

Was the Müteferrika Press a Turkish-Jewish Enterprise?

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The paper will deal with a fatwa issued by Yenişehirli Abdullah Efendi (d. 1743) before his dismissal from the post of Grand Mufti in 1730. The fatwa is obviously related to the issue of the partnership between the runners of the Müteferrika Press, that was officially established in Constantinople in 1727 by Ibrahim Müteferrika (d. 1747) and Yirmisekiz Çelebizade Mehmed Said Agha/Pasha (d. 1761). The Grand Mufti was asked to rule if the third person who printed the books which two founders of a press intended to print and provided to this end the necessary equipment could also be considered a partner. The third person insisted that he would deserve one fifth of the profit, and the two founders two fifth each. The Grand Mufti ruled that the third person who printed the books but did not make any investment should not receive any profit share but only a payment for his work. Although the fatwa does not mention real names but conditional ones such as Zayd, Amr and Bakr, one may easily decipher that the two founders in question were Ibrahim Müteferrika and Said Agha, and the person who pretended to be a part of their partnership was Jonah Eshkenazi (d. 1745), who ran his own printshop, established in Constantinople in 1711 to print Jewish books. As a skilful and experienced printer Jonah was very much involved in the printing activities of the Müteferrika press and it seems that he considered himself as an important part of the first Ottoman-Turkish printing enterprise. However, since the Grand Mufti ruled that Jonah could not be considered a partner and shareholder but an employee, he received only salary, which is also obvious from Ibrahim Müteferrika's probate inventory. There are other contemporaneous sources claiming that some other local Jews or Jews who came from abroad were also involved in the printing activities of the Müteferrika press. Therefore the paper puts forward the question if this press could be in reality considered a Turkish-Jewish enterprise? If no, this press reveals yet another remarkable pattern of cooperation between the different religious communities in the Ottoman realm.