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## Two-Faced: Translations of a Portrait of Abdülhamid II

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**Abstract** In 1869, the Abdullah Frères studio in Istanbul made a portrait of the Ottoman Prince Abdülhamid Effendi. When Abdülhamid II ascended the throne in 1876, this photograph was copied, appropriated, and disseminated in various formats. One such carte-de-visite depicts the sultan with a full beard when he sports only a mustache in the original image. The manipulation of this image provides a lens for understanding portraiture as a medium that embodies multiple and subjective identities (even of the same person) that also move across material platforms and cultural borders. By tracing the translation and cross-cultural circulation of the Abdullah Frères image, this chapter reveals networks of exchange as formative to the imperial portrait photograph.

**Keywords** Portrait, Photograph, Translation, Cross-cultural, Imperial

In 1869, the Abdullah Frères studio in Istanbul made a photographic portrait of the Ottoman Prince Abdülhamid Effendi. This image shows him wearing a frockcoat and fez. His hand rests on a marble table and a gold pocket watch laces through his vest. When Abdülhamid II ascended the throne in 1876, this photograph was copied, appropriated, and disseminated in various formats. One cropped *carte-de-visite* version depicts the thirty-fourth Ottoman sultan with a full beard, when he sports only a mustache in the original photograph. Like a studio prop or theatrical costume, this additional facial hair reshapes Abdülhamid II's likeness, anointing his role as a sage and pious leader. The 1869 photograph presents Abdülhamid as an Ottoman prince, but the manipulation and publication of this same image seven years later transforms his presentation into that of a sultan. The reuse of the Abdullah Frères photograph thus activates an idealized and abstract notion of a modern dynastic identity. Abdülhamid II emerges from this material adaptation not as an individual transformed by his position, but as an immortal icon. Because portraiture is governed by referential norms, this photograph functions as an index not only for Abdülhamid II, but also for an Ottoman imperial heritage. It therefore provides an important lens for understanding portraiture as a medium capable of embodying multiple and subjective identities (even of the same person) (► **Hybridity**) when translated across material platforms and cultural borders (► **Circulation**). By tracing the translation (► **Translation**) and cross-cultural circulation of the Abdullah Frères image, this essay reveals networks of exchange as formative to imperial portrait photography.

As a ruler, Abdülhamid II was passionate about photography, applying it to nearly all manner of courtly affairs. He relied equally on the medium's documentary and reproductive faculties. The sheer number of photographs collected during his reign (36,535) testifies to the Hamidian court's fervent interest in photographic image making. The unique and highly crafted albums sent to the United States and Britain in the wake of the 1893 Chicago World's Columbia Exposition further demonstrate this fascination. Ali Rıza Bey, a military photographer who authored sections of these volumes, was hired to run a studio and laboratory installed at Yıldız Palace in 1894. Photographs thus became both indispensable and ubiquitous tools in a constellation of devices through which Abdülhamid II managed the empire.

While the Hamidian court invested so purposefully in photography, the sultan averted his own face from the camera's lens.<sup>1</sup> Only three photographic portraits of Abdülhamid are known—all made before his coronation in 1876.<sup>2</sup> These include the aforementioned 1869 Abdullah Frères

1 Few painted portraits of Abdülhamid II were made during his lifetime. The two to which I refer are oil paintings in the Topkapı Palace Museum Collection 17/126 and 17397. Renda 2000, 530–531.

2 As far as I am aware, no official photographic portraits were made during his reign. Bahattin Öztuncay suggests that a "glass dispositive" of Abdülhamid II

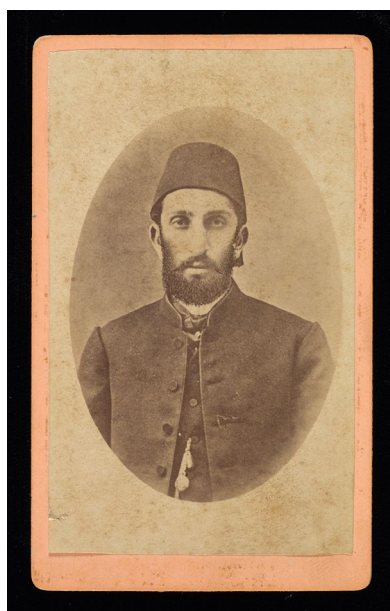


Figure 1 (left): *Modified carte-de-visite of Abdülhamid II*, original photograph by Abdullah Frères, 1869.

Figure 2 (right): Sultan Abdülhamid II, photographer(s) unknown, 1876.

image as well as two earlier portraits made in Buckingham Palace by the British firm W. & D. Downey while Abdülhamid was touring Europe with his uncle, Sultan Abdülaziz, in 1867 (Davison 1963; Şehsuvaroğlu 1949). Nonetheless, this small corpus of photographs participated in professional networks that engaged with an international language of portraiture, photography, and imperial power (Micklewright 2013, 7). This contradiction—a leader obsessed by photography who refused to have his photograph taken—complicates the many forms, iterations, and translations of Abdülhamid's portraits.

All three of these portraits were circulated as *carte-de-visites*. Invented in 1854 by the French photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, mass-produced *carte* photographs came from a camera with multiple lenses, which facilitated the making of several portraits in one sitting. Inexpensive commodities, *carte-de-visites* were wildly popular and required a short production time (McCauley 1985; Darrah 1981, 24; *The Year-book of Photography and Photographic News Almanac*, 1864). They overwhelmed the nineteenth-century visual economy, penetrating the private lives of Europeans and Ottomans alike. As modern 'calling cards,' these commercially produced photographs migrated between cosmopolitan centers, initiating a phenomenon known as 'cartomania.'

While they are often dismissed as formulaic, the *carte's* prescribed composition and repetitive ordinariness systematized a global network of portraiture. Their standardized format allowed for readability in diverse contexts. The normalization of poses and studio props afforded the sitter agency through their own self-presentation, and in turn, the viewing audience familiarity with such forms of presentation. The use and reuse of Abdülhamid II's 1869 portrait exemplifies these visual patterns that are integral to photographic portraits, especially to *carte-de-visites*. Few as they may be, his portraits demonstrate the particular flexibility of Ottoman identity in the late nineteenth century. Even when portraying the same print or person, these different images register multiple levels of meaning by containing "the Self of repetition, the singularity within that which repeats" (Deleuze 1994, 23). In other words, the photographs of Abdülhamid II were imprints of personal likeness, presenting a culturally and temporally specific yet universally legible tradition of photographic portraiture.

The repetition and reproduction of the sultan's portrait exploits the rareness of his photographic image. Like the 'bearded' *carte*, these interpretations and their process of translation reveal the portrait's use value and capacity to formulate knowledge. This is especially true when photographs of Abdülhamid II were inaccurately labeled. A color chromolithograph from ca. 1876 portrays Murad V, Abdülhamid II's brother, but is erroneously titled "Abdu-l-hamid, II. Sultan of Turkey." This engraved

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exists and is based on a photograph by Abdullah Frères in 1875–1876. See Öztuncay 2011, 59.

portrait by the British G.J. Stodart is based on an 1869 photograph by Abdullah Frères where Murad dons a plain uniform adorned with one medallion.<sup>3</sup> This example of mistaken identity reveals the extent to which Ottoman selfhood was derived from the costume and not the face. Here Murad's fez, frockcoat, and medal mirror the ensemble worn by AbdŪlhamid in his own 1869 Abdullah Frères portrait. Unlike in Japan where imperial portraits were believed to *be* the emperor, Ottoman examples emerge as "relational object(s)" intimately tied to their performative qualities (Edwards 2010).

AbdŪlhamid II took the notion of relational photography quite literally. He used portraits of his children—who were photographed numerous times throughout his reign—as surrogates for himself. On September 13, 1878, he sent an album of royal family portraits to Queen Victoria that included several photographs of his own children.<sup>4</sup> With the album he included a letter, stating: "This intimate souvenir of my family is intended to remind you of the fidelity and profound attachment that I have to the grand and glorious British Empire"<sup>5</sup> (AbdŪlhamid II n.d.). Like the student portraits in the albums that he gifted to Britain seven years later, AbdŪlhamid II's own children perform as proxy for him. However, the reflection of the sultan's own facial features and familial resemblance seen in images of his offspring complicate this form of photographic surrogacy.

Celebrity albums filled with card-mounted portraits were wildly popular with royal families (and equally fashionable with the general public). Photographs of AbdŪlhamid II would have been collected by both European and Ottoman audiences and added to portfolios like the *Album Contemporaine Européen*. A copy from 1865 by Justin Lallier reveals the collection process: Pages reserved for sovereigns have four ovals printed with country names and royal crests, indicating where to glue a portrait of a Turkish ruler, for example. The last pages are dedicated to noblemen and administrators. These contain ten empty rectangles, each stamped with a corresponding number, arranged to simulate a wall of portraits hung salon-style, one on top of the other. AbdŪlhamid II's personal collection contains similar albums, including one with portraits of celebrated foreigners such as President Lincoln, Nasir al-Din Shah, Queen Victoria, Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the Guangxu Emperor of China (İÜK, Album 90899). This and other volumes like the *Album Contemporaine Européen* codified diplomatic networks, operating as nineteenth-century "face books." They reflected the capacity of the photographic album to manufacture social connections and forge relationships across geographic, political, and spatial borders (Bann 2011,

3 The text around the portrait reads: "Engraved by G.J. Stodart from a Photograph, William Mackenzie, London, Edinburgh & Glasgow." NPG, D47408.

4 Similar albums exist in the İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi: 90894, 90898, 90902.

5 RA VIC/MAIN/H/47. The exact date of this letter is uncertain. It is hand-written in French on stationary with the sultan's initials "AH."

7–29).<sup>6</sup> Thus, we see imperial portrait circulation as a shared and global activity (► **Cultural Mobility**).

Heightened by the unbridled circulation of these photographs, the flexibility of image production and reproduction dissolved pre-existing technical boundaries, blending the visual practices of drawing, wood engraving, and photography (Beegan 2008, 8). On Abdülhamid II's 1869 Abdullah Frères portrait, the in-painting of his beard and subsequent re-photographing of the original print shifts the authoritarian gaze away from the artist/subject relationship toward the communal performance of making, taking, and disseminating photographs. It is this shift that implicates the multiple hands involved in shaping the sultan's likeness, including the hand that drew the beard or clicked the shutter whose names and studios we do not know. Nonetheless, the photographic portrait is subject to multiple chains of translation from the creation of the first print to its last reproduction (Belknap 2016, 9). It is precisely through these translations that Abdülhamid II's photographic likeness develops a haptic dimension. With touch, these cartes traversed technological, geographic, and cultural boundaries. They were not made only to be seen, but also to be held, painted, pocketed, smelled and sung to. The migration of Abdülhamid II's portrait—from one hand to another, from the studio to the parlor, from the counter to the album page—reveals the power of photography to shape not only an emperor's likeness, but also the social and historical imaginary.

## Figures

Fig. 1–2: © Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (96.R.14).

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6 They mimic the early modern practice of portrait prints portraying great men, such as popes, sultans, and emperors. The Mughal Akbar (r. 1556–1605) commissioned portraits of his courtiers, for example, who were multicultural in makeup, including Persians, Uzbeks, Afghans, Rajputs, Jesuits who belonged to Shia, Sunni, Hindu, and Christian faiths. See Beach 2012; Brand and Lowry 1985; Roy and Losty 2013.

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