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## OTTOMAN IMPERIAL PORTRAITURE AND TRANSCULTURAL AESTHETICS

In his book *Other Colors*, Orhan Pamuk invokes the early twentieth-century Turkish poet Yahya Kemal's response to Gentile Bellini's 1480 portrait, *Sultan Mehmed II* (fig. 4). It is a painting, Pamuk notes, that has achieved iconic status as a symbol of the Ottoman sultanate in modern Turkish culture. Pamuk writes, "what troubled him was that the hand that drew the portrait lacked a nationalist motive."<sup>1</sup> In Kemal's work, Pamuk finds an approach to the Ottoman past that is riven with the doubts of a Turkish writer struggling to position that history as part of a national cultural identity in the early years of the Turkish Republic. Not least among the challenges for both authors grappling with the connection between Ottoman portraiture and contemporary cultural identity is the fact that the past, like the present, was ineluctably forged through an engagement with European aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Yet what also emerges from Pamuk's short response to this painting, and the constellation of other portraits by Ottoman and Persian artists that were inspired by it, is the prospect of an alternative, more enabling engagement with this history of transculturation. The uncertain authorship of some of these paintings and the alternative readings they provoke for Pamuk as he entertains their attribution on each side of the East-West divide, for example, function for him as a reminder that "cultural influences work in both directions with complexities difficult to fathom."<sup>3</sup>

Pamuk's eloquent, ambivalent response to the legacy of the Ottoman engagement with Venetian Renaissance art is a provocation to my own study of British artists' portraits of the Ottoman sultans in the nineteenth century. Pamuk's evocation of Yahya Kemal's profound misgivings encapsulates the risks associated with cross-cultural



FIGURE 4.  
Gentile Bellini, *Sultan Mehmed II*,  
1480. Oil on canvas, 69.9 × 52.1 cm.  
© The National Gallery, London.

patronal transactions. The confluence of differing investments in the portrait process by patron and artist and the complex history of the painting's later reception encapsulate the ways in which the work of art is potentially vulnerable to contrary purposes. One of the challenges that this chapter engages is how to theorize the shifting spatial and temporal articulations of such discrepant iterations.

Among many portraits of the Ottoman sultans commissioned from foreign artists throughout the nineteenth century, one of the most influential was the folio that incorporated portraits of the sultans from the founding of the dynasty to the reign of Mahmud II, published in 1815 and known as the *Young Album*.<sup>4</sup> It is a particularly provocative case study of transculturation because of its intriguing, contested history. Both the circumstances of this album's initial commission and its subsequent and repeated repurposings as it shuttled back and forth between Istanbul and London throughout the nineteenth century make it a compelling example of the contrary purposes to which the

sultans' portraits were deployed. It is precisely because of the mobility and interpretive mutability of this album that this case study provides a productive site from which to engage broader issues about how to theorize the artwork produced as a result of cross-cultural contact and how to assess what happens to cultural boundaries through such mobility. The *Young Album* did not simply reflect the imperial interests of the commissioning sultan nor of the British printmaker; instead it represented a range of interests and addressed different audiences as it shifted across time and space. The challenge is how to account for the historical mutability of boundary formation as this artwork gathered different audiences at different historical moments. How are the various cultural allegiances of both artist and patron inscribed within a portrait study of a foreign ruler? How are cultural boundaries articulated within such images whose formation is transacted across cultures? And what theoretical models of boundary formation are applicable here?

Anthropologist Nancy Munn's phenomenological approach to border theorization has been particularly resonant for me in conceptualizing these processes. Although her approach was developed in the very different domain of contemporary Australian Aboriginal Warlpiri culture, Munn's emphasis on the mutability of space and time in the processes of boundary formation offers a model that has explanatory resonance with the *Young Album*. Munn analyzes the processes of boundary formation in Warlpiri culture where ancestral law imposes spatial limitations on designated individuals. Her phenomenological interpretation of the Warlpiri "Law truck" is a particularly compelling example of the spatio-temporal complexities of this mobile boundary formation. In Warlpiri society, the "Law truck" is the vehicle designated to carry key people in a ritual performance. During the time this truck is on the road, it is a mobile center of power, defining, as Munn characterizes it, "different excluded regions in its immediate vicinity at any given moment."<sup>5</sup> This power extends beyond the "immediate moving field" of the vehicle, affecting the whole route, thereby "carrying the power of boundary making with it" and projecting "temporary mobile signifiers of its delimiting powers onto the spatio-temporal fields of others."<sup>6</sup> During these journeys the Law truck both establishes boundaries through zones of exclusion for those community members who are not within the vehicle and simultaneously brings all the people in the "affected regions" into a temporarily "imagined community" of "common, excluded travel space, a unitary spacetime."<sup>7</sup>

Nancy Munn's model of the "Law truck" underscores spatially and temporally provisional processes of boundary formation organized around a mobile, temporary center of power, whereby boundaries are renegotiated through the processes that both separate and connect individuals involved in this cultural ritual. An engagement with this model enables a theorization of the implications of the mobility of Ottoman royal portraits in the nineteenth century. To date, analyses of Ottoman royal portraiture have charted the iconographic innovations that unfolded across time within this long-standing tradition. So, too, scholars have investigated the differing audiences for these works, in particular

registering a major shift toward the use of the sultans' portraits as gifts to European rulers in the context of the Ottoman Empire's new policy of participation within the European diplomatic arena in the late eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> An engagement with Munn's model can augment such analyses by enabling us to attend to ways in which distinctive interpretations of the artwork are hinged to its physical mobility, its affective power to gather its audience, and how the contingencies of boundary-marking processes that operate within and between artwork and audience differentially constitute and position that audience.

Yet this model resists direct transposition because of the differences between contexts. Munn's interpretation is derived from a relatively stable system that operates effectively because of a shared understanding of ritual meanings within the culture she is addressing. The *Young Album* presents a much more fractured history where the object itself is profoundly reconfigured across cultures over time; consequently boundaries are renegotiated between divided centers of power in Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Notwithstanding these significant differences in context, this model can be usefully adapted to interpret the complex intrication of diverse motivations and allegiances and the spatio-temporal complexities of cross-cultural boundary formation in the protracted production and reception of the *Young Album*.

#### BETWEEN ISTANBUL AND LONDON

In 1806 the British printmaker John Young was approached by Mr. Green from the Levant Company to undertake a most unusual commission—a series of twenty-eight mezzotint prints, portraits of the Ottoman sultans from the founding of the empire up to the present day. His client was the reigning Ottoman ruler, Sultan Selim III, and although he did not deal directly with the Ottoman leader, it was clear that the sultan was the project's guiding force. Young received instructions that a limited number of prints were to be taken from his plates and “every possible secrecy was to be observed during the progress of the work.” None of the final prints were to be kept by Young and “the pictures were, on no account, to be exhibited publicly or privately.” In order to ensure this, “the plates, when finished and printed, were to be given up to the [sultan's] agent.”<sup>9</sup> These interdictions temporarily established the album's production as a process issuing from the delimiting power of the Ottoman sultan, incorporating the work of the British printmaker within the boundaries of Ottoman culture.

In accepting this commission Young worked from the gouache portraits by an Ottoman-Greek, Kostantin Kapıdağlı, that were supplied to him by the Ottoman palace, and he was instructed to submit a sample of his work for the sultan's approval before beginning the larger project. As the appointed mezzotint engraver to the Prince of Wales, Young was no doubt used to powerful clients with exacting demands, but this was a particularly exotic commission coming from inside the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul and circumscribed by such conditions of secrecy. Young duly submitted the print and



FIGURE 5.  
 John Young, *Sultan Othman Khan I: Head of the Ottoman Imperial House (Sultan Othman—Khan Ier. Chef de la Maison Imp. Othomane)*. Plate 1 from *A Series of Portraits of the Emperors of Turkey . . . With a Biographical Account of Each of the Emperors* (London: W. Bulmer, 1815). Hand-colored mezzotint, 38 × 26 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (Folio B N 12).

engraved plate of the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, Osman I. Both plate and print remain in the Topkapı Palace collection (fig. 5). Once they were received, the approval of the sultan was granted, and Young proceeded to make the other plates.

For Sultan Selim III this project was part of a new initiative. Although by no means the first Ottoman sultan to present his portrait to a European ruler, he was the first to integrate the European convention of the diplomatic exchange of portraits with an extensive program of reform and a new foreign policy of sustained engagement with the major European powers. The *Young Album* was the second such project in which Selim III utilized print technology to disseminate his representation abroad.<sup>10</sup> The first was a single portrait of the sultan also painted by Kostantin Kapıdağlı and engraved in London by Luigi Schiavonetti in 1793 (fig. 6). Within the vignette beneath the sultan's portrait is



FIGURE 6.  
Luigi Schiavonetti (after Konstantin Kapıdağlı), *Sultan Selim III*, c. 1793. Stipple engraving printed in black, brown, red, and blue, 40.6 × 25.8 cm. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

a view of the Tophane Barracks that symbolizes his military reforms of 1791–92. This format was intended to be presented to Ottoman statesmen as well as European ambassadors and monarchs.<sup>11</sup> The version of this print presented by the painter, Kapıdağlı, to the sultan himself and now held in the Topkapı Palace archives is encased in a binding decorated with the empire's holy cities, Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, and its former and present capitals, Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul. Thus the sultan's agenda of military reform, designed to ensure the maintenance of the empire's territorial integrity, is framed and authorized by geographic signifiers of his dual political and religious roles as sultan and caliph.

This solo portrait and the *Young Album* were part of Selim III's broader initiatives to open up channels of communication with Europe and to end the long-standing policy

of isolationism that until the late eighteenth century had characterized the Ottoman approach to foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> A key step was establishing permanent Ottoman embassies in Europe, with the first opened in London in 1793.<sup>13</sup> Selim III was a reformer who relied on traditional solutions to strengthen the central power of the Ottoman state; in this regard his approach was characteristic of the reform agendas of various sultans since the mid-seventeenth century. And yet he was also a transitional figure, a precursor to the nineteenth-century Tanzimat reform process because of his willingness to engage with European practices and to consult with European advisers about these reforms.<sup>14</sup>

His portrait album project is itself a transitional form. This project celebrating the dynasty with representations of its successive rulers is situated within a centuries-old tradition of Ottoman imperial portrait albums.<sup>15</sup> Court historian Lokman's *Kıyâfetü'l-insaniye fi Şemâ'il'ül-Osmaniye* (Human Physiognomy Concerning the Personal Dispositions of the Ottomans, 1579), the best known of these early portrait albums, contained twelve dynastic portraits by Üstad Osman and Nakkaş Ali. It was created in a particularly energetic period of production of illustrated Ottoman histories. Scholars of early modern Ottoman art have demonstrated the complex visual sources for these albums. They assimilated and translated Persian, European, and earlier Ottoman precedents to consolidate an image of the sultanate that exerted a strong influence over subsequent Ottoman dynastic imagery.<sup>16</sup> Kostantin Kapıdağlı's portraits, on which Young's engravings are based, are situated within this long-standing court tradition; its portrait iconography draws on earlier Ottoman precedents. For instance, the physiognomy and clothing particularly of the earlier sultans relies on eighteenth-century miniature precedents, in particular Levni's *Kebir Musavver Silsilenâme*, 1703–30.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as Günsel Renda demonstrates, Kapıdağlı introduces European portrait conventions in features such as the standing, rather than traditional seated, enthroned pose. He also introduces the vignettes beneath each portrait, which signal the prestige of the respective sultans through symbolic reference to their achievements, either great military victories or contributions to public life. This was a diplomatic gift with a message; a historiographic narrative of the Ottoman Empire is presented through these vignettes. The first group of portraits represent the consolidation of the dynasty through military triumphs in the empire's expansionary stage. The major territorial gains are represented in the vignettes of their respective sultans.

The last three of Kapıdağlı's portraits shift away from this emphasis on territorial conquest, presenting instead the military reform agendas of Mustafa III (r.1757–74), Abdülhamid I (r.1774–89), and Selim III (r.1789–1807) through symbols of worldly knowledge and scientific inquiry, edifices of naval pedagogical innovation, and military dress reform in their respective vignettes. In the vignette that accompanies the portrait of Mustafa III (fig. 7), the telescope, globe, and books (in all likelihood a reference to the school of Naval Engineering that Mustafa III established in the naval arsenal in 1773)<sup>18</sup> sit on and protrude beyond the boundaries of the vignette's border, casting their shadows on this platform and creating a *trompe l'oeil* effect that demonstrates a sophisticated



FIGURE 7.  
 John Young, *Sultan Mustapha Khan III: Twenty-sixth Ottoman Emperor (Sultan Mustapha Khan III)me. Vingt Sixième Empereur Othoman*. Plate 27 from *A Series of Portraits of the Emperors of Turkey . . . With a Biographical Account of Each of the Emperors* (London: W. Bulmer, 1815). Hand-colored mezzotint, 38 × 26 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (Folio B N 12).

grasp of Western perspectival conventions in a particularly bold statement of military, aesthetic, and iconographic innovation. Similarly the Laleli Mosque depicted inside this vignette is an early example of Ottoman baroque architecture, a fusion of traditional Islamic forms and Western architectural motifs. In the portrait of his successor, Abdülhamid I (fig. 8), the orderly façade of the *Mühendishâne-i Bahr-i Hümayun* (Imperial Naval Engineering School) fronted by the strict geometry of its parterre garden finds its visual parallel in the windowed façade of the mosque to the left. The architectural harmony of military and religious establishments is reiterated by the solitary cypress paralleling the mosque’s solo minaret. The reference to military reform is reiterated in the foreground of Selim III’s vignette (fig. 9), where an orderly row of the sultan’s New Order troops, the linchpin of his controversial military reform strategy, are immediately



FIGURE 8.  
 John Young, *Sultan Abdul Hamid Khan: Twenty-seventh Ottoman Emperor (Sultan Abdul Hamid Khan. Vingt Septième Empereur Othoman)*. Plate 28 from *A Series of Portraits of the Emperors of Turkey . . . With a Biographical Account of Each of the Emperors* (London: W. Bulmer, 1815). Hand-colored mezzotint, 38 × 26 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (Folio B N 12).



distinguishable by their new European-style uniforms. A parallel row of docked naval vessels are depicted on the other side of the Golden Horn near the recently renovated naval arsenal. These three portraits assembled in chronological succession in the album signify a sustained period of reform and register the most recent sultans' responsiveness to the challenges facing the Ottoman Empire in this later period. The portraits that precede them locate this challenge in relation to a glorious Ottoman past.<sup>19</sup>

Selim III's initiatives in the sphere of foreign relations set a pattern for the century ahead, one that can be characterized by intense processes of diplomatic maneuver and countermaneuver. As Şükrü Hanioglu has argued, in the face of declining Ottoman strength and recognition of the superior force of European powers, the art of diplomacy and shoring up strategic alliances became a crucial tool for securing the empire's



FIGURE 9.  
John Young, *Sultan Selim Khan III: Twenty-eighth Ottoman Emperor (Sultan Selim Khan III me. Vingt Huitième Empereur Othoman)*. Plate 29 from *A Series of Portraits of the Emperors of Turkey . . . With a Biographical Account of Each of the Emperors* (London: W. Bulmer, 1815). Hand-colored mezzotint, 38 × 26 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (Folio B N 12).

future. Bonaparte's attack on Egypt in 1798, for example, which destroyed Selim III's efforts to conclude a Franco-Ottoman alliance, instead necessitated temporary alliances with Russia and Great Britain. This event, as Hanioglu argues, underscored that "in order to survive [the Ottoman state] would have to harness European power and turn it against any potential attacker."<sup>20</sup>

I would argue that diplomacy, with its emphasis on negotiation, move, and counter-move, is also an important model for the role of Ottoman visual culture in this context. These images were tools in what Richard Sennett refers to as the "soft power" of international diplomacy.<sup>21</sup> This is particularly applicable to the sultans' portraits in a period when they were deployed by the Ottomans within this political sphere. For example, 1806 and 1807 were particularly dynamic years for such portrait exchanges between

the Ottoman Empire and France as the two countries reforged alliances.<sup>22</sup> Engagement in diplomatic alliances assumes some mutual ground that makes negotiation possible, a playing field on which those parties involved are seeking to gain strategic advantage, and /or a willingness to find mutually accepted solutions to a common challenge. In the case of the Ottomans throughout the nineteenth century, alliances, primarily with Britain and France, shifted dramatically as the balance of power was renegotiated. Such alliances were underpinned by a shared interest in maintaining the Ottoman Empire, albeit prompted by very different motivations for each of the parties. For the Ottomans such strategic alliances often came with conditions attached in the shape of “demand[s] for administrative reform, often with the aim of improving the status of the Empire’s Christian subjects.”<sup>23</sup>

The regular shuttling of portrait gifts between the Ottoman Empire and Europe in this era of diplomacy, I would argue, was part of this process of response and counterresponse, achievement and setback. The assumed mutual ground here was the language of honorific portraiture with its rhetorical aggrandizement of the respective rulers. The initial purpose of the *Young Album* lent an historical dimension to this aggrandizement, enshrining the legitimacy of the reigning sultan by asserting the longevity of this powerful dynasty. So, too, the reform agenda represented in the vignettes accompanying the portraits of the most recent Ottoman sultans, a clear statement of the state’s embrace of a modernizing imperative, directly asserts a common purpose with the European states. Thinking about these portraits in terms of the dynamics of diplomacy focuses attention not just on the individual gesture of a particular portrait’s iconography but emphasizes the ways in which meaning is generated and renegotiated through the life of these images, highlighting the ritual function of these portraits.

Given this, it is highly significant that despite the intention of its commissioner Selim III, the *Young Album* was never to fulfill its purpose as a gift to foreign powers. As a tool of diplomatic negotiation, the album was set aside, and due to internal political struggles it was not completed during Selim III’s lifetime. Yet this album is all the more intriguing for its history of thwarted purpose and redeployment. Selim III’s reforms of the Ottoman defense forces were met with staunch opposition from the conservative corps of Janissaries, whose rebellion against the sultan in 1807 was openly supported by the Ulema (religious scholars).<sup>24</sup> These powerful opponents of reform were ultimately responsible for the sultan’s deposition. The *Young Album* became caught up in these political events. John Young was still working on the prints in London when Sultan Selim III was deposed in 1807. These circumstances created a dilemma for the printmaker, who had already made a considerable investment of time and resources in this costly deluxe print folio.<sup>25</sup> It was not until 1815 that the project was completed with the imprimatur of “the agents of the Turkish government” in London.<sup>26</sup> By this time its purpose was reconfigured. In order for the printmaker to recoup his costs, the album was now to be released commercially within Britain.

The resulting albums reflect Young’s dual intentions in these new circumstances.

Multiple copies were delivered to Sultan Mahmud II and eighty of them remain in the Topkapı Palace archives in Istanbul.<sup>27</sup> In the version sold in Britain, the portraits were augmented with text. In a canny bit of marketing, Young realized that the vicissitudes of the commission itself would be of interest to his British audience and so he included them in his preface to the volume. Young's story of working for the sultan under these stringent conditions, the veils of secrecy, and the opaque network of access to his patron added to the album's appeal.

Through Young's inclusion of this frame story the balance of authorship and authority shifts and, to invoke Nancy Munn's term, its "center of power" is reconfigured. In the Topkapı versions as originally intended, the sultans alone are foregrounded. The portraits are not signed by either artist or printmaker. In the versions sold in London, through Young's insertion of himself as author and subject of the tale in his preface, the sultanate is no longer solely at the album's center. Previously Young's work on this project was positioned within the boundaries of Ottoman culture, as he temporarily and at a distance worked in the service of the sultanate, whereas in the later reconfigured project, through Young's preface, the authorship and authority of the printmaker is asserted, and he emerges as a parallel figure through the narrative of his adventure in bringing this project to fruition. Young even took the liberty of dedicating his work to a member of another royal household, his British patron, the Prince Regent.<sup>28</sup>

In an effort to bring the project up to date, Young included portraits of Selim III's two successors, Mustafa IV (r.1807–8) and Mahmud II (r.1808–39) (fig. 10). The visual continuity of the project is interrupted by these two images of the later sultans. It is unclear how Young obtained these portraits. Whatever the source, this visual discontinuity within the album speaks to the disrupted history of its production, a caesura in the coherence of the original commission.

Young also inserted an abbreviated history of the Ottoman Empire in his souvenir albums, adding short accounts of each sultan next to their portraits, an inclusion that rewrites the historiographic narrative of the original commission. The symbolism of the vignettes under each of the portraits that were created by Kapıdağlı and approved by Selim III construct a visual history through symbolism that is suited to the function of a diplomatic gift; celebratory in tone, they visually narrate each sultan's achievements. Young's short histories of the sultans by contrast present a very different narrative reflecting a contemporary British approach to the history of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup>

The individual histories of the last three sultans in particular are revealing in terms of a British historiography of the Ottoman Empire, confirming a trajectory of decline premised on inept, corrupt, or thwarted leadership. Compare, for instance, the portrait of Mustafa III with its visual symbols of erudition and the following excerpt from Young's appended text: "There is little to remark in the character of Mustapha. The misfortunes of the empire appear to have been accelerated, not more by the inefficiency of the government, than from the indolence and inability of the Sultan; who seems to have been totally destitute of political talents."<sup>30</sup> Although Young's former patron, Selim III,



FIGURE 10.

John Young, *Sultan Mahmoud Khan II: Thirtieth Ottoman Emperor (Sultan Mahmoud Khan IInd [sic]. Trentième Empereur Othoman)*. Plate 31 from *A Series of Portraits of the Emperors of Turkey . . . With a Biographical Account of Each of the Emperors* (London: W. Bulmer, 1815). Hand-colored mezzotint, 38 × 26 cm. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (Folio B N 12).

was judged more favorably in terms of his character attributes, according to Young he was “surrounded by weak or treacherous advisers” and ultimately fell victim to the Janisaries’ “appetite for vengeance.” Lamenting his original patron’s demise, the British author concludes this account with an affirmative but patronizing statement about the empire’s immanent cultural assimilation in the hands of the reigning Sultan Mahmud II. Young writes that “the munificence and taste of the present Emperor will, probably, render the period not far distant, in which Turkey will emulate the most enlightened states of Europe.”<sup>31</sup> It is clear from Young’s text that this hope for the arrest of the Ottoman Empire’s decline is premised on the assumption of its subsidiary relation (i.e., that

it no longer posed a military threat) and submission to the stronger European states, especially Britain.

In this version of the *Young Album* sold in London in 1815, the combination of Young's British history of the Ottoman sultanate, his frame story about the project's history, and the British royal dedication combined to ensure that the album was now organized around a different center of power. The British authorial subject emerges in tandem with a historiographic narrative that asserts a trajectory of the Ottoman Empire's benign assimilation to European culture and interests. In doing so the British author inscribes Ottoman history for his British audience, thereby bringing it within the realms of a different "imagined community."

This history of the physical and semantic mobility of this portrait series did not, however, end with its publication in London. Although there is no record of its distribution as a gift to foreign rulers, the versions sent to Istanbul did not simply languish in the sultans' storerooms. The Kapıdağlı portraits and textless versions of the *Young Album* currently in the Topkapı Palace archives became one of the most frequently referenced sources for later nineteenth-century portrait series. Just as Young had customized the original commission by adding portraits of the two successors to his original patron Selim III to the version he eventually published in 1815, so too one of the albums in the Ottoman palace collection continued to be customized. This time it was augmented and supplemented by the officially sanctioned photographic and print portraits of the subsequent sultans.

One of the most remarkable chapters in the album's later history was the reproduction of its portrait pages as cartes de visite (fig. 11) first produced by the Ottoman-Armenian photographers, the Abdullah Frères, in the early 1860s (most likely in 1862 when their availability for sale in the firm's Pera studio was announced in the local Ottoman newspaper *Tercüman-ı Ahval*).<sup>32</sup> In this context the *Young Album* entered yet another image economy when an alternative context for its reception emerged as a result of its reproduction in the cheaper carte de visite format. This brought it within the reach of wider local and foreign audiences in Istanbul. Their continuing interest for these audiences is suggested by the studio trademark on the back of a number of these cartes that indicates they continued to be released during the period when the photographic studio was appointed as the official photographers to the Ottoman palace.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not the sultan directly approved this production run is unknown; however, it is unlikely that the photographic studio would have proceeded without at least an understanding that this would have received the tacit support of the palace, considering that any offense in those quarters was a highly risky undertaking for their business interests in the Ottoman capital.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike the London version of the album, these cartes de visite are divested of their text. But they also differ from the albums held in the Topkapı Palace archives. Miniaturized and reproduced without the clarity of the large mezzotint format, the symbolism conveyed through the vignettes is barely legible in these cartes de visite. Given the



FIGURE 11.

Abdullah Frères, *Cartes-de-visite of the Young Album*, n.d. Each carte approx. 9.7 × 6.3 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (96.R.14).

affordability of these cartes, they were within the reach of a much wider audience than either the deluxe mezzotint albums that Young sold in Britain in 1815 or the versions secluded in the sultan's collection. Although the provenance of the *Young Album* cartes de visite in the Getty Research Institute's Gigord collection are unknown, the signs of handling, the wear and tear on their surfaces, the fading, black stain marks, and especially the pinholes are enigmatic indices of their history of display and robust use before they entered the archives. Untethered from the luxury book format, they invite a very different, informal physical engagement. For an Ottoman audience these portable,

scaled-down photographic images of the dynasty offered their owners a more intimate access to their heritage. The imprecision in our ability to account for the circulation of these cartes de visite prior to their entry into these collections is a testament to the openness and mutability of boundary-marking processes.

## BOUNDARY MARKING AND HISTORY MAKING

In this chapter I have focused on the *Young Album* as a case study of the intersecting histories of nineteenth-century British and Ottoman visual cultures. Competing historiographies of the Ottoman Empire were produced through the intertwined, transimperial production and reception of this portrait series. What is foregrounded here is not a peripheral zone of cultural contact that is remote from an imperial center, but instead an artwork moving back and forth between two imperial capitals, London and Istanbul, across the East-West divide. Analyzing the particular history of this work of art traversing these geographical vectors reconstitutes the “imaginative geography” of nineteenth-century imperial cultures as a transcultural field across which artworks are refigured, cultural boundaries redrawn, and audiences reconstituted.

In recent years, postcolonial cultural and visual theorists have developed a range of models and metaphors for thinking about processes of transculturation and cross-cultural contact.<sup>35</sup> In this chapter I have invoked anthropologist Nancy Munn’s phenomenological analysis of Australian Aboriginal Warlpiri cultural ritual and transposed it to an interpretation of Ottoman-British cross-cultural contact through the visual arts. Munn’s focus on culture as a field of action, in particular her interpretation of the Warlpiri Law truck as a mobile center of power, emphasizes the mutability of boundary formation across time and space. This is an effective way of thinking about how the processes of cultural contact between the Ottoman and British empires were enacted through the *Young Album*. Rather than imputing the work of art as having a single point of origin that correlates with a unitary and static concept of its audience (as is often assumed in the study of imperial cultures), adapting Munn’s approach enables us to conceptualize a constellation of forces that acted on the temporally and spatially mobile work of art and the different audiences that were marshaled by it as it moved between London and Istanbul. This approach highlights cross-cultural connections as forms of permeable and renegotiable boundary formation within and between artworks and audiences, enabling a focus on how the *processes* of connection operate through visual culture in the “connected world of empires.”<sup>36</sup>

This is not a utopian claim about mutable cultural boundaries, nor is it an argument about subaltern agency. My case study addresses the pragmatics of elite visual culture that is brought into the service of political negotiation. This study is embedded within the complex and shifting geopolitics of the noncolonized Ottoman state adapting inherited and imported aesthetic conventions of honorific portraiture within the era of global British and French imperial ascendancy. A model that emphasizes the negotiated poli-



tics of international diplomacy is particularly apt for conceptualizing the initial purpose of the *Young Album* and the role of Ottoman visual culture in this international arena.

My contention, however, is that the *Young Album* was a divided object. From the very beginning it was intended for a European audience, but through the historical circumstances of its production a significant difference emerges between its original purpose as a gift in the context of diplomatic exchange relations and the alternative purpose it acquired in 1815, as an independently marketed album of historical curiosity for a broader British audience. It was yet again reconfigured when reissued as cartes de visite by the Abdullah Frères photographic studio in Istanbul, offering both local and foreign audiences intimate access to Ottoman history. As part of this historical mobility there were multiple shifts in its image economy: from gift culture to consumer culture and from luxury album to intimate cartes de visite. In these different iterations the characters of the sultans were variously co-opted for Ottoman and British Orientalist versions of the empire's character and its history. These shifts occur through time and space, encompassing the celebration of different subjects and histories. Through processes of supplementation with additional text and images rupturing the aesthetic coherence of the original commission, the cultural boundaries of the work of art were redrawn, divergent centers of power were imputed, different forms of authorship were claimed, conflicting ways of authoring Ottoman history were inscribed, and alternate audiences were engaged. Through this durational case study, cultural encounter emerges as a procedure entailing multiple transformations and multiple local effects.

To return to the framing device for this chapter, Yahya Kemal's misgivings about the foreign artist whose hand "lacked a nationalist motive" is borne out in the vicissitudes of the *Young Album*. As it turned out, the British artist was by no means simply a hired hand for the articulation of the Ottoman sultans' identity and history. Distinctions between text and image enabled the later reappropriation of this volume for the self-aggrandizement of the British artist and his monarch. Yet the continuing legacy of the album within Ottoman culture ensured the various ways this album could be further redeployed for the purposes of celebrating Ottoman history through its venerable dynastic lineage, and thereby the album in its various reincarnations became a resource for imagining Ottoman futures.