd-al-Ḥalīm. 2004. *Al-Kārīkātūr al-ʿarabī wa-l-ʿalamī*. Beirut: Dār al-Anwār.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Harris, William W. 1997. *Faces of Lebanon. Sects, Wars, and Global Extensions*. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, Inc.

Kollatz, Anna. 2022a. 'Karikaturen im Nahen Osten. Die 1920er Jahre'. *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht. Schwerpunkt: Karikaturen im Nahen Osten*. 73.3/4. 117–128.

–. 2022b. 'Maultier und Motorrad. Fortschrittsdiskurse im Spiegel der Karikaturen ʿAlī Rifqīs'. *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht. Schwerpunkt: Karikaturen im Nahen Osten*. 73.3/4. 148–164.

Latham, Sean and Scholes, Robert. 2006. 'The Rise of Periodical Studies'. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*. 121.2. 517–531.

Lebanese Artists. n.d. 'Moustapha Farroukh'. URL: https://www.lebaneseartists.com/ar/farroukh-moustapha (last accessed 25 November 2025).

Méouchy, Nadine. 2002. 'Introduction thématique. France, Syrie et Liban, 1918–1946. Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire'. In Méouchy, Nadine (ed.). *France, Syrie et Liban 1918–1946*. Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo, Institut français de Damas. URL: https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3165. (last accessed 13 December 2024).

Mitchell, W. J. T. 2004. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Reprint. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Naǧǧār, Iskandar. 2010. *Al-Fatā al-mutamarrid. Mišāl Zākūr (1896–1937)*. Beirut: Lebanese American University – Center for Lebanese Heritage.

Noun, Fady. 2010. 'À la redécouverte de Michel Zaccour, «l'enfant terrible» du combat pour l'indépen dance'. *L'Orient-Le Jour*. URL: https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/661870/_A_la_redecouverte_de_Michel_Zaccour%252C_%253C%253C%2Bl%2527enfant_terrible%2B%253E%253E_du_combat_pour_l%2527independance.html (last accessed 18 September 2024).

Okyar, Ikim Büke. 2023. *Arabs in Turkish Political Cartoons, 1876–1950. National Self and Non-National Other*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Reindl, Alexander. 2024. *Cartoon of the Day 5: On the Boards that mean the World, or Discussing the Lebanese Constitution of 1926. Caricatures and Cartoons in a Global Perspective*. https://doi.org/10.58079/12v2q (last accessed 3 July 2025).

Roßler, Gustav. 2023. *Do Pictures Have Agency? Reflections on the Agency of Things in the Light of Works of Art and Image Acts*. Berlin: Springer VS.

Ṣalībī, Kamāl aṣ. 2003. *A House of Many Mansions. The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*. Repr. London: Tauris.

Sheehi, Stephen. 2005. 'Arabic Literary-Scientific Journals'. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25. 439–449.

Somers, Paul P. 1998. *Editorial Cartooning and Caricature. A Reference Guide 1*. Westport, Conn. et al: Greenwood Press.

Traboulsi, Fawwaz. 2007. *A History of Modern Lebanon*, London: Pluto Press.

Wagner, Veruschka. 2022. 'Geschichte in Bildern. Die satirische Darstellung des Griechisch-Türkischen Kriegs in der osmanischen Zeitschrift Āyīne'. *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht. Schwerpunkt: Karikaturen im Nahen Osten*. 73.3/4. 129–147.

Winckler, Barbara. 2018. ''New Media' and the Transformation of the Public Sphere in the *nahḍa* Period and Today: How the Advent of the Periodical Press and the Internet Have Affected the Arab/ic Literary Field – Analogies and Differences'. In Allen, Roger et al. (eds.). *New Geographies: Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature*. Madrid: ediciones Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. 27–64.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Veruschka Wagner

University of Bonn, Germany
wagnerveruschka@gmail.com

Anna Kollatz

University of Heidelberg, Germany
anna.kollatz@ori.uni-heidelberg.de

Satirical Visions of the Future? Egyptian and Ottoman Caricatures on ‘Science Fiction’ and Technology from the Beginning of the 20th Century

Abstract

The contribution deals with caricatures that depict and thematise ideas about the future and compares examples from Istanbul and Cairo. Both Ottoman-Turkish and Egyptian journals contain manifold examples of caricatures that could be characterised as playing with ‘science fiction’ topics and deal with visions of the future. Examples from a series of 14 depictions by the caricaturist ʿAlī Rifqī in the Egyptian satire journal *al-Fukāha* are compared to individual caricatures from various Ottoman satirical magazines from the first quarter of the 20th century. Similar to the general content of the respective magazines, many of the caricatures to be analysed deal with the modernisation of mobility, which is grotesquely exaggerated (e.g. flying travellers, flying trains). In this context, existing contemporary problems are also addressed to some extent, such as the traffic on the streets of Cairo and Istanbul, which was already challenging at that time. Another thematic strand is the innovations in science, also making reference either to utopian (or dystopian) technologies or to the changes in the world view brought about by modern science. So, what do the caricatures reveal with regard to contemporary concepts and critique of ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’? Beyond all the fictitious and futuristic content, are there elements referring to contemporary society of that time? And do the caricatures really address the future?

Keywords: future visions, science, modernisation, Cairo and Istanbul, first quarter of the 20th century

1. Introduction

The 19th century was a century characterised by the idea of progress, which went hand in hand with a certain fascination, if not obsession, with new technologies. The invention of steam-powered trains and ships, aeroplanes, and many more machines led people across the globe to dream into a future shaped and mostly bettered by technologies. On the other hand, the social impact of the Industrial Revolution also led writers and illustrators to create more critical, even dystopian outlooks into the future, outlooks fed from their observations in their present time. This ambiguous fascination found its expression in many different domains of cultural practices, such as in theatrical (sometimes variété-like) shows of Galvanism or science-inspired literature. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*, first published 1818, is often held up as the

Diyâr, 7. Jg., 1/2026, S. 139–164, DOI: 10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1-139

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

first piece of 19th-century science-fiction literature,[1] introducing the figure of the 'mad scientist.'[2] Authors like Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells left deep footprints in the genre right in the same period as when the caricatures discussed in this article were published. In this contribution, we will refer to 19th- and early 20th- century science fiction as a genre that left its mark not only on literature but also on popular art, cartoon, and caricature. While the genre developed quickly in Europe, the United States, and South Asia,[3] it seems to have had a slower start in the Middle East.[4]

The London World's Fair of 1851 marked the beginning of a series of international universal exhibitions that served to showcase the achievements of industrialisation by presenting newly invented machines and devices. The developments continued, with international and national events aiming to make the various countries more competitive in this sector. The international press picked up on these developments and discussions, and emerging national states or countries under direct or indirect colonial influence were equally interested in participating in this field, which was perceived as the motor of modernity. For example, the Ottoman Empire was represented at London World's fair, and the 'Egyptian Street' built several years later for the Paris World's Fair in 1889 stands witness to this day to the crooked colonial gaze that shaped representations of 'Oriental' countries at the time. Despite the inequality baked into approaches, both individuals and political figures from Middle Eastern countries were highly interested in the fairs and travelled to see them.[5] Many of these individual travellers, both from the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, may be characterised as belonging to an emerging new middle layer of society, for which the Egyptian press and literature coined the name *effendiya*.[6] It is the same societal layer that gave birth to journalism, both in daily newspapers and (satirical) magazines in the two regions.[7] In the Ottoman Empire, it was the bureaucratic elite whose interest

1 Most thoroughly detailed by Aldiss 1973. We use the broad definition of the science fiction genre proposed by Bruce Sterling, who describes science fiction as 'a form of fiction that deals principally with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals.' He characterises it as a 'modern genre,' pointing to the coining of the term 'science fiction' by American publisher Hugo Gernsback in the 1920s and further detailing the impact of the Industrial Revolution as a major influence on science fiction writers. See Sterling 2025.

2 We do not want to engage in a deeper discussion of the genesis of science fiction as a literary genre. While a part of the scholarly community has identified early forms of science fiction as early as with the Epic of Gilgamesh, many others date the rise of the genre to the 19th century and read 17th- and 18th-century texts such as *New Atlantis* by Bacon 1627 as, in a way, proto-science-fiction texts, especially regarding their engagement with utopian (and dystopian, like Shelley 1826) outlooks on the world as shaped by humankind. Considering the novel, see Cowan 2011, 407–21.

3 As studied by our colleague Hans Harder; see, i.a., Harder 2001, 105–19.

4 The question as to why the genre did not develop in the Middle East in parallel with this trend cannot yet be answered. Research on this topic is still pending.

5 On travelogues from the Middle East to Europe, see Newman and al-Ṭahṭāwī 2012; Wagner 2016; Agai and Conermann 2013. On the development of engagement with 'Western' technology and lifestyle and the rise of criticism against it, see, e.g., Hourani 1962.

6 See Ryzova 2014; Eppel 2009, 535–9.

7 See Ryzova 2014; Zdafee 2019, esp. chapter 2.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

in magazines in the second half of the 19th century that paved the way for a new era of political newspapers and opinion journalism. Increasing criticism of the government and propaganda for regime change prompted the Ottoman government to tighten its control over the press through laws and regulations, giving rise to the Ottoman press in exile. After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the suppressed desire for publications erupted in a veritable press boom, especially in Istanbul.[8] Even before the 1908 revolution, the editors of the most important satirical magazines were in opposition to Sultan Abdülhamid's regime. Before they began working for satirical magazines, many of the authors and illustrators had already had careers in the military or as civil servants, and many of them had connections abroad.[9]

Progress and technical innovations were thus, rather unsurprisingly, among the hot topics to which the Ottoman and Egyptian press devoted itself in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The satirical press in particular favoured these kinds of topics. The turn of the century saw a boom in satirical magazines. In particular, the years 1908/9 and the early 1920s in the Ottoman Empire and, shortly thereafter, the late 1920s and 30s in Egypt saw the publication of numerous humorous publications. While many caricatures dedicated to technical progress express astonishment or admiration and play with the sensation of being overwhelmed by technical progress, others combine an admiring gaze at technical innovations with a certain scepticism towards their own country's ability to participate in this progress. This ambiguous stance may be explained by tendencies towards self-orientalisation, that is, the internalisation of Western Orientalist ideas and critique by individuals from the region.[10] A telling example may be found in the first caricature discussed below, which ascribes the incredible amount of new technology presented as the work of an 'American scholar,' thus perpetuating the idea of Western technological superiority. However, in its satirical exaggeration, the self-orientalising aspect of the caricature might also work as an implicit critique of the West.

In this article, we will discuss the question as to whether and in what ways the caricatures of the time reveal threads of societal discourse with regard to contemporary concepts and critique of 'progress' and 'modernity' in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Veruschka Wagner opens with Ottoman caricatures from the beginning of the 20th century, while Anna Kollatz compares them to Arab caricatures from late-1920s Cairo. Together we start our comparative reading from the hypothesis that, beyond all the fictitious and futuristic content characteristic for science fiction, the caricatures contain elements referring to the contemporary society of that time. Do the caricatures really address the future exclusively? Or is the science fiction content a narrative device for addressing issues in the contemporary, for criticising the society and politics of the day?

8 Baykal 2019, 42.
9 Heinzelmann 1999, 90.
10 For a theoretical approach to the concept, see Tombul and Sarı 2021, especially Chapter 3, by Andrade. Regarding the realm of caricature, orientalising strategies in the context of constructing a national self are discussed by Okyar 2023.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - cc BY

2. Caricatures on Technology and Questionable Progress

The topic of technological innovations is addressed in a caricature printed in the satirical magazine *Güleryüz* ('Laughing Face') in October 1921. During the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923), *Güleryüz* was Istanbul's most influential humoristic magazine.[11] In the caricature shown in Figure 1, technological progress and the latest achievements of the rapidly developing 19th century are depicted in their combined function. Several new devices that had entered our world at that time, such as the camera, gramophone, and telephone, are connected in such a way that a burglar is overpowered by them upon breaking into a home. This technological system was intended to protect residents from burglary, as explained in the text underneath the depiction:

> After this kind of invention by an American scholar, we will now be able to sit comfortably in our homes. Because as soon as the burglar tampering with your door steps inside, he will be confronted with a new moving system of electrical devices. All at the same time, the hammer will land on his head, the pincer will grab his arm, the camera will take his picture, the water pump will spray him with water, and the gramophone will notify the police by telephone. All these events will happen all at once.
>
> Woe to the thieves from now on!

The scene resembles a gallery of new inventions. Various devices are presented to us taken out of their context. Overwhelmed by so many new developments, the question of the usability of one invention or the other arises. In this caricature, the various devices are not only combined with each other, but are also misused for other purposes, namely to keep burglars away. The caricature mocks the function of the devices and questions technological progress as a whole, while at the same time addressing the problem of burglary, which seems to have been acute at the time.

Figure 2 shows an earlier caricature, which also deals with the innovations in technology.

One of the newest achievements of the time was the discovery of X-rays. This caricature from *Karagöz* ('Dark Eye'), one of the longest-lived and most successful Turkish satirical magazines,[12] shows an X-ray machine in the hands of the two protagonists of the

11 *Güleryüz* was a satirical magazine published between 1921 and 1923 and was characterised by its colourful illustrations, especially on its cover pages. The magazine appeared in Istanbul on a weekly basis with a total of 122 editions. Its publisher and founder, Sedat Simavi (1896–1952), was a Turkish journalist, political caricaturist, writer, and film director. In terms of content, it mainly dealt with the Turkish War of Liberation and supported the national resistance movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk against the Allied occupation after the First World War. As an opposing voice and supporter of the Turkish government (thus in opposition to the independence movement), the politico-humorous journal *Aydede* was founded in 1922. However, *Güleryüz* also devoted attention to other topics, such as social changes, modernisation, and emancipation. For the magazine's role during the War of Independence, see Dümen 2019.

12 *Karagöz* ('Dark Eye') (1908–1955) mainly focused on domestic and foreign policy issues. It was initially published twice a week and later once weekly, each with four pages. It played an important role in conveying political content and shaping public perception. Its main characters are

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

*Figure 1. Protection against burglars (*Güleryüz*, 17 October 1921, 5). The speech bubble in the top left-hand corner says: 'Hello! Hello! Police!'*
After this kind of invention by an American scholar, we will now be able to sit comfortably in our homes. Because as soon as the burglar tampering with your door steps inside, he will be confronted with a new moving system of electrical devices. All at the same time, the hammer will land on his head, the pincer will grab his arm, the camera will take his picture, the water pump will spray him with water, and the gramophone will notify the police by telephone. All these events will happen all at once. Woe to the thieves from now on!

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

*Figure 2. X-rays for better transparency (*Karagöz*, 12 July 1909).*
'– Oh Karagöz... so many pieces of jewelry... so many valuable items.
– You see the use of X-rays... It's not for nothing that he didn't allow them in Istanbul. Oh, if only I could use it on his brain just once to find out what's going on in there.
– That isn't necessary... it's obvious.'

magazine, Karagöz and Hacivat, who are known from traditional Ottoman shadow theatre. They are using the machine to examine Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). The image projected onto the screen shows numerous pieces of jewelry and precious objects that are hidden inside Abdülhamid's body.

The dialogue under the illustration between Hacivat and Karagöz reads as follows:

- Oh Karagöz... so many pieces of jewelry... so many valuable items.
- You see the use of X-rays... It's not for nothing that he didn't allow them in Istanbul. Oh, if only I could use it on his brain just once to find out what's going on in there.
- That isn't necessary... it's obvious.

Karagöz and Hacivat, two protagonists from traditional Ottoman shadow theatre, who always engage in dialogue about daily life or the current political situation. They appear in the caricatures as observers or participants. See Okyar 2023, esp. 32, and Heinzelmann 1999, esp. 51–67.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

In *Karagöz*, the two protagonists usually address everyday issues in dialogues, in which Karagöz explains something to Hacivat.[13] This caricature by Mehmed Baha,[14] refers to an incident shortly after Sultan Abdülhamid II was deposed in 1909. Allegedly, during the search of Sultan's palace after his deposition, nothing of value was found, causing both irritation and amusement at the same time. The circumstances that nothing of value was allegedly found is picked up on in this depiction[15] and linked to a new technological achievement. These kinds of combinations are typical of caricatures, in which two current events or topics are often linked together to create a humorous effect.

The Sultan was taken up as a central figure in many magazines in the Ottoman Empire, as well as in other countries and regions, and appeared in numerous caricatures, especially towards the end of his reign. He is depicted in different ways: sometimes as particularly cruel to his people, but also as a weak ruler ('sick man of Europe'),[16] while he was sometimes also portrayed as a lazy sultan addicted to his desires. His large nose is particularly noticeable in these depictions and was often targeted by caricaturists. This allegedly bothered the Sultan so much that he had the word 'nose' censored.[17]

The Egyptian caricature in was printed in 1927 as part 10 of a science fiction series by the caricaturist 'Alī Rifqī (Ahmet Rıfkı).[18] His sci-fi caricature series *Miṣr fī sanat alfayn* ('Egypt in the Year 2000') was published in the first year of *Al-Fukāha*,[19] in the first 14 issues. The caricatures usually were printed on page 9, covering half a page of the magazine. They did not stand in any thematic connection to articles, jokes, or other caricatures around them. The series does not seem to follow any particular thematic order or 'plot.' Instead, caricatures covering a number of topics were published in a seemingly random order, with technology-related content making up the largest part of the series. We find one of Rifqī's favourite topics–'modern'[20] traffic and transportation–along with 'modern'

13 Heinzelmann 1999, 53.

14 Mehmed Baha and Halid Naci were the two main illustrators for the journal at the time when the Karagöz caricatures shown here appeared. Heinzelmann 1999, 60, 67.

15 Atik 2014, 98.

16 Gülbudak 2022, 561–97; Alkan 2018. For further information on the perception of the Ottoman Empire as a sick man within the Orientalism debate, see Aslı Çırakman 2005.

17 Küper-Büsch and Rona 2008.

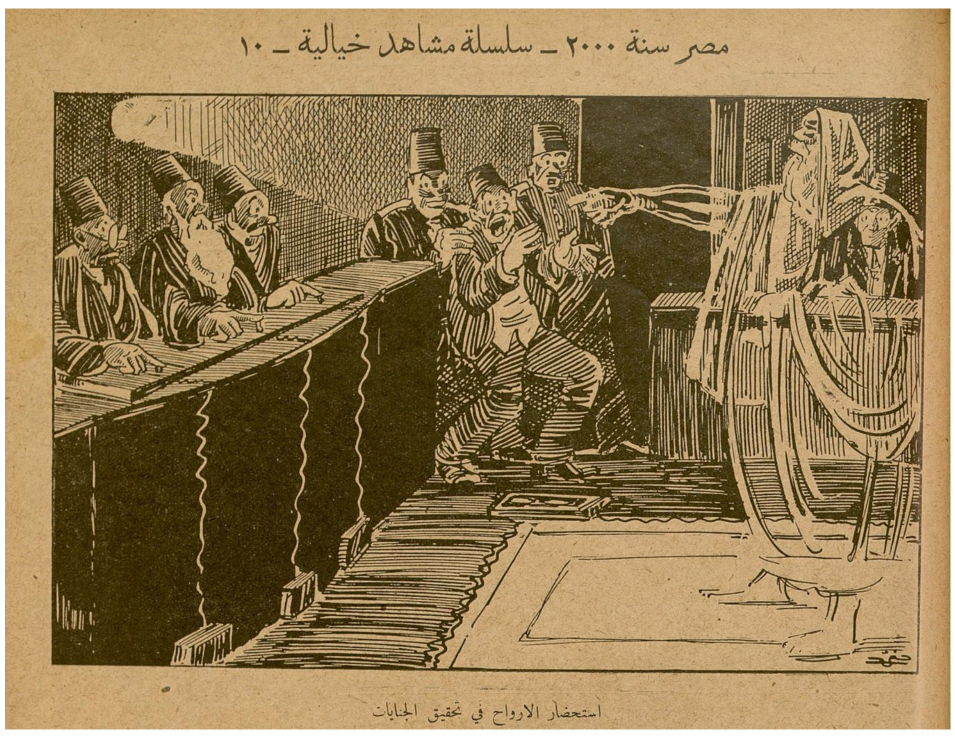
18 On him, see Eberhard Dziobek's contribution in this volume.

19 The magazine *Al-Fukāha* ('The Joke' or 'Humour') was published weekly in Cairo from 1926–1933 by the publishing house *Dār al-Hilāl* ('Half-moon Press'). This very influential press had been founded by the Lebanese intellectual Jurji Zaidan (1861–1914), a university classmate of Yaqub Sarruf (1852–1927), the founder of the magazine *Al-Muqtaṭaf* ('The Elite', 1876). Jurji came to Cairo in the early 1890s and started publishing the monthly *Al-Hilāl* ('The Crescent'), which exists to this day. After his death in 1914, his sons Emile and Shukri took over both the magazine and the press. Pro-Wafd nationalists like their father, they started to expand the scope of the press in the 1920s by adding more magazines. One of them is the satirical magazine *Al-Fukāha*, for which they hired 'Ali Rifqī as the chief caricaturist.

20 I use 'modern' in this context to indicate the sources' assessment of technologies or developments regarded as relatively new additions to the caricaturist's time that seem to stem from some sort of (questionable, as shall be discussed below) 'progress.'

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 3. Al-Fukāha*, 2 February 1927, 11.*
'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 10: Necromancy in Criminal Investigation.'



communication technologies of various kinds. Some caricatures also hint at the impact that 'modernisation' may have on daily life or the environment in general. Such influences include totally changed habits in everyday life or the effect that things or habits that appeared totally normal to his 1920s readers may become extraordinary in the future. These factors make the series perfect for a miniature case study on how this individual caricaturist dealt with the great concepts of *tamaddun*, 'progress,' and 'modernity,' in the caricaturist's time and in his imagination of future.[21]

The caricature 'Necromancy in Criminal Investigation' (Fig. 3), which represents a court hearing, shows a use of technology in a way similar to the *Karagöz* caricature above in Figure 2. However, in the Egyptian example, the technology employed resembles a Ouija-board and might thus be described as a rather esoteric form of 'modern' technology. The judges on the left keep their fingers pressed on a contraption that is wired to the floor. This seems to allow them to conjure up the ghost of a victim–probably of a murder case–who points decidedly to the chief judge in the middle of the judge's table. Bystanders in

21 All Egyptian caricatures discussed in this article belong to this series.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

the back react with astonishment and shock; even the judges seem stupefied by the ghost's 'statement.' Different interpretations of this rather enigmatic caricature come to mind: at first glance, it seems to showcase a somewhat creepy modern achievement that could be of great assistance in criminal investigations.[22] However, is this 'technology' to be considered reliable? The reaction of the judges and the witnesses in the background may be read as shock, because a seemingly unlikely truth is being revealed, namely that the chief judge is a murderer, or, alternatively, the shocked reaction may point to the absurd statement this form of 'modern technology' produces, similar in its absurdity to some fantasies produced by artificial intelligence programmes in our own times. Could the fact that the chief judge sports a beard also lead one to read the caricature as a critique of the old, religion-based qadi-system? Could the ghost's accusatory pointing finger even stand for a general critique of the judiciary system? The caricature leaves us–and may have also intentionally left its contemporary recipients–with a certain ambiguity regarding the 'modern technology' and the courtroom scene, thereby allowing room for the recipient to engage with both topics. Apart from the thematic side of this caricature, the representation of the courtroom scene in Egypt of the year 2000 deserves our attention. Other than the ghostly apparition, neither the interior or the figures depicted show any difference to the way ʿAlī Rifqī and his colleagues would have drawn their contemporary *effendīya* Egyptians and their surroundings.[23] Whether this continuity of appearance from the caricaturist's present to the imagined distant future is a deliberately used stylistic device or just coincidental, we shall keep it in mind as an indication that the caricaturist may have been sceptical about the transformational potential of 'modernity' in terms of social structures.

3. Sketches of the Future

Traffic and transportation are a key topic when it comes to visions of the future. Influenced by technical innovations and the increasing number of vehicles, people have to come to terms with new living conditions. Istanbul and Cairo are the focus of the caricatures, which provide similarities in the depictions of the future (or contemporary) traffic situation. However, a certain ambiguity vis-à-vis living conditions in the future can be observed in caricatures dealing with traffic. Imaginations of future (and at times futuristic) traffic in the metropoles of the day, including fantastic means of transportation, often depart from present-day observations and fears. For example, the growing number of motorised vehicles in the cities is often represented as a dangerous and life-threatening change to traditional ways of travel, as well as to everyday life.[24] Interestingly, however, the

22 On a side note, let us point to a 1994 murder case in Australia, in which a Ouija board was used to identify the culprit. See Dulaney and Carrick 2018.

23 See, e.g., Ryzova 2014; Zdafee 2019.

24 Such as Rifqī's depictions of car and tram traffic as discussed in Eberhard Dziobek's article in this volume. See also Rifqī's caricatures no. 2 and 4 *Al-Fukāha*, 8 December 1926, 9, and 22 December 1926, 9, from the series *Miṣr fī sanat alfayn,* that show fantastic sci-fi technologies to prevent accidents, such as cars and trams made from rubber or a train able to fly over road crossings.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

depiction of the people stands in stark contrast to these future visions of transportation, as they do not change and seem to remain the same in appearance. The contemporary readers thus saw images of themselves transported into a highly technologised, fantastic future. This contrast between the known present and the imagined future creates a certain ambiguity that is typical for these kinds of caricatures. It avoids unambiguous interpretation through its complex composition. Caricatures playing with ambiguity address various aspects in parallel by alluding to them directly or indirectly. In this case, they purport to address the future but are actually dealing with the present.

Figure 4, the scene depicted on the cover of the 27th issue of the second series of the satirical magazine *Geveze* ('Chatterer/chatty'),[25] fills the entire page of the issue and, like almost all caricatures and articles in *Geveze*, is unsigned. The scene shows a chaotic traffic situation in Istanbul's Çemberlitaş district on the European side. The district can be recognised by the column on the right of the caricature, the Çemberlitaş or Constantine Column. On the right, we can see a single pedestrian trying to escape while various vehicles drive in a criss-cross fashion. The caption indicates that this is not a depiction of a current situation, but a vision of the future, where numerous vehicles endanger the lives of pedestrians. The subtitle proclaims:

> If cars, automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles, and other means of transportation were to increase in Istanbul, then this would be the order and the comfort of walking and moving around in the streets and avenues.

Means of transportation are portrayed as frightening and viewed very critically. Numerous caricatures depict trams in particular as hazardous to one's life and often compare them to the effects of war.[26] 'If the present is already perceived as so dramatic, what will the future look like?' seems to be a question on people's minds, not only in Istanbul but also in other cities such as Cairo.

The caricature in Figure 5, published as part 8 of the Egyptian sci-fi series, comments on a development in urban traffic culture that ʿAlī Rifqī reflected critically in other caricatures as well: in his own time, he observes pedestrians being driven off the roads of Cairo, as a result of aggressive car and tram drivers and the danger they posed.[27] In a future with astonishingly civilised traffic, he imagines the pedestrian to be a rare breed, marvelled upon by his contemporaries and even filmed out of a car, maybe for the local news. The 'normal' of

25 *Geveze* appeared in two series in 1908 and 1909, with a total of 115 issues, initially as a daily newspaper and later twice weekly. It was published in Istanbul, with Kirkor Faik as its editor. In addition to news and caricatures, the magazine included various formats such as letters, poems, essays, anecdotes, and advertisements. For more information on form and content of the magazine, see Civalioğlu and Çelik, 2017.

26 E.g. Rifqi's depiction of trams getting into conflict with donkey drivers or carriages for *Aydede*, 16 October 1922, 2, and *Al-Fukāha*, 23 March 1927, cover. Both caricatures elaborate upon the same joke, showing the traditional vehicle as obstructing the tram's way. See Kollatz and Wagner 2025, 10–1.

27 See above, note 8. The first tramline had opened in Cairo in 1896; the tramway network grew fast. In the late 1920s, when Rifqī worked for *al-Fukāha* magazine, the tram thus was a still relatively new, but normal sight in Cairo.

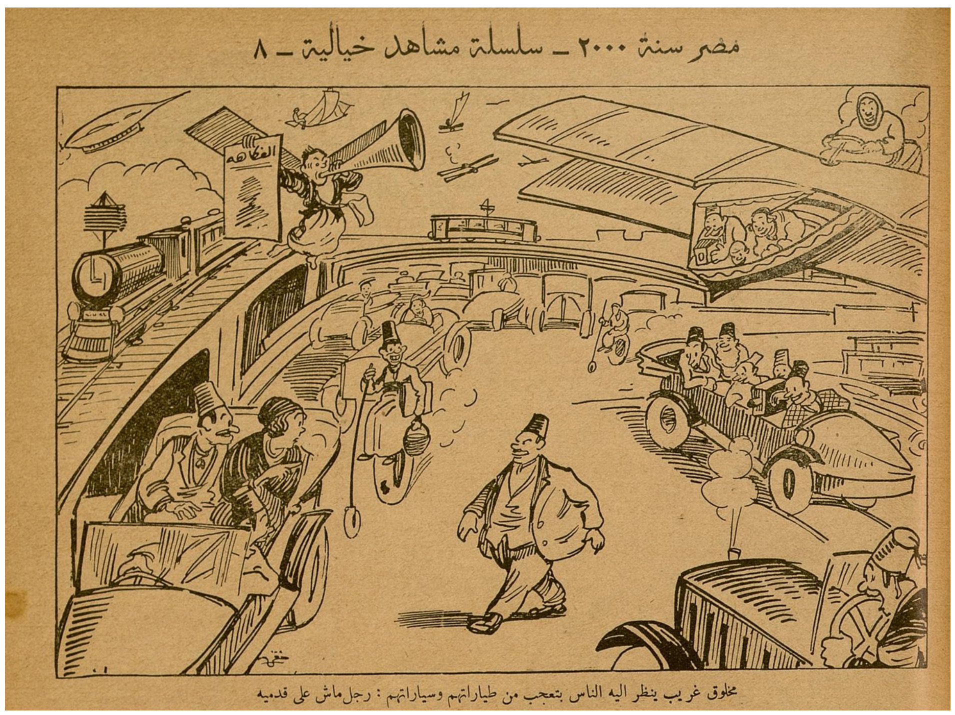
https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Figure 4. Geveze*, 18 February 1909.*
'If cars, automobiles, motorcycles, bicycles, and other means of transportation were to increase in Istanbul, then this would be the order and the comfort of walking and moving around in the streets and avenues.'

the caricaturist's time is expected to become the rare and marvellous in the future. Yet again, most of the cars, as well as the clothing of all the figures, look very 1920s *effendīya*, with the men donning fezzes and either a European suit (marking them as *effendī*) or *gallabīya* attire (marking them as more traditional, yet well-off people from the countryside, or lower-class workers or servants in this picture). The only woman depicted here sports a moderate 1920s outfit with a cap on her shortly cropped hairstyle but wearing a traditional black coat over her (probably European-style) dress. The caricaturist seems to imagine a future in which this urban middle class, to which he himself belongs, as do his editors and the main intended audience of the magazines he publishes in, continues to exist in the same way as in his own present time. While fantastic aviation machines, cars, and trains have changed the traffic considerably, the social reality of Cairo remains stable in his imagination. This does not stop at the clothing; it also includes gender and class relations. The technological fantasies

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 5. Al-Fukāha*, 19 January 1927, 3.*
'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 8: A strange creature that people look at in wonder from their aeroplanes and cars: A pedestrian.'



represented by sci-fi motives thus seem to be restricted to the sphere of technology and outward changes in everyday life, while social and societal structures remain unaffected. This strengthens the observation regarding the contemporary clothing of figures made above. On a funny side note, we should acknowledge the flying news agent in the upper left part of the caricature, who is advertising the latest issue of *Al-Fukāha* magazine. The caricaturist expected his satirical magazine to continue into this distant, marvellous future–and on this point he was wrong, for publication of the magazine was stopped, and the publication fused with another of *Dār al-Hilāl*'s magazines already in 1930.

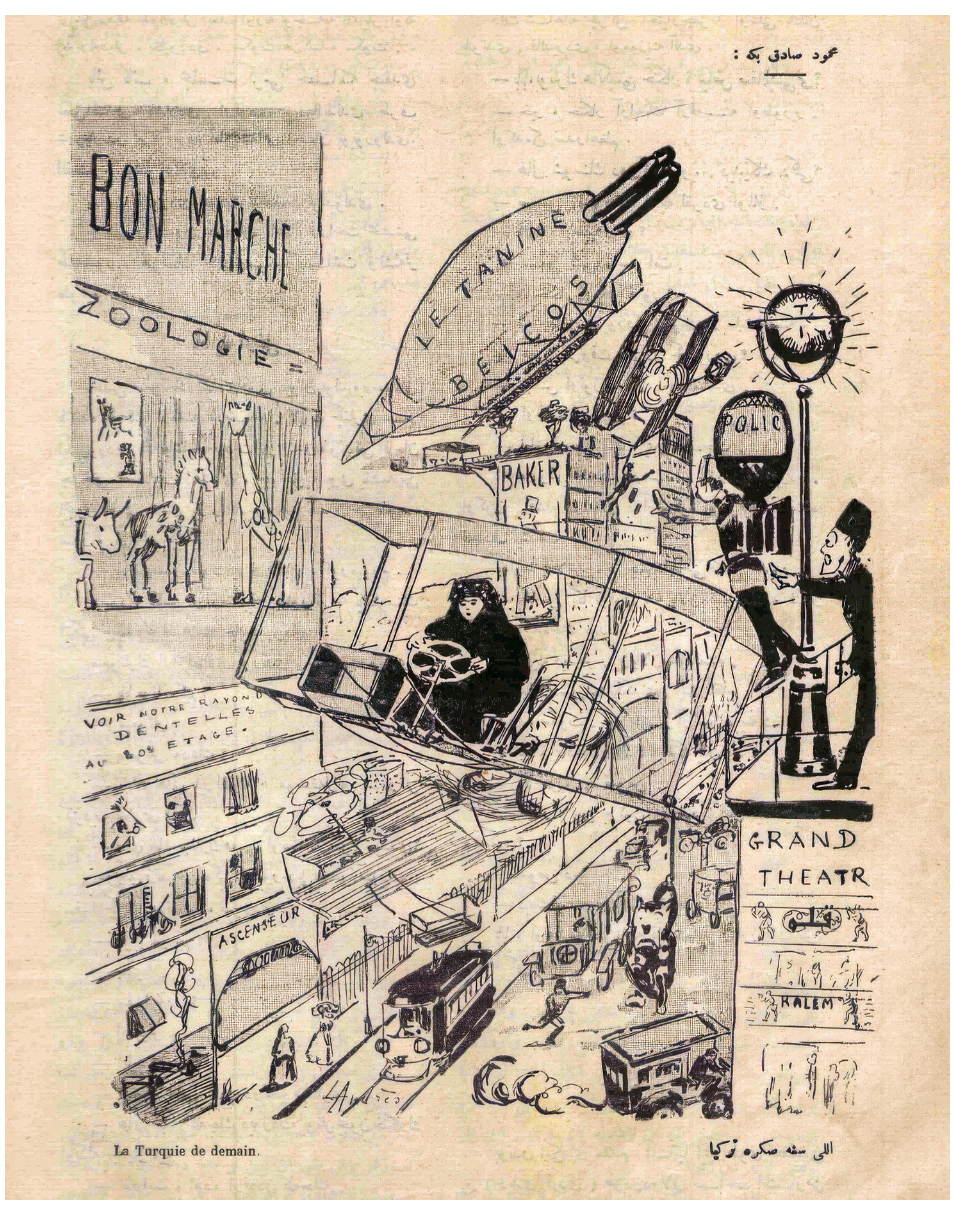
Fabulous airborne vehicles that are visibly inspired by light aeroplanes of the time, Zeppelin airships, and the like, can be found in the Ottoman sphere as well.

The caricature published in the bilingual *Kalem* ('Pen') entitled 'Mahmud Sadık Bey'e' ('For Mahmud Sadık Bey') (Fig. 6), a journalist who also wrote for the *Kalem* and many other newspapers and magazines,[28] bears the caption 'Turkey in 50 years' (in Ottoman

28 *Kalem* was published weekly between 1908 and 1911 by Salah Cimcoz and Celal Esad in both Ottoman Turkish and French. The two parts differed in their content. Pseudonyms were used for most of the contributions. Heinzelmann 1999, 68.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 6. Kalem*, 1908, 8.*
'For Mahmud Sadık Bey. Turkey in 50 years.'



Turkish) and 'Turkey of tomorrow' (in French). The magazine *Kalem*'s caricatures cover a much broader spectrum than those in *Karagöz*. In addition to 'classic' political caricatures, meaning drawings commenting on a political event or situation, the publication

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

also included elements such as portrait caricatures and humorous little picture stories, for example. Furthermore, *Kalem*'s caricatures are strongly influenced by European models.[29]

The caricature here shows a typical vision of the future in which air vehicles predominate as a means of transportation. The shopping street depicted may be the busy İstiklal Street in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, which is lined with high-rise buildings and shops to the left and right and still has today a historic tram that runs up and down. A woman in a chador flies an aeroplane, while other aircraft, such as a Zeppelin, are also on the move. A policeman tries to regulate the air traffic, while a passer-by appears to be waiting for an 'air cab.' The caricature is signed L. Andrès. However, it is not known who is behind the name.[30]

Kalem published satirical commentaries on current political and cultural events, in both texts and depictions. This caricature can be interpreted as a criticism of both modernisation and the current traffic situation in the city. The residents are confronted with trams, cars, and other vehicles. The question that these kinds of caricatures deal with is what it will be like in the future if traffic is already overwhelming people at the moment. Ideas about the time to come can appear partly as a solution, but partly as a exacerbation of the current problem. The situation in this caricature here is transferred to what lies ahead, where the problem seems to be an overcrowded airspace instead of traffic congestion on the ground. The fact that all the signage is in French can also be interpreted as a criticism of the Westernisation efforts of the time.

In a way similar to Figure 6, the 14th caricature of the Egyptian series, shown in Figure 7, takes up a theme we might describe as *the future characterised as a world upside-down*. Here, we see the people of the distant future, notably still wearing 1920s clothing. The attire of the fully veiled woman in the front and a lady in the back, wearing just a cap, a fashionably short dress, and high heels are pointing to persisting differences between 'traditional' and 'modern' citizens. But while societal and gender roles stay stable, the zoo illustrates the reversal of norms. In this distant future, people admire a donkey, a horse, and a cow as curiosities, while 'modern technology' not represented in the picture but only in the blurb is said to have become the new normal. In a way, this depiction predicted the idea of farm animal parks quite accurately. However, this must have seemed as ridiculous to the contemporary observer as declaring some 2000s everyday vehicle to be a valuable old-timer may seem to us today.

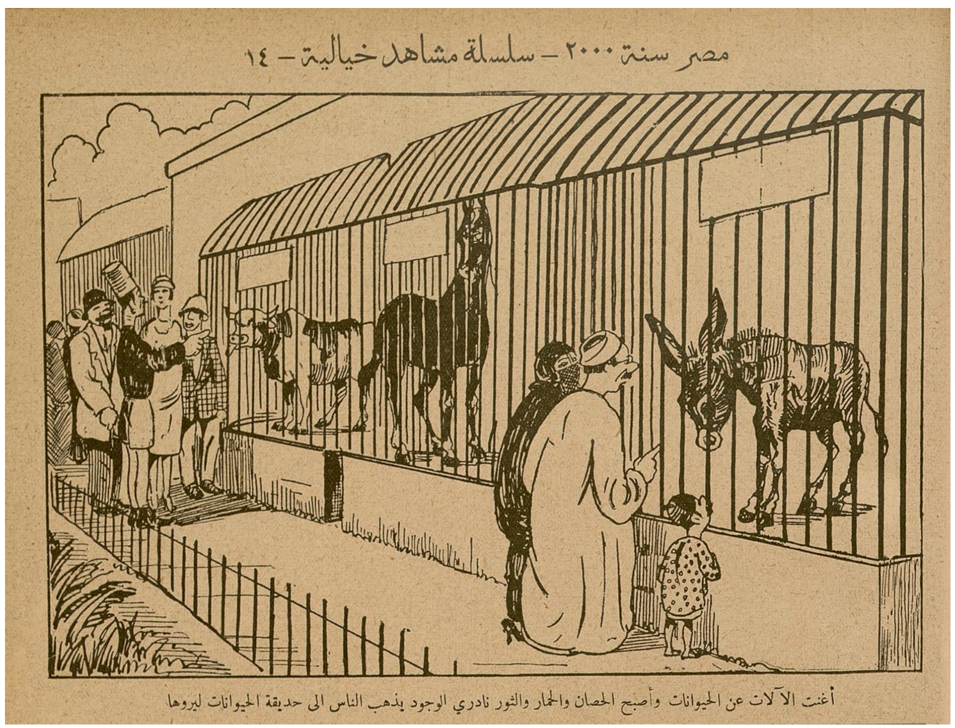
In another Egyptian version of city aerial traffic, shown in Figure 8, ʿAlī Rifqī plays with an imagination of future traffic control. The dichotomy between futuristic air traffic and a city, society, and everyday customs of the 1920s becomes even more clear in this caricature. We have a scene of the rooftops of a city, presumably Cairo, that has modern buildings as well as a mosque, while most of the buildings are not decidedly marked as 'modern' or futuristic vs 'traditional.' Many planes are flying around, steered by *effendī*s, marked again by their fezzes. Some of the roofs have been equipped with landing cushions, as in

29 Heinzelmann 1999, 70.

30 The same signature can be found under other drawings, including in other magazines. Reference to this from Okyar 2023, 155; and Heinzelmann 1999, 74. However, it could also be a pseudonym.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 7. Al-Fukāha*, 2 March 1927, 7.*
'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 14: As machines have taken over from the animals and donkeys, horses, and oxen have become rare [and] people go to the zoo to see them.'



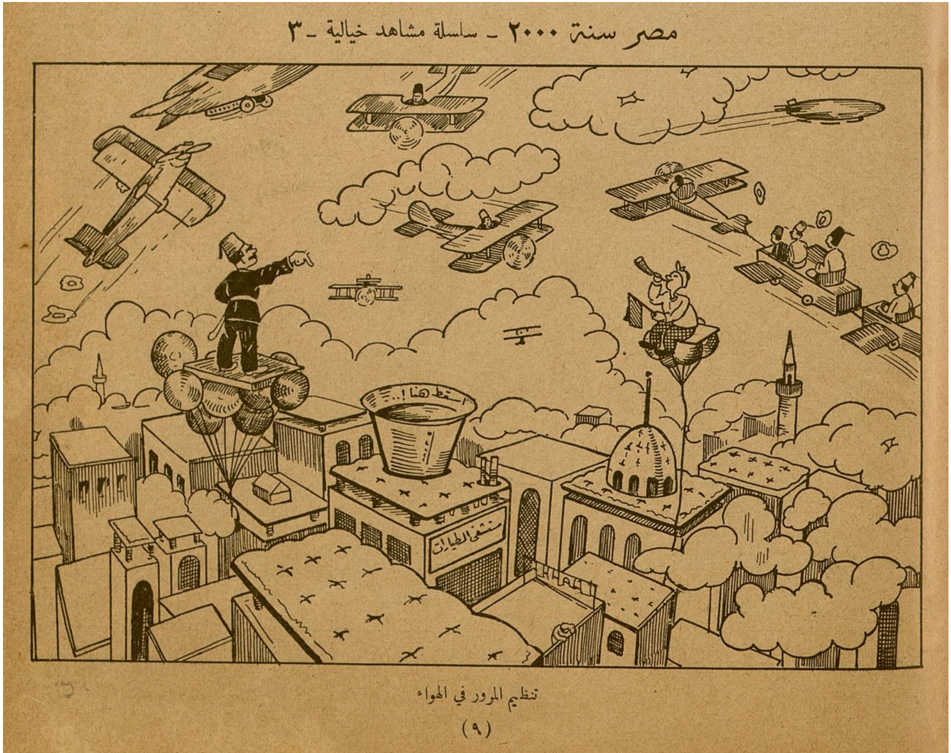
the foreground, or even around the mosque's cupola to the right. In the middle, we find an aircraft hospital, which has some sort of landing funnel installed on the roof. Two figures are placed between the roofs of the city and the sky dominated by the different aircraft. Both a policeman giving traffic directions and a person blowing a horn and holding a flag float atop a cluster of balloons. These balloons have nothing in common with a *mongolfière*[31] or a Zeppelin airship. Instead, the balloon floating 'technique' depicted here is clearly a comical way of parodying 'modern' technology, even more clearly making fun of the future technologies than the landing cushions or mattresses on the rooftops.

Similarly, the first caricature of the series *Miṣr fī sanat alfayn* (Fig. 9) shows a monkey man of the future, flying through the streets of Cairo in a MacGyver-style, tattered hot air balloon, singing an old folklore song and showing off his monkey who in turn is kept

31 The first hot air balloon documented in Cairo was flown by the two Frenchmen Nicolas-Jacques Conté and Gaspard Monge over Azbakiyya as early as 1798. As many caricatures since the 1870 show, hot air balloons and Zeppelin airships were well known at the time.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 8. Al-Fukāha*, 15 December 1926, 9.*
'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 3: Air traffic control.'
The text on the building in the middle reads mustashfa al-ṭayyārāt *('aircraft hospital'), the cylinder on top of it is marked as the (emergency) entrance with the note* isqaṭ hunā *('land/ enter here').*

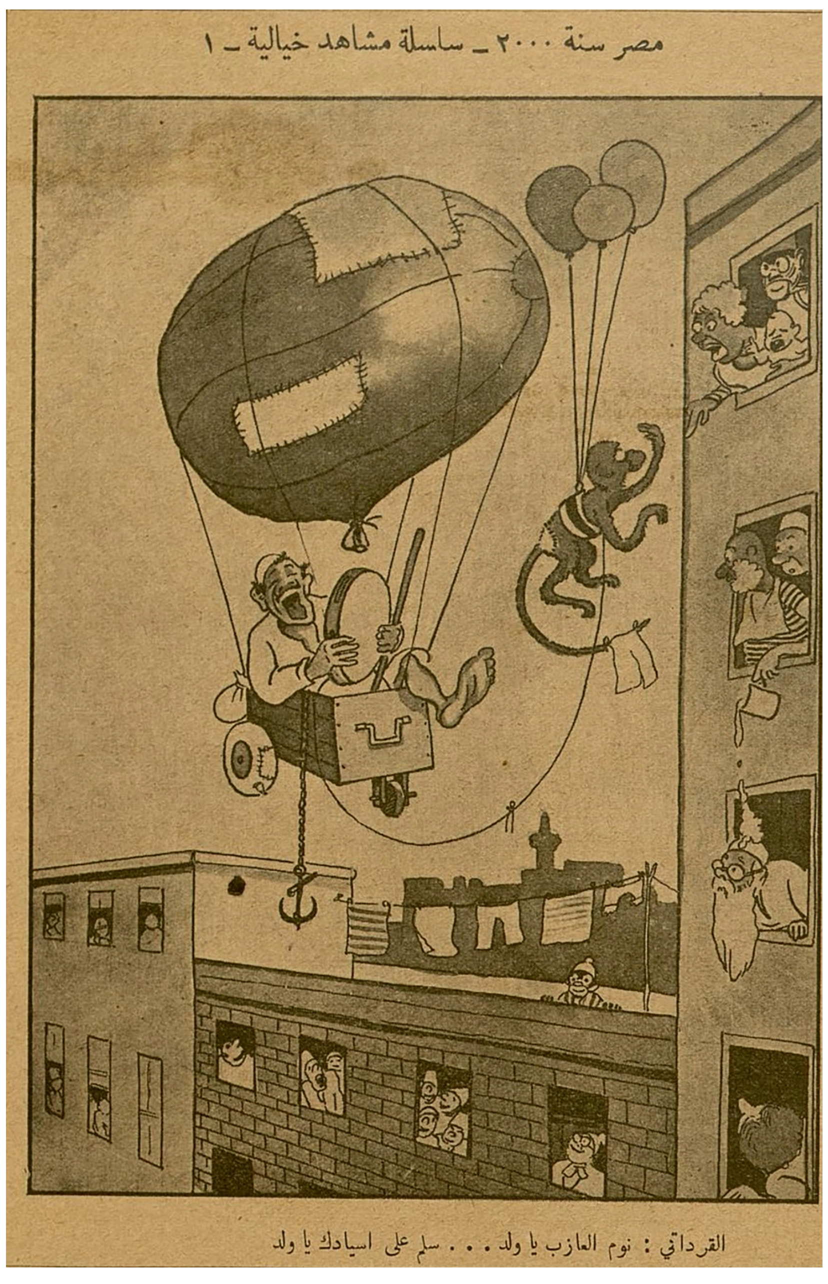


afloat in the air by three balloons. This comical way of depicting flying apparatuses could be read as a parody on 'technological progress' itself, as well as at a specific 'Egyptian' way of trying to achieve it: The lower-class monkey man, similar to the chronically underpaid police officer of the distant future in Figure 8, is imagined to be still lower-class and relying on home-made, probably unreliable solutions.[32] In this way, both the air traffic control and the monkey man caricature add to a characterisation of Egypt that represents it as a country not entirely capable of solving problems in a 'modern,' technologically refined way.[33]

32 The police officer especially is a figure subjected to mockery in Rifqī's and many other caricatures of the time, as shown by, e.g., caricatures for children. See Zdafee forthcoming.
33 A telling example is Rifqī's caricature on the Egyptian way of dealing with street flooding after heavy rain, see *Al-Fukāha*, 22 December 1926, 5, in which the caricaturist mocks the fantastic, yet impractical measures Cairo citizens plan to take to keep themselves safe on a rainy day, due to the fact that they do not trust the city's safety measures.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 9. Al-Fukāha*, 1 December 1926, 9.*
'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 1: The monkey man: Bachelor's sleep, my boy… greet your elders, my boy!'[*]



* The rhyme is an old traditional song used by monkey men in Egypt.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

4. Science Fiction Explicitly Criticising the Present Time

Following the easing of press conditions in the Ottoman Empire after 1908, a new draft for the press law was drawn up in 1911, which was intended to restrict freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Karagöz and Hacivat express their displeasure concerning upcoming repressions in the caricature in Figure 10, as they also do in many others. In the drawing, Karagöz and Hacivat, who are trying to print with the printing press they set up on a flying aeroplane in the skies of Istanbul, are able to keep their distance from the laws 'below.' The aeroplane bears the inscription 'Karagöz matbuası' (Karagöz Printing House). We also see a multitude of pigeons holding copies of the *Karagöz* in their beaks and perhaps distributing them, this reminding one of how leaflets were distributed in wartime. The dialogue underneath reads as follows:

> Hacivat, you have to get used to it, brother, you have to get used to it! From now on, not only the military will use aeroplanes. When the new printing law comes into force, we will publish our newspapers here. Go on, put the paper under the roller, go on!...

In the same manner as in both the Egyptian and Ottoman caricatures in this contribution, in this caricature, progress and new technologies are presented as a way out of the current situation. With the help of aeroplanes, the press wants to escape the restrictions they are confronted with. This caricature uses future achievements as an–albeit absurd–solution to current problems. In doing so, it criticises current events and developments in the country. As early as 1877, when censorship was introduced, journalists and publicists addressed the issue and criticised the severe restrictions on caricatures. Some individuals were severely punished for publishing a caricature critical of censorship, such as Teodor Kasap, who was given a prison sentence for publishing Karagöz and Hacivat caricatures mocking censorship.[34]

The satirical magazine *Geveze* focused on the everyday living situation in Istanbul. For example, the magazine criticised the inadequate street cleaning, the operation of streetcars, the regularity of ferry connections, and the handling of financial support for people living in residential areas destroyed by fires.[35] The newspaper was also particularly concerned with transportation and traffic, as we already saw in Figure 4. A particularly large number of caricatures on visions of the future therefore deal with these topics.

According to Brummett, the Ottoman satirists used flying machines as a symbol of modernity par excellence, contrasting the traditional and the old. 'In the cartoon space the flying machine was employed to illustrate the obsolescence of the old ways and the inevitability of a machine-based future.'[36] The caricature in Figure 11 from *Geveze*[37] criticises the current situation, in this case the state of the Galata Bridge, by accessing future

34 Bostancı 2020, 68.

35 Civalıoğlu and Çelik 2017, 28–42.

36 Brummett 2000, 138.

37 *Geveze* ('Chatterer/chatty') was published for the first time on 15 August 1908 in Istanbul. Initially daily, later twice weekly, a total of 115 issues were published until it was discontinued in June 1909. It is one of the many satirical magazines published after 1908.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [cc] BY

Figure 10. Karagöz, *15 November 1911.*
'Hacivat, you have to get used to it, brother, you have to get used to it! From now on, not only the military will use aeroplanes. When the new printing law comes into force, we will publish our newspapers here. Go on, put the paper under the roller, go on!...'

ideas. 'When the bridge is completely submerged, air transportation will be used,' reads the caption. The Galata Bridge at that time was a wooden structure that connected the two European parts of Istanbul, which are separated by the Golden Horn. It was of enormous importance for traffic and transportation, and its dilapidated condition was widely discussed in the press. The Istanbul administration was accused of not fulfilling its duties and not taking care of the bridge.[38]

As in the previous caricature, a vision of the future is presented as a solution to current problems. Air vehicles are offered as an option that could be used to circumvent problematic conditions on the ground. This strategy is used to express criticism against authorities who make decisions that entail social or cultural restrictions.

38 See footnote in Brummett 2000, 138.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 11. Geveze*, 1909.*
'When the bridge is completely submerged, air transportation will be used.'

Not only visions of the future, but also visions of the present are addressed in satirical magazines using typical science fiction motifs. 'This is how I imagine Istanbul, since I haven't received a letter for a long time,' reads the caption under the right-hand side of the two panels in Figure 12. Next to the tram, the symbol of modernity, flying objects, the symbols of the future, are depicted in a modern district with tall buildings. The means of transportation include a hot air balloon from which people can travel by cable car to the places they want to go. But there are also fantastic inventions on display, such as seats with a spring underneath that transport people from place to place starting from a 'jumping station' (on the left of the picture). Tables refer to the metro, the post office, the police station, the fire station, and many other places. The caption suggests that this is the imagination of the city and its development of a person who lives abroad and has not been in Istanbul for a long time. The caricature is signed by Ahmet Rıfkı, the alias of ʿAlī Rifqī, who is believed to have been living in Italy at the time.[39] The idea or presentation of the scenes is very similar to the visions of the future presented in other depictions. Whether imagining the current situation from the perspective of someone abroad or envisioning the future, both variants are directly related to the current situation. The depictions are therefore based on contrasts and comparisons, regardless of whether both parts of contrast or comparison are presented explicitly or not.

39 For Rıfkı/Rifqi see Çeviker, 1997, 64–70, as well as the contribution by Eberhard Dziobek in this issue.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Figure 12. Zümrüdüanka, *12 November 1923, 1. Caricaturist: Rıfkı.*
Right side: 'This is how I imagine Istanbul, since I haven't received a letter for a long time.'
Left side: 'Since I received letters and newspapers this week, I learned about the real situation.'

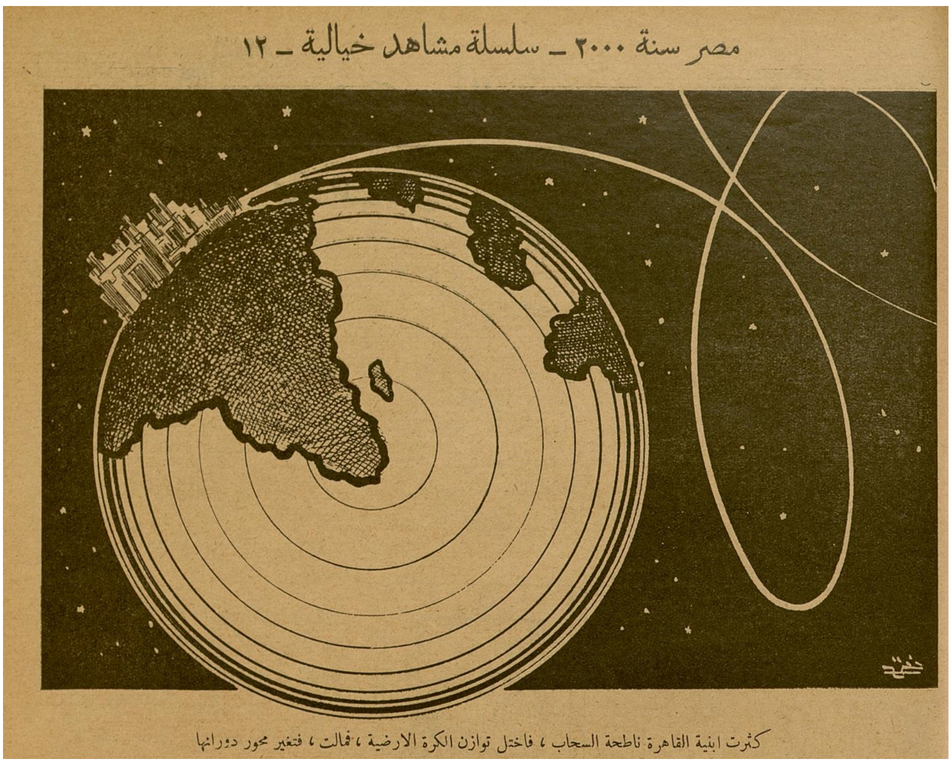
In Figure 12, the two elements to be compared or contrasted are juxtaposed. Below the second panel on the left we read: 'Since I received letters and newspapers this week, I learned about the real situation.' The panel shows an impoverished district with crumbling wooden houses and holes in the ground. The people in the picture are poorly dressed. The paperboy is hawking the two daily newspapers *İkdam* and *Akşam*. There are no aeroplanes or futuristic objects flying in the air, only birds and classic kites. While in the right-hand panel a person arriving by cable car is distributing the pension ('Hasan Efendi, I've brought your December salary, please reach out'), the elderly gentleman leaning out of the window in the left-hand picture asks the paperboy whether the payments have arrived yet. The lack of payment is an indication and criticism of the economic state in which the country and society find themselves.

The fictional narrator imagines Istanbul as a wealthy and prosperous city that has gained progress through technology. However, the given reality provides a completely different picture, with an impoverished population in poor living conditions.

Addressing 'modern' technologies as a transformative influence on the earth, this last caricature from Rifqī's Egyptian Sci-fi Series (Fig. 13) seems almost prophetic from today's point of view. With its relatively reduced visual language, this caricature at first

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

Figure 13. Al-Fukāha, *16 February 1927, 5.*
'Egypt in the Year 2000 – A Series of Dream Visions – [no.] 12: Cairo's skyscraper buildings disrupted the earth's balance, tilting it and changing its axis of rotation.'



glance opens a space of ambiguity that is only narrowed by the blurb. It brings the insanity, or unpredictability, of 'modernity' and 'progress' to the readers of *Al-Fukāha* in a cosmic allegory that first seems to ask the question as to whether Cairo, the *umm al-dunya* ('mother of the world,' a common epithet of the city till today), is the transformative power changing the world. Or has this transformation been brought about by the skyscrapers, the architectural emblems of 'modernity'? Once the earth is unhinged as a whole, would this apply to the many small 'orbits' of life existing on it? Would that mean that, from Rifqī's perspective, all the changes he and his contemporaries are witnessing, would necessarily lead to making a complete mess of the earth by the year 2000? Or could there be a pinch of positivity in the caricature as well: The old ways having been overcome, a new order is established, with Cairo being a deciding factor in the world's development? *Al-Qāhira umm al-dunya*, Cairo as the centre of progress or development, be it towards a brighter future or into a gloomy soulless 'modernity'? Read together with the blurb, the caricature once again betrays Rifqī's scepticism vis-à-vis the booming belief in 'progress towards modernity' that dominated many discourses of the time, both in Egypt and the

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

(post)-Ottoman world and globally. Using the skyscrapers as a *pars pro toto*, it suggests that 'modern' achievements will certainly change the way of life in Egypt and beyond to a great extent, disrupting the time-honoured balance of the planet, which stands, as it were, as a '*toto pro pars*' for the issues that moved Rifqī's and his contemporaries' thoughts. Both the drawing of the planet drifting out of its orbit and the blurb that describes the effect of the 'modern' buildings as 'disruptive' (*fa-akhtala*) reinforce a certain negative stance towards progress on a larger scale. The benefits of the quick changes already being induced by technology and 'modernisation' or being propagated by the progressive middle classes (like the *effendīya* in Egypt) during the 1920s are thus questioned by foretelling their long-term effects on the planet.

5. Conclusion

The common themes presented in Ottoman and Egyptian caricatures on visions of the future and science fiction motifs are notable. The similarities in the depiction of future vehicles are particularly remarkable, as both in the Ottoman and in the Egyptian caricatures, and both on the ground and in the air, vehicles known at the time are intermingled with fantastic contraptions. It should not go unmentioned that the Istanbul and Cairo caricature scenes were not at all developing separately or unaware of each other. Notably, the caricaturist Rifqī, who published the Cairo 'sci-fi' series analysed in this article, had his roots in the Istanbul scene and published in *Güleryüz*, among other publications, before he left Istanbul after the end of the Ottoman sultanate.[40]

However, a certain ambiguity can be seen in the contrast between the depiction of people and that of vehicles. While the vehicles appear utopian in some cases and are subject to major changes over time, the people shown in the depictions of the future do not differ from those in the present in either the Ottoman and the Egyptian examples. In terms of their outward appearance, their behaviour and tasks, people in the depictions of the future are similar to everyday life as it would have been experienced by our caricaturists. While technology changes in their visions of the future, everything else seems to remain the same. On the one hand, the caricatures poke fun at technological achievements and question their function and benefits. On the other hand, they provide visions of the future that stand in contrast to the people depicted, who remain in their 1920s social behaviour. This can also be interpreted as a criticism of current society and living conditions. In the everyday reality of the caricaturists' lives, technology promoted progress and modernity. Rapid development gave people the feeling that the world was turning faster than they were. Technologies of the future therefore also served as markers of progress and change in the caricatures. On the other hand, the fantastic exaggeration of specific elements of technology was also used to criticise change and question the benefits of innovations and progress.

The question is to what extent the caricatures were actually targeting the future versus addressing the current situation of the caricaturists and their audiences. The traffic problem seems to have been of great concern to the residents of the metropoles Istan-

40 See contribution by Dziobek in this volume.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

bul and Cairo. The exaggerated comparison between caricaturists' present situation and their imagination of future transformations clearly illustrates their criticism of the present and, at least in the Egyptian case, betrays elements of self-orientalisation when doubting the capability of Egyptian society to fully embrace technologisation (as in the air traffic and monkey man examples). However, especially the Ottoman caricatures in this article also show that the topic of technology or traffic was often combined with some second, unrelated topic of the time. One example is the combination of the achievement of X-ray technology with a critique of the situation under the reign of Abdülhamid II. Other cases would be the first caricature on new technology and the burglary problem in Istanbul and the one on press censorship in *Karagöz*. This unexpected combination of topics seems to be a technique used to astonish people, instill laughter, and criticise the current times all at once, thus constituting a technique to enhance the function of caricatures.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Al-Fukāha. 02 February 1927, 1/10. 11.
–. 8 December 1926, 1/2. 9.
–. 22 December 1926, 1/4. 9.
–. 23 March 1927, 17. Cover.
–. 19 January 1927, 1/8. 3.
–. 02 March 1927, 1/14. 7.
–. 15 December 1926, 1/3. 9.
–. 1 December 1926, 1/1. 9.
–. 22 December 1926, 4. 5.
–. 16 December 1927, 1/12. 5.
Aydede. 16 October 1922, 83. 2.
Geveze. 1908, 22.
–. 18 February 1909, 27.
Güleryüz. 17 October 1921, 24. 5.
Karagöz. 12 July 1909, 100.
–. 15 November 1911, 357.
Kalem. 1908, 17. 8.
Zümrüdüanka. 12 November 1923, 91. 1.

Secondary Sources

Agai, Bekim, and Conermann, Stephan (eds.). 2013. *Wenn Einer eine Reise tut, hat er was zu erzählen. Präfiguration – Konfiguration – Refiguration in Muslimischen Reiseberichten*. Berlin: EB-Verlag.
Aldiss, Brian Wilson. 1973. *Billion Year Spree. The History of Science Fiction*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
Alkan, Necmettin. 2018. *Karikatürlerle Sultan II. Abdülhamid. Propaganda ve Gerçek Arasında Bir Padişah*. Istanbul: Kronik Kitap.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Andrade, Julijana Nicha. 2021. 'Constructing and Reconstructing Orientalism. Depicting Orientalist Imagery in Contemporary Art in the Quest of Self-Identity'. In Tombul, Işıl and Sarı, Gülşah (eds.). *Handbook of Research on Contemporary Approaches to Orientalism in Media and Beyond.* Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Global. 92–106.

Atik, Ayşe. 2014. 'İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi Karikatürlerinde Osmanlı Kurumları, Gündelik Yaşam ve Halk İmgeleri'. MA Thesis, Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Aydın.

Bacon, Francis. 1627. *New Atlantis.* N.p.

Baykal, Erol A. F. 2019. *The Ottoman Press 1908–1923.* The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage 67. Leiden/Boston: Brill.

Bostancı, Erol. 2020. *Caricaturequie. Humour et satire dans l'Empire ottoman.* Tome 1: 1852–1919. N.p.

Brummett, Palmira. 2000. 'The Yeni and the Eski. Cultural Change and Envisioning the 'Modern' in late Ottoman Cartoons'. *The Great Ottoman and Turkish Civilization.* 3. 134–140.

Çeviker, Turgut. 1997. *Karikatür Üzerine Yazılar.* Istanbul: İris.

Çırakman, Aslı. 2005. *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe". European Images Of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth..* New York: Peter Lang.

Civalıoğlu, Berna and Çelik, Yakup. 2017. 'İkinci Meşrutiyet Döneminde Bir Mizah Gazetesi: Geveze'. *Karadeniz.* 35. 28–42.

Cowan, Jacqueline L. 2011. 'Francis Bacon's New Atlantis and the Alterity of the New World'. *Literature and Theology.* 25.4. 407–421.

Dulaney, Michael and Carrick, Damien. 2018. '"Who Killed You?" The Jurors who Used a Ouija Board to Find a Murderer Guilty. URL: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-08/ouija-board-juror-misbehaviour-murder-trials/9734868 (last accessed 27 September 2025).

Dümen, Özgün Nil. 2019. 'Millî Mücadele Döneminde Mizah Basını: Ay Dede ve Güleryüz (1922)'. MA Thesis. Ankara.

Eppel, Michael. 2009. 'Note about the Term Effendiyya in the History of the Middle East'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies.* 41.3. 535–539. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40389288

Gülbudak, Özgür. 2022. 'Le Rire dergisi'nde yer alana II. Abdülhamid konulu Karikatürler üzerine bir inceleme'. *Sanat Tarihi Dergisi.* 31.1. 561–597.

Harder, Hans. 2001. 'Indian and International. Some Examples of Marathi Science Fiction Writing'. *South Asia Research.* 21.1. 105–119.

Heinzelmann, Tobias. 1999. *Die Balkankrise in der osmanischen Karikatur: die Satirezeitschriften Karagöz, Kalem und Cem 1908–1914.* Stuttgart: Steiner.

Hourani, Albert. 1962. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kollatz, Anna and Wagner, Veruschka (eds.). 2025. *Erst lachen, dann denken!/Laugh first, think later! Karikaturen aus dem Nahen Osten, 1850–1940/Caricatures from the Near East, 1850–1940.* Heidelberg: heiBOOKS. Universitätsmuseum Heidelberg: Kataloge, Band 18. URL: https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1608 (last accessed 12 February 2025).

Küper-Büsch, Sabine and Rona, Nigar (eds.). 2008. *Die Nase des Sultans. Spitzen der türkischen Karikatur.* Berlin: Dağyeli Verlag.

Newman, Daniel L. and al-Ṭahṭāwī, Rāfiʿ. 2012. *An Imam in Paris. Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831).* New York: Saqi Books.

Okyar, Ilkim Büke. 2023. *Arabs in Turkish Political Cartoons, 1876–1950, National Self and Non-National Other.* New York: Syracuse University Press.

Ryzova, Lucie. 2014. *The Age of the Efendiyya. Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Shelley, Mary. 1826. *The Last Man*. London: Henry Coldburn.
Sterling, Bruce. 2025. *Science Fiction. Encyclopedia Britannica*. URL: https://www.britannica.com/art/science-fiction (last accessed 2 April 2025).
Tombul, Işıl and Sarı, Gülşah (eds.). 2021. *Handbook of Research on Contemporary Approaches to Orientalism in Media and Beyond*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7180-4
Wagner, Veruschka. 2016. *Imagologie der Fremde: Das Londonbild eines osmanischen Reisenden Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Göttingen/Bonn: V&R Unipress/Bonn University Press.
Zdafee, Keren. 2025. 'Emotional Egyptian Childhood. Notions of Fear, Joy, and Anger in al-Awlād's Comics'. In Kollatz, Anna and Wagner, Veruschka (eds.). *Cartoons and Caricatures in a Global Perspective. 1850–1950*. Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing.
–. forthcoming. *Cartooning for a Modern Egypt*. Leiden: Brill.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Şen, Ahmet Tunç. 2025. *Forgotten Experts: Astrologers, Science, and Authority in the Ottoman Empire, 1450–1600*. Stanford Ottoman World Series. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 330 pages. ISBN: 9781503643017 (e-Book).

Reviewed by **Kristof D'hulster**
TRANSLAPT, Universität Münster
Kristof.Dhulster@ugent.be

Nine years after the defense of his doctoral dissertation, *Astrology in the Service of Empire: Knowledge, Prognostication, and Politics at the Ottoman Court, 1450s–1550s* (University of Chicago), Ahmet Tunç Şen treats the reader to *Forgotten Experts*. Far more than a cosmetic revision of his dissertation, he has substantially rethought and refined his study, producing a sophisticated socio-cultural history of Ottoman astrologers as historical actors. The book examines questions of identity, patronage, legitimacy, knowledge transmission, and the cultural meanings of astrology, as well as its intersections–always precarious, sometimes explosive–with religion, power, and shifting forms of epistemic authority.

The introduction (pp. 1–38) immediately captures the reader's attention by juxtaposing two dramatic events, separated by only three decades, that epitomize the fluctuating fortunes of Ottoman astrologers in the long sixteenth century. The first is the laying of the foundation stone of the Süleymaniye, timed according to calculations by the court astrologer and performed by none other than *şeyhülislam* Ebussuud Efendi. The second is the destruction of a court-sponsored observatory, authorized by a fatwa issued by one of Ebussuud's own students during the reign of Murad III. These two events establish the central tension of the book and invite the reader to follow Ottoman astrologers as they alternately gained access to the inner court or hastily sought the nearest exit. Şen proves an able guide throughout.

Tempting as it is to interpret this second event as evidence of 'scientific decline' or 'the triumph of orthodoxy,' Şen cautions against such narratives. The precarious position of astrology, he argues, was not an aberration but intrinsic to the discipline itself. Its fortunes rose and fell alongside shifting configurations of epistemic authority, changing priorities among decision-makers, and competition with other forms of 'expertise.' One of the book's major conceptual contributions lies in its refusal to rely on broad and often misleading categories such as 'occult' or 'esoteric' sciences. Instead, the author proposes 'expertise' as a more productive analytical lens–one that functions not merely as a heuristic tool but as a historically meaningful category for Ottoman actors themselves. While the Ottoman polity was hardly a full-blown meritocracy, expertise nevertheless mattered and could serve as a basis for authority, advancement, and patronage.

The book is also situated within broader historiographical debates in the history of science. Astrologers, despite their grounding in the astral sciences, have long been marginalized in the history of Ottoman science, just as Ottoman science itself has often been excluded from global narratives of late medieval and early modern scientific knowledge. Şen carefully traces the genealogy of this exclusion while noting that recent scholarship

Diyâr, 7. Jg., 1/2026, S. 165–169, DOI: 10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1-165

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

has begun to redress it. Ottoman astrology, however, remains doubly marginalized–both within Ottoman studies and within the history of science. *Forgotten Experts* represents a significant step toward correcting this imbalance. As Şen states explicitly, the book does not merely seek to add an Ottoman chapter to overwhelmingly Eurocentric narratives or to reiterate arguments about the importance of the 'occult' in premodern history. Instead, inspired by Martin Mulsow's *Prekäres Wissen*, it asks how astrology survived despite persistent epistemic, institutional, and cultural vulnerabilities, including the absence of formal educational structures and sustained critiques of its legitimacy.

Chapter 1 (pp. 39–78), '*Munajjim*s' Expertise,' addresses the conceptual and terminological challenges posed by the figure of the *müneccim*. Translating the term as either 'astrologer' or 'astronomer' proves inadequate, as it obscures the hybrid nature of the expertise involved. A *müneccim* combined mathematical and natural sciences with knowledge of the unseen, straddling multiple epistemic domains for which modern English lacks an equivalent umbrella term. Rather than resorting to cumbersome paraphrases, Şen judiciously leaves the term untranslated. This choice captures the breadth of the category while also delineating its limits: pure astronomers and magicians, for example, fall outside the scope of the book.

The inherently precarious nature of the *müneccim*'s expertise had important spatial and social consequences. As this form of knowledge could never be fully institutionalized within the madrasa system, its transmission depended on informal master–pupil relationships and ad hoc patronage rather than on stable curricular structures. While courts emerged as the primary sites of both practice and training, with aspiring *müneccim*s apprenticed to established court astrologers, such courtly patronage remained highly personalized and contingent. Even where offices such as that of the chief *muvaḳḳit* provided a measure of continuity, astrology relied largely on the 'fond attachment' of individual patrons, producing constant fluctuations in the *müneccim*s' remuneration, textual production, and professional opportunities. The court thus functioned as a partial substitute for the madrasa, offering resources without conferring the stability of formal institutionalization.

The epistemic ambivalence of the *müneccim*'s position was furthermore mirrored in practitioners' own reflections on their craft. Many acknowledged the speculative nature of their *aḥkām* and emphasized the probabilistic character of their judgments, signaling an acute awareness of the limits of experiential knowledge and celestial observation. At the same time, most maintained that celestial configurations offered meaningful clues to terrestrial events. Significantly, they typically framed celestial influences as subordinate to divine will. This stance might be read merely as a defensive response to accusations of astral determinism–often voiced by Sufi or juridical critics–but Şen suggests that it may instead reflect a genuine cosmology in which celestial causation operated *within*, rather than *against*, divine sovereignty.

Having laid out the broader historiographical debates and the challenges posed by the figure of the *müneccim*, the book's next four chapters follow the logic of a social history of astrology, oscillating between moments of prominence and marginalization, while also being shaped by the highly uneven visibility of astrologers in the sources. This history unfolds alongside political chronology but does not map neatly onto the reigns of individ-

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

ual sultans. Instead, Şen foregrounds astrologers and their changing conditions of practice, thereby decentering dynastic narratives.

Chapter 2 (pp. 79–112), 'Persianate Foundations,' marks the beginning of the book's social history proper. Focusing on ʿAbdurrahman and Khitabi, the author reconstructs their careers from a body of sources that is not so much sparse in quantity as limited in its suitability for writing social history. These fragmentary references are supplemented with rare ego-documents embedded in unexpected genres, allowing Şen to produce remarkably textured biographies despite the qualitative constraints of the material. Close readings of ʿAbdurrahman's surviving *taḳvīm* and Khitabi's horoscope for Mehmed II's birth introduce readers to key astrological genres and constitute welcome excursions into the more technical aspects of the profession. Both figures operated within a strongly Persianate intellectual milieu. Their careers underscore astrology's formative, Persianate phase before its later Ottomanization.

Chapter 3 (pp. 113–52), 'Heavenly Patronage,' shifts attention from astrologers to their patrons, particularly Bayezid II. By his reign, the court astrologer had begun to resemble a formal office, reflecting broader processes of institutionalization that–less often recognized–were already under way. Bayezid II's self-fashioning as a philosopher-king fostered sustained patronage of astrology, replacing earlier ad hoc arrangements. Şen situates Bayezid II's interests within a wider intellectual context, exploring possible models such as Ulugh Beg and examining links between astrology and contemporary messianic currents. He convincingly shows, however, that apocalyptic or millenarian themes are largely absent from astrologers' writings under Bayezid II.

In Chapter 4 (pp. 153–87), 'Fortunes Turned,' the reader is taken into the reign of Süleyman I. Most surprisingly, astrology's prominence declined despite the sultan's well-known penchant for the 'occult.' Süleyman appears to have favored lettrism over the technical expertise of astrologers, with the result that *müneccim*s increasingly receded from the center of courtly life. The poet-astrologer Riyazi emerges as the most visible figure of this period, largely because his literary reputation secured him a place in biographical dictionaries. Riyazi's works reveal mounting frustration over the lack of recognition for astral expertise, and his unsuccessful attempts to secure patronage illustrate the narrowing avenues available to astrologers.

The final chapter (pp. 188–224), 'Occult Rivalries,' examines the array of divinatory experts with whom the *müneccim*s competed for authority and patronage: bibliomancers, geomancers, physiognomists, lettrists, and mystics, all offering alternative modes of prognostication. During and after Süleyman's reign, these figures increasingly overshadowed astrologers, often adopting bolder and more prophetic tones, while astrologers continued to emphasize probabilistic judgment. As the narrative moves into the late sixteenth century, the reader reaches the dramatic events evoked in the introduction: the construction of the Süleymaniye, whose auspicious timing was determined by Riyazi, demonstrating that astrology retained practical relevance even as its prestige waned; and the construction and subsequent destruction of Taqi al-Din's observatory under Murad III. Rather than framing its demolition as a simple clash between religion and science, Şen shows that opposition came largely from Halveti mystics, revealing a struggle among competing forms of 'occult' expertise first and foremost. Figures such as the lettrist-cum-geomancer

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Haydar, whose confident and prophetic pronouncements contrasted sharply with astrological caution, exemplify these dynamics.

In his conclusion (pp. 225–38), Şen returns once more to the observatory's destruction and resists its use as a symbol–whether of scientific decline or of astrology's waning. Astrology, after all, persisted well into the twentieth century, producing annual sultanic *taḳvīm*s replete with prognostications. What was at stake, he suggests, was not astrology per se but competition over limited resources for defining legitimate knowledge and for advising political authority. He further raises the possibility that increasing bureaucratization and centralization may have constrained innovation.

With an impressive list of archival sources from seven repositories and unpublished manuscripts from seventeen institutions (pp. 281–86), *Forgotten Experts* comes to a close as a lucid and compelling narrative that balances close reading of complex sources with broader historiographical reflection. Şen consistently resists settling on a catch-all term or a simplistic binary explanatory framework. Instead, he convincingly calls for a nuanced understanding of a plural epistemic landscape in which astrology operated side by side with other traditions. In doing so, he fills a major gap in Ottoman and global histories of science and sets a new standard for the study of astrology as a social practice.

Even so, it is the reviewer's duty to raise a few points that merit further reflection. Most notably, *Forgotten Experts* explains with great clarity *why astrology mattered* rather than *how it worked*. From one perspective, this choice is entirely justified. Detailed explanations of astrological technique would risk opening a Pandora's box and diverting attention from the book's central concerns. Yet the relative scarcity of sustained engagement with astrological sources as technical texts remains noticeable, and readers are offered only fleeting glimpses into the inner workings of astrological practice. Some additional signposting or brief methodological asides might have helped non-specialists better grasp the hybrid nature of the astrologer's expertise. Ironically, this choice also underscores the book's originality, as much existing scholarship on astrology has done precisely the opposite, focusing narrowly on technicalities for a highly specialized readership. With Şen, we learn considerably more about the man Mirim Çelebi than about what it entailed, in practice, for him to comment on Ulugh Beg's *zīj*–and that is, all things considered, a very good thing.

A second point concerns competitive diversity within astrology itself. Şen skillfully portrays clashes between astrologers, geomancers, and other experts as struggles *between* distinct epistemic strands, each claiming privileged access to the future. Less pronounced, however, is the extent to which similar forms of competition also existed *within* these traditions. Astrologers not only offered multiple interpretations of the same celestial configurations–a point Şen duly notes–but also, at times, interpreted different kinds of signs within a single work. Ottoman *taḳvīm*s, for example, did not rely exclusively on astral observation but occasionally juxtaposed stellar divination with alternative prognostic frameworks, invoking fictitious entities such as *Şükür Yıldızı* or the *Ricālü'l-Ğayb*. This juxtaposition produces an *embarras du choix*, making it difficult for the reader to decide which form of divination to follow–an issue that remains largely underexplored and perhaps ultimately unanswerable.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY

Finally, the book's focus on the 'long sixteenth century,' culminating in the dramatic destruction of Taqi al-Din's observatory, provides a compelling narrative arc but carries certain risks. Although Şen repeatedly emphasizes the persistence of astrology both before and after this period, readers unfamiliar with the broader chronology may nonetheless come away with the impression of a lasting marginalization of astrology after the sixteenth century, or of a marginal or largely absent Ottoman astrology prior to its Persianate infusion by ʿAbdurrahman and Co. These reflections, however, should be understood less as criticisms than as openings for further research.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Daniels, Jacob. 2025. *The Jews of Edirne. The End of Ottoman Europe and the Arrival of Borders*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 299 + xiv pages. ISBN: 9781503642011 (paperback).

Reviewed by **Julia Fröhlich-Siegl**
University of Vienna, Austria
julia.froehlich@univie.ac.at

Change takes many forms and shapes, most obviously differing with regards to intensity (degree), impact (longevity), and time (duration): How encompassing is it, how much does it alter specific people, groups, or even structures, and how quickly does it take effect? What does it mean if space–and the social implications attached to it–are altered, as borders are rewritten and social space newly defined? If space (territory) is newly conceptionalized, how do its populations react to this change and what does it mean in terms of belonging, social interaction, and collective identity? Referring to what is roughly termed 'the Edirne region,' Jacob Daniels draws on these questions to discuss the impact of nation building and border formation on the local (Jewish) population in the late Ottoman and early Republican context.

Borders and borderland form the conceptual core of what is an in-depth, much-encompassing portrayal of mobility patterns, social structures, individual and collective agency, as well as policies of demographic engineering. Picking up on the relatively recent scholarly interest in Ottoman/Turkish border studies (e.g., *Borders, Boundaries and Belonging in Post-Ottoman Space in the Interwar Period*, edited by Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, 2023), Daniels zooms in on the (spatially shifting) region where first the young state Bulgaria and later also Greece abutted the shrunken European part of the Ottoman Empire. It is this transformation of the Edirne region from an integral part of the Ottoman Empire to a violence-ridden province at the margins of the Turkish nation state which serves as the backdrop of the many anecdotes, life stories, local events, and discourses that are so meticulously retold in the light of a minority's struggle for economic, social, and physical survival.

By doing so, this title is a further invaluable contribution to the recently sparked and hopefully ongoing discussion on Ottoman and post-Ottoman borderlands, borderland mobility, mentality/identity, and migration policies: among them Ella Fratantuono's *Governing Migration in the Late Ottoman Empire* (2024), Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky's *Empire of Refugees* (2024), and *Regime's of Mobility* (2022) by Jordi Tejel and Ramazzan Hakkı Öztan as well as a wide selection of articles (e.g., the special issue 'Borders, Belonging, and Refugee Memory since the Greco-Turkish War and Population Exchange' forwarded by William Stroebel and Kristina Gedgadaitė in 2022) which explore mobility and networks in borderland regions from various angles.

The Jews of Edirne approaches individual lives, activities, and mobility patterns with equal depth and insight. Building on a rich tapestry of biographical accounts, private correspondence, newspapers, and diaries among other sources, Daniel successfully creates a multi-facetted prism through which the reader may perceive the effect of the borderland on individual and collective life in Edirne: the disruption of trans-border relations with suddenly turned-Bulgarian-state communities and business contacts, the equally sudden lim-

Diyâr, 7. Jg., 1/2026, S. 170–172, DOI: 10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1-170

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

itation of personal trans-border mobility, the gradual dissolvement of a decidedly Ottoman identity, the growing tension that erupted into ethnic violence during times of (perceived) external or internal threats, and the eventual evolvement of an ethnically homogeneous, Muslim-dominated borderland that left little room for ethnic or cultural diversity.

Starting off with an insightful discussion of the borderland concept and its on-site realization in Edirne, Daniel turns to Jewish life and identity in Edirne in five chronologically aligned chapters. Chapter 1 sets the stage by presenting Edirne's local, demographic, economic, historical, spatial, and cultural specificities, and especially highlights the Ottoman legacy that continued to shape local, especially Jewish, trans-national networks and perspectives. By reflecting on space, identity, and growing nationalism, Daniels masterfully traces how the Jewish community of Edirne became a target of antisemitic/anti-minority outlashes which marked the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Following up on this, chapter 2 zooms in on local media discourse, intercommunal relations, and intra-communal conflict, thus portraying how Jewish communities in the Edirne region reacted to political, social, and spatial developments in the first years after the Young Turk revolution. During what Daniel terms a phase of 'political experimentation' (p. 89), the Jews of Edirne are portrayed as meandering between self-assertion, revolutionary spirit, Zionism, and Ottoman(ist) conceptions of communal identities. Moving on to the years 1913–1918, chapter 3 emphasizes the traditional perspectives inherent in the Jewish community's mental maps and self-identification. Arguing that 'the border meant one thing to the Jews and another to almost everyone else,' (p. 121), Daniels shows that the Jews of Edirne largely maintained their trans-regional (and thus trans-national) outlook and solidarity, while Christians and Muslims were much more directly affected by ethnic cleansing and thus connotated the border very differently. While shrinking in size due to economic migration as a result of disrupted trans-regional business ties, the remaining Jewish community kept its distinctively Ottoman identity and networks–a truly exceptional phenomenon in the region and part of what makes Daniels' choice of focus so intriguing. Chapter 4 covers the period of Greek occupation which again forced the local community to navigate the pitfalls of a region where power could change hands quickly. Manoeuvring between the Greek state's expectations, religion-based forms of antisemitism, and general instability, the community was torn on the question how to react to and survive this volatile situation. Once again foregrounding individual perspectives, Daniels gives vivid examples of Jewish (including female) agency while individuals engaged with Ottomanism, Zionism, and Hellenism to varying degrees–which underlines that state allegiance and communal nationalism could still co-exist in the eyes of the respective authorities (p. 148). Chapter 5 begins with the year 1923 and briefly revisits the many spatial and contextual changes marking the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, including an altered concept of allegiance to the nation state which now demanded 'that obedience to the nation should surpass all other attachments.'[1] With the pogrom of Thrace (1934) as its anchor point, this chapter sets out to contextualize this outburst of antisemitic violence, thereby discussing the role of Ottoman legacies, economic specificities of the region, and the ingrained suspicion against borderland minorities. What is most interesting about this chapter, however, is that it presents the pogrom both as

1 Malešević, Siniša. 2013. *Nation States and Nationalisms*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 112.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

a result of the Ottoman past and a blueprint for future anti-minority outlashes in Turkey. In view of what was to come, Daniels argues, the pogrom of Thrace was both 'a culmination of developments that had begun in the Ottoman era and a rehearsal for subsequent acts of displacement and dispossession' (pp. 175–76) of minorities.

Aiming to 'probe the many shades of Jewish experience' (p. 181) in the Edirne region, *The Jews of Edirne* constitutes a masterful account of the lives, activities, adaption and survival strategies of the local community/communities which leaves little room for criticism. Well-written, analytic, and based on a wonderfully diverse source corpus, this book offers fascinating insights into an understudied topic whose marginality in academic discourse used to mirror the spatial frame of the equally marginalized borderland it is set in. By shining a light on this region and its people, Daniels has succeeded in expanding the limits of academic research, and contributed to the fruitful discussion evolving around borderlands, mobility, and identity which has powerfully emerged in the last decade especially.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Czygan, Christine and Aynur, Hatice (eds.). 2025. *Challenging Conventions: Love, Lovers, and Beloveds in Early Modern Ottoman Poetry*. Berlin: De Gruyter. 205 pages. ISBN 978-3-11-134154-5.

Reviewed by **Nilab Saeedi**[1]
Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria
Nilab.saeedi@oeaw.ac.at

The study of Ottoman *divān* poetry has long balanced its aesthetic complexity with its social and historical significance. *Challenging Conventions: Love, Lovers, and Beloveds in Early Modern Ottoman Poetry*, edited by Christiane Czygan and Hatice Aynur, emphasizes the latter, highlighting the genre's dynamism, subversive potential, and deep engagement with sociopolitical and spiritual currents. Stemming from a 2022 workshop, the volume brings together established and emerging scholars to explore the multifaceted concept of *ʿışḳ* across poets, genres, and contexts from the 15th to 18th centuries. 'If Islamic spirituality could be distilled into a single word, that word would undoubtedly be love.' This edited volume takes that insight as its point of departure. Its central goal is to examine the many layers of love *ʿışḳ* in early modern Ottoman poetry–not as a fixed trope, but as a vibrant and evolving force that engages with, mirrors, and at times challenges the sociopolitical, spiritual, and ontological structures of its era. The volume directly addresses a gap in the field: although *ʿışḳ* is a pervasive theme, it has received comparatively little attention in international scholarship, with foundational works such as Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı's *The Age of Beloveds* being rare exceptions. By bringing together both established and emerging scholars, the editors assemble a cohesive collection that truly 'challenges conventions' in its subject matter as well as in its methodological outlook.

The book is organized thematically into five sections–*Social Configurations, Ontological Configurations, Spiritual Configurations, Beyond Lyrical Conventions,* and *New Sources*–a structure that effectively leads the reader through the intricate layers of meaning woven into the poetic representations of love. To provide a comprehensive review, I will first summarize each chapter's focus and contribution before turning to an assessment of the volume's strengths and shortcomings.

Social Configurations

In their foundational chapter, 'Love, Gender, and Self-Presentation in the World of Early Modern Ottoman Court Poetry,' Mehmet Kalpaklı and Walter G. Andrews explore how gender and audience shape selfhood in Ottoman court poetry. Through comparative close readings of *ġazels* by Necātī (d. 1509) and Miḥrī Ḫātūn (d. after 1512)–especially poems with parallel refrains such as *bu gice* ('tonight') and *geçen gice* ('last night')–they show how similar poetic conventions produce markedly different effects. Necātī's ostensibly

1 Research Associate, Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies (IHB), Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), Austria, Nilab.saeedi@oeaw.ac.at; ORCID: 0000-0001-7729-9563.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

occasional poems ultimately aim for universality, crafted for public, male-centered literary spaces and aligned with aspirations for lasting fame and patronage. Miḥrī's poems, by contrast, are more direct, narrative, and tied to specific private moments, often responding to or subtly subverting male poetic models. The chapter's key contribution is its clear demonstration of a distinct 'woman's voice' and 'harem court' aesthetic, challenging the long-standing view that female poets merely imitated men.

Christiane Czygan's chapter 'The Dual Impact of Madness in Sultan Süleyman's Third Divān (1554)' examines the paradox of Sultan Süleymān (d.1566)–writing as Muḥibbī–adopting the poetic persona of the love-maddened *mecnūn*, despite the political necessity of projecting mental stability. Combining historical analysis of Ottoman ideas about insanity with close readings from Muḥibbī's *Third Divān*, and situating the *mecnūn* motif within medical and mystical discourses, she uncovers a sharp divide between the sultan's political and poetic selves. In poetry, Muḥibbī could safely embrace 'madness' to fashion himself as the ideal lover, a move that ultimately reinforced his mystical image as the *insān-ı kāmil* (Perfect Man). Czygan thus demonstrates how poetry offered even the empire's ruler a protected space for controlled, transgressive self-expression.

Ontological Configurations

Victoria Rowe Holbrook's wide-ranging chapter 'The Separation of Goodness and Beauty: Plato, Galip, Lacan' traces the philosophical genealogy of beauty, arguing that a decisive split occurred when Plato's *kalon*–the unity of beauty and goodness–was translated into Latin and divided into separate concepts. She contends that Arabic, Persian, and Turkish intellectual traditions preserved the original Platonic unity. Through a conceptual history that moves from Plato's *Symposium* to the Quran and hadith, and finally to Şeyẖ Ġālib's (d. 1799) *Ḥüsn ü ʿAşḳ*, she concludes with a critique of Jacques Lacan, whose redefinition of love she sees as a product of this historical rupture. Holbrook ultimately shows that Ġālib's work embodies an unbroken Islamic Platonic tradition in which beauty, love, and goodness remain inseparable, guiding the soul toward divine truth.

Fatih Altuğ's chapter 'Narratives of Devotion and Transformation: Procedural Dynamics of Love, Truth, and Subjectivity in Nergisī's Meşāḳḳ ul-ʿUşşāḳ and Nihālistān' redirects attention from poetry to prose by examining two story collections of the 17th-century writer Nergisī (d. 1635) to show how love functions as a transformative event that produces a new subjectivity. Drawing on Alain Badiou's concepts of the 'event,' 'fidelity,' and 'truth procedures,' Altuğ argues that love in Nergisī's narratives is not simply an emotion but a disruptive force that breaks apart the lover's former identity. The protagonist's steadfast fidelity to this event–despite social rejection and personal suffering–becomes the very process through which an 'amorous subject' is formed. The chapter stands out for its deft use of modern continental philosophy to reinterpret early modern Ottoman prose, reframing literary love as a disciplined, truth-generating practice.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

Spiritual Configurations

Sadık Yazar's chapter 'On the Tidal State of Love: The Representation of Telvîn in Turkish Sufi Poetry' examines the Sufi concept of *telvīn*–the state of spiritual fluctuation that precedes the steadiness of *temkīn*–and its subtle expression in the poetry of Yūnus Emre (d. 1320?) and Eşrefoğlu Rūmī (d. 1469–1470?). Combining theoretical discussions of *telvīn* from classical Sufi manuals with close readings of selected poems, Yazar identifies the linguistic and thematic signals of this unstable spiritual condition. He shows that poets like Yūnus Emre evoke *telvīn* through oppositional phrases ('at one moment… at another') and recurring motifs of lost reason and waning patience, effectively dramatizing this unstable spiritual state.

Betül Sinan Nizam's chapter 'Displaying Competence through Love: A Typology of Lovers in Ḳaṣīdes with the Redif *ʿışḳ*' examines the often-overlooked presence of *ʿışḳ* in *ḳaṣīde*, a genre typically devoted to panegyric. She shows how mystic poets skillfully integrated themes of divine and passionate love into praise for patrons, creating a distinct typology of lovers within this formal structure. The chapter highlights the fluidity of Ottoman poetic genres and demonstrates how poets balanced worldly ambitions with spiritual ideals, revealing that *ʿışḳ* was pervasive enough to shape even the most public and politically oriented poetry.

Beyond Lyrical Conventions

Gülşah Taşkın's chapter 'Power is Speaking: What Does The Beloved Tell about Love?' challenges the conventional portrayal of the beloved as a silent, passive figure in Ottoman poetry. By analyzing poems where the beloved speaks directly, she examines the resulting changes in power dynamics and expressive possibilities. Taşkın shows that granting the beloved a voice not only disrupts a central *ġazel* convention but also allows the poetry to explore complex rulership dynamics, transgressive love, and more nuanced psychological depth.

Benedek Péri's chapter 'Love Poetry with or without Love? Classical Ottoman Amorous Gazels in the Early 16th Century' challenges the modern view that Ottoman poetry was primarily driven by emotional resonance, arguing instead that intellectual and rhetorical mastery were central. Drawing on historical biographical dictionaries and contemporary literary critiques, he shows how the interplay of Turkic and Persian influences highlights that poets were chiefly valued for their technical skill and erudition. Péri's findings recalibrate the field, emphasizing the early modern 'horizon of expectations,' where poetic excellence was judged not by emotion but by mastery of convention, intertextual skill, and linguistic virtuosity.

New Sources

Hatice Aynur's chapter 'In the Quest for a Lyrical Persona: Love in Ṭaṭavlalı Maḥremī's 'Ġazels' presents a newly discovered copy of the *divān* of Ṭaṭavlalı Maḥremī (d.1535), a

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

16th-century poet, introducing a previously overlooked voice to scholarship. Through careful textual analysis, she explores Maḥremī's treatment of the distinction between earthly and divine love and his unique rhetorical strategies. The chapter both recovers an important source and deepens our understanding of Ottoman poetic conventions, expanding the known literary canon.

Edith Gülçin Ambros's chapter 'Ottoman Catechism ('İlm-i Ḥāl) Goes Popular: Love, the Girl, and the Jew' studies and translates the 14th-century folktale *Kız Destānı*, analyzing it as a didactic narrative that supported Islamization in Anatolia. Combining historical and literary analysis, she treats the tale as a reflection of socioreligious change in rural society. Ambros broadens the volume's scope beyond elite literature, showing how themes like love and conversion circulated through popular culture.

Evaluation of the Volume

Challenging Conventions: Love, Lovers, and Beloveds in Early Modern Ottoman Poetry, stemming from a 2022 workshop, opens with an introduction that masterfully frames the project. It traces the etymology and theological debates surrounding *ʿışk* and outlines the volume's three guiding assumptions: that poetry engages with sociopolitical norms, that *ʿışk* appears in unexpected forms, and that madness provides a critical lens for interpreting 16th-century poetry. This clear and sophisticated theoretical framing sets a high standard for the chapters that follow. The volume is not merely a collection of essays but a carefully curated, thematically structured dialogue. Its five sections–*Social, Ontological, Spiritual Configurations, Beyond Lyrical Conventions, and New Sources*–allow readers to trace how *ʿışḳ* operates across courtly, mystical, and literary realms. The volume succeeds in transforming Ottoman love poetry into a dynamic field of social, political, and spiritual contestation.

The volume's first half is especially strong, with chapters by Kalpaklı and Andrews, Czygan, Holbrook, and Altuğ offering original, compelling arguments likely to influence future scholarship. Kalpaklı and Andrews' opening chapter is a masterful reading of Ottoman poetry in its social and performative context. Czygan compellingly shows Sultan Süleymān using the *mecnūn* persona to craft the 'perfect lover' (*insān-ı kāmil*), with her analysis of the 'chain' trope particularly striking. Altuğ's application of Badiou's philosophy to Nergisī's prose offers a refreshing theoretical lens.

However, the volume has notable shortcomings. Despite its focus on love, lovers, and beloveds, it surprisingly lacks critical engagement with the pervasive homoeroticism central to the classical ġazel tradition. Apart from the Kalpaklı and Andrews chapter, which examines gendered voice, the beloved –typically portrayed as a young male–is largely treated as an unexamined, almost invisible convention. This omission represents a missed opportunity to 'challenge conventions,' as promised by the editors, since it avoids engaging with the substantial scholarly discourse on homoerotic dynamics, a fundamental and complex aspect of Ottoman poetry. A more thorough interrogation of these dynamics would have enriched the volume's analysis of lovers, beloveds, and the intricate power relations embedded in the literary culture.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - [cc] BY

The *Spiritual Configurations* section is notably weaker and less cohesive than preceding sections. Yazar's chapter on *telvīn* largely presents exposition of the Sufi concept rather than critical literary analysis. While it provides a competent survey of the theoretical background, it lacks the argument-driven, textually grounded approach that characterizes the strongest contributions in the volume, resulting in a dip in analytical rigor and disrupting the tone established in the Social and Ontological Configurations sections. Although the chapter offers valuable context for understanding mystical frameworks of love, it does not fully integrate this conceptual foundation into sustained literary or historical analysis. Similarly, the *New Sources* section only partially fulfills its promise. Aynur's study of the newly discovered *divān* of Ṭaṭavlalı Maḥremī is a strong piece of philological scholarship, clearly distinguishing between earthly and divine love and fitting seamlessly with the focus on high literary traditions. By contrast, Ambros's presentation of the folktale *Kız Destānı*, while offering useful insight into popular religious culture and Islamization in Anatolia, feels tangential to the volume's core focus on lyrical *ʿışḳ* in elite literature. Its inclusion seems appended rather than integral, undermining thematic cohesion and raising questions about the editorial rationale for what constitutes a relevant 'new source.' Taken together, these weaknesses–the uneven treatment of homoeroticism, the less critical and cohesive Spiritual Configurations section, and the partial fulfillment of the New Sources promise–highlight areas where the volume could have more fully realized its ambitious aims. While these issues do not negate the collection's substantial strengths, they underscore the limits of its analytical reach and the challenges of balancing thematic breadth with sustained critical depth. A minor limitation, acknowledged by the editors, is the volume's focus on Islamic traditions, leaving non-Islamic Ottoman literary interactions largely unexplored. Additionally, the sophisticated theoretical frameworks employed (e.g., Badiou, Lacan) may pose challenges for readers unfamiliar with contemporary critical theory.

Challenging Conventions: Love, Lovers, and Beloveds in Early Modern Ottoman Poetry is a significant, interdisciplinary contribution to Ottoman literary studies. Far from a collection of discrete essays, it forms a cohesive argument demonstrating that *ʿışḳ* was a central, dynamic, and versatile force in early modern Ottoman culture–socially, spiritually, and intellectually. Standout chapters by Kalpaklı and Andrews, Czygan, and Altuğ reveal love as a medium for gendered self-fashioning, political transgression, ontological exploration, and the forging of new subjectivities, while Nizam highlights its rhetorical sophistication. The volume's interdisciplinary synthesis, building on foundational works like *The Age of Beloveds*, shifts focus from the social history of literature to the intellectual and aesthetic history embedded within it. While chapters employing Badiou and Lacan may challenge readers unfamiliar with contemporary theory, and the focus on Islamic traditions leaves non-Islamic literary interactions underexplored, these reflect its defined scope rather than flaws. Ultimately, the book reinterprets Ottoman poetry, challenges conventions, and opens exciting new avenues for research, making it essential reading for scholars of literature, history, and mysticism.

https://doi.org/10.5771/2625-9842-2026-1 https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access - CC BY