

## Interview

### Interview<sup>1</sup> with Prof. Dr. Nir Shafir

Introduced by Hakkı Arslan

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Nir Shafir is an assistant professor of history at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) whose work focuses on the Ottoman Empire/Middle East from 1200 to 1800. At the UCSD, he teaches graduate and undergraduate classes on the history of the Early Modern and Medieval Middle East, the history of science, global history and historical approaches to disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda. He is an occasional contributor and editorial board member of the *Ottoman History Podcast* and served as its editor in 2018. His first book is titled *The Order and Disorder of Communication: Pamphlets and Polemics in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire* and is due to be published by Stanford University Press in 2024. The first half of this work provides a unique and comprehensive description of the world of books, reading, and education in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire, where nearly all written works were copied by hand rather than printed until the late nineteenth century. The second half details how “pamphlets” fractured this world by exacerbating the virulent and fierce socio-religious debates that polarised Ottoman society in the second half of the 17th century. Future projects include a social history of the Turkish language in the Ottoman Empire and an investigation into the cultural role of antiquity and antiquarianism in the Early Modern Middle East. The following interview will mainly deal with the content of the above-mentioned book by Shafir.

*Hikma*: Your book, *The Order and Disorder of Communication: Pamphlets and Polemics in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire*, deals with the polemical debates in which the pamphlet was the central medium of communication. This book is, as far as I know, the first comprehensive treatment of polemical *risāla* literature in a monograph. Could you first describe the main content and purpose of the book?

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1 This interview with Prof. Dr. Nir Shafir was conducted by Dr. Hakkı Arslan, research associate at the Collaborative Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB)) 1385 *Law and literature* (Recht und Literatur) at the Westfälische-Wilhelms-University in Münster, in the form of an online conversation.

*Nir Shafir*: My book focuses on the Ottoman Empire during the second half of the 17th century. During this period, the empire was racked by virulent debates over the legality of a variety of everyday practices, like smoking tobacco, popular medical procedures, and worshipping at the graves of saints. The debates became so heated that many of the empire's Muslim subjects split into opposing camps, each side declaring the other to be heretics. The more focused argument of this book links these controversies to the development of a new form of communication, the pamphlet. Not only did the debates take place on the pages of the pamphlets, but the pamphlets themselves became significant agents in the religious polarisation of Ottoman society. Pamphlets invited both elite scholars and less educated laypeople to participate in public debates, thus expanding the social boundaries of the Ottoman body politic. Yet, the pamphlets were also quite polemical. They led to the establishment of new, antagonistic reading publics among Ottoman subjects and encouraged fake authorship as a way to increase their circulation. More broadly, however, the book attempts to understand how the means of communication structure our politics and society. In this specific case, I'm interested in a problem with particular contemporary relevance: Do certain technologies and practices of communication fuel polemics and polarisation, and if so, how? These questions have not been posed with respect to premodern Middle Eastern societies because we presume that they only apply to societies with mass media generated by modern communication technologies like print, the telegraph, or the internet. And, as many writers have reminded us, print was not widely adopted in the Middle East or the Islamic world at large until the late 19th century. Instead, people continued to copy books by hand, that is, as manuscripts. We assume, incorrectly, that societies employing manuscript technology had limited circulation of information, namely that books were expensive and only moved within a small circle of educated elites. However, I show that books, despite being wholly copied by hand, were cheap and relatively plentiful, that they circulated freely across broad swaths of Ottoman society and that there was a vibrant debate—often triggered by pamphlets—about who should have access to books and how they should be read. To prove these points, my monograph reconstructs an entire world of communication writ large in the 17th-century Ottoman Empire, what I term the empire's "communication order". The first half, which is devoted to the question of putative "order", looks at how books were produced, the circuits by which information moved through Ottoman society, the possibilities for censorship, the value of authorship, and, more broadly, how education was conducted and reading practiced in the 17th-century empire. The second half, the supposed "disorder", demonstrates how this order buckled as what elites considered "bad" communication practices, especially regarding pamphlets, led to polemics and polarisation.

*Hikma*: Pamphlet is the translation of the word *risāla*, which is often translated as tract or treatise. Why did you translate it as pamphlet?

*Nir Shafir*: I have always preferred the word “pamphlet” over “*risāla*”, mainly for two reasons: to help communicate my ideas to a broader audience and to grant greater analytical finesse to my research. First, whenever possible, I opt to translate words and concepts from Arabic, Turkish, or Persian rather than leave them untranslated so that those without knowledge of these languages can grasp my arguments more readily. Of course, there are instances when it is more fitting to leave foreign words transliterated rather than translated. For example, there is no precise equivalent to *samāʿ* in English, and it is more efficient to leave the word untranslated rather than state every time that it is a Sufi religious ceremony incorporating music and gestural movement. At other times, a word like *naṣīḥa* or *wujūd* contains meanings that cannot be captured by their English counterpart. Of course, scholars are most troubled about translations that seem to project contemporary categories on the past, such as uncritically translating *dīn* as religion or *jumhūr* as republic. Yet, leaving words untranslated can also lead to intellectual imprecision for the sake of linguistic continuity. This is, to some degree, the case with the word *risāla*. It simply signifies too much. We might agree that short length and legal content unite *risālas*. Yet, early works titled *risālas*, like those of the Brethren of Purity, are quite long and indistinguishable from books. In the later periods, too, their content cannot be limited to just legal issues. There are *risālas* about theology or music, or the virtues (*faḍāʾil*) of a place. In my case, translating the word *risāla* as pamphlet lets me analytically delimit a specific type of *risāla*: a short and mobile treatise meant to address one of the controversies of the 17th century. There is also the additional analogical emergence of pamphlets in the Early Modern European context, where they were used to discuss and debate current political events and occasional religious controversies. In this sense, the word pamphlet is a better fit than treatise or tract. Some might object that this choice imposes the framework of European history onto the Middle East, but I use the word pamphlet in a looser manner, without linking it to the telos of modernity. Ultimately, the work of the historian is to make the past understandable and relevant to the present, and translation is an inherent part of this work. We partake in translation even by speaking about things like the economy or society, concepts for which no word existed in the past. The mark of a good historian is not to eschew translation but to perform the task thoughtfully and reflexively.

*Hikma*: Let us now talk about the *risāla* from a more general point of view. What is a *risāla* exactly? Who wrote *risālas* and why? Are there different types

of *risālas*? For example, pamphlet-style *risāla* for polemical debates vs. scholarly *risāla*, etc.?

*Nir Shafir*: I can't speak about all *risālas* since the type of texts labelled as *risālas* is too broad, but I identify a few characteristics that define the subset of *risālas* that I call pamphlets in the period. Firstly, pamphlets discussed everyday socio-religious practices. These practices included smoking tobacco, worshipping at the graves of saints, and saying that one belonged to the "religion of Abraham", to give just a few examples. What unites these topics is that they dealt with the quotidian actions of Muslims, practices undertaken continuously by many in the empire that others could also observe. To put it another way, they rarely, if ever, touched upon theological controversies or political events, what we might typically think of as the stuff of debates. The theological or political aspects were there, too, but often left unwritten and unacknowledged in the pages of the pamphlets. Secondly, pamphlets were cheap. Pamphlets, like *risālas* in general, were short, usually between two to twenty folios. This meant it took less time (or money) to copy them. They also likely circulated unbound or minimally bound at a time when binding significantly increased the cost of a book. As I demonstrate in my analysis of scholarship on book ownership from the probate records of the Ottoman Empire, the great majority of books in circulation in the Early Modern period were not expensive. It is unclear, however, if pamphlets circulated in the market (i.e., they were bought and sold) or if they were too cheap to command much of a price and thus circulated, as it were, below the market. In court records they were referred to as "a pile of papers" or "a collection of *risālas*" rather than identified by title, which suggests that they did not command much of a price and were perhaps recycled. Pamphlets were not the only type of cheap and short text; catechisms (*'ilm-i ḥāl*), stories (*hikāye*), and prayer manuals were also common. In other words, not every short text was necessarily a pamphlet. Thirdly, pamphlets were ephemeral. As suggested above, pamphlets were not costly, and, therefore, once their condition deteriorated or their relevance waned, they were most likely disposed of. As in Europe, probably only a tiny percentage of the cheaper and more mundane literature and texts have survived until today. When they do survive, it is often by accident, like the medieval Ḥadīth literature about which Konrad Hirschler has so cogently written. Due to their ephemerality, pamphlets were likewise not collected in libraries unless they were bound together in a miscellany (*majmū'a*). This is how we often find them today, either copied together by a single copyist, compiled and bound by a collector, or written onto the ends or spare pages of larger manuscripts. However, if we look at collections derived from the private libraries of 19th-century scholars, we often find codicologically independent pamphlets. Fourthly, pamphlets

were independent texts. Although short and short-lived, pamphlets were still complete texts in and of themselves. In other words, they were not just abbreviated versions of longer texts or copied selections. Nor were they just fatwas. They had the benedictions, an introduction, a chapter or two, and a conclusion, just like any other complete book. A fifth characteristic is that pamphlets were intended to circulate. Perhaps unlike *risālas* in general, pamphlets were intended to circulate across the Ottoman Empire both geographically and socially. Of course, they did not spread evenly or rapidly to all parts and peoples of the empire, but they definitely did move. For example, pamphlets about the controversial medical procedure of “chickpea cauterisation” (*kayy al-ḥimmaṣa*) were written only a few years apart from each other and in different cities of the empire, such as Damascus, Istanbul, and Edirne. As I detail in the last chapter of my book, the famous scholar ‘Abd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī purposefully set out to distribute his pamphlets from Damascus across the empire and had an entire operation to achieve this. At other times, a scholar like Yaḥyā Minkārīzāde, a future *ṣeyḥülislām*, tried to write a pamphlet that would reach a semi-educated population that had difficulty reading. His first pamphlet, which was fifteen folios or so, was too long and complicated, so he cut it down to around two folios, and it spread quickly and widely. Another characteristic, the sixth, is that pamphlets were polemical and polarising. Pamphlets tackled topics that were often at the heart of debates as to who was a “good” Muslim in the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, they usually gave rise to heated polemics, with authors accusing those who disagreed with them of being heretics or unbelievers. Earlier *risālas* also sometimes touched upon whether certain actions or beliefs were signs of heresy, but the pamphlet debates were distinguished by, one, the intensity and vitriol of the accusations and, two, the way that numerous individual issues were connected to create generally polarised cultural worldviews. The seventh characteristic is that pamphlets were written in a legal idiom. Pamphlets, like many *risālas* in general, were legal texts. The debates on their pages were expressed within the framework of Islamic law. So, for example, when discussing whether or not it was permissible to worship at the grave of saints or the verity of saintly miracles, the debate proceeded only along the lines of legal proof and evidence. It never included, for example, personal attestations of miracles or metaphysically inspired discussions of the friends of God. Nearly all pamphlets were written by scholars with some legal training, but not all scholars wrote pamphlets. In the 17th century, *ṣeyḥülislāms* and other high officials almost never wrote pamphlets, as they could express a ranking opinion by simply issuing a fatwa. (Contrast this with 16th-century figures like as-Suyūṭī and Kemālpāşazāde.) However, scholars marginalised by the hierarchy of the Ottoman legal system—either well-educated Arab scholars in the provinces or Turcophone scholars in smaller cities and outside of

the hierarchy—found pamphlets a useful means to disseminate their legal opinions more broadly or to influence figures like the *şeyhülislām*. Finally, an eighth characteristic is that pamphlets provided accessible information. Legal knowledge was often challenging to obtain. Not only did mastery of the law take years of study, but the information itself was stored in large, long, and expensive commentaries that required a deep familiarity to navigate. Muslims who wanted to participate in legal debates but were not legal scholars only had recourse to a fatwa from a mufti, the text of which was often reduced to a yes-or-no answer. While pamphlets may have been written by (and for) legal scholars, they also provided accessible legal information for non-specialists. A reader could pick one up for a relatively low price and gain some arguments or points that could then be deployed elsewhere, like in the mosque or street, without labouring through a long and expensive commentary. However, learned scholars often found the interpretations and readings of such “commoner jurists” to be profoundly lacking. This disapproval, however, did not stop partially educated Muslims from reading and using pamphlets.

*Hikma*: You said that most *risālas* are still in manuscript form; what is the extent of *risāla* literature? Can you make some estimates? How were they collected, and what are the challenges of working on *risāla* literature?

*Nir Shafir*: Most *risālas* are in manuscript form because nearly all books in the Middle East and the wider Islamic world were copied by hand until the mid-19th century. Moreover, as I mentioned above, pamphlets are part of a larger group of ephemeral writings that likely flourished once paper was widely adopted in the 9th century. The vast majority of this ephemeral literature has not survived until today. Still, some material dating from the 17th century onward does remain simply because it is closer in time to the moment of preservation. It is, of course, difficult to tell what percentage of material has survived. Kātib Çelebi, writing in 1656 about the debate over whether a Muslim can say he or she belongs to the religion of Abraham (*millet-i İbrāhīm*), said that over 80 pamphlets had been written on the topic. As far as I can tell, none of them have survived, except perhaps one. Instead, the debate is dominated by a single pamphlet written by Minkārīzāde Yaḥyā, written shortly thereafter and to which all other pamphlets respond. There are hundreds of copies of Minkārīzāde’s work and almost none from among the pamphlets that preceded it. At other times, we know that an occasional pamphleteer and translator named Ebūaḥmedzāde wrote several pamphlets, but again, none of them have survived. These figures suggest that only a few pamphlets managed to become “viral” and be copied in sufficient numbers for them to remain until today. In addition, there is the question of preservation. As noted above, most libraries in the

Early Modern period did not collect individual pamphlets or cheaper and more ephemeral literature. In fact, they often held larger, costlier, and rarer books that could serve as reliable exemplars for readers and copyists. Pamphlets and other ephemera were often only preserved when bound in a *majmū'a* (miscellany) or copied after another long treatise. Only a tiny fragment of ephemeral, polemical material in circulation was preserved. When I read these 17th-century polemical debates, I often have the sense of reading about a debate from our own time, say about vaccination, but four hundred years in the future. Imagine, if you will, that all the social media posts, videos, messenger threads, etc., will have disappeared, and we will only be left with a few newspaper columns decrying the dangerous and heretical views of the commoners, simply because only a few select institutions will have deemed it worthy to archive and preserve these newspapers. The same dynamic happens in the pamphlet debates. For example, in the latter part of the 17th century, some Turcophone Muslims began to argue that a core prayer of Ottoman religious life, Birgivī Meḥmed's renewal-of-faith (*tecdīd-i imān*) prayer, was actually an act of heresy. Now, there are many pamphlets by educated authors decrying the argument and insulting anyone who put it forward as not cognisant of basic grammar and logic. But I never found any pamphlets arguing for such a position. Such an argument may have been circulating orally, as in sermons, or through other genres, or it may simply have never been preserved in writing by libraries. Finally, there is the question of authorship and authority. In the Early Modern world, it was very tricky to become an author, that is, to circulate one's writings publicly under one's own name. Unless already deemed a respectable and respected scholar, disseminating one's writings publicly was often regarded as a selfish act driven by the desire for fame or to incite people to violence. Perhaps for this reason, pamphlets espousing Legalist positions (that is, Islam should be defined only with respect to Islamic law) were often pseudonymous or falsely ascribed to more famous or canonical authors. In fact, it was known, even in the 17th century, that many, if not most, of the works of famous Legalist authors like Birgivī Meḥmed and Ḳāḏīzāde Meḥmed were "fakes". For instance, Birgivī never directly disavowed saints (*awliyā'*) or their sanctity, but pamphlets ascribed to him did precisely that. There was a much looser culture of authorship among Legalists. In contrast, Sufi pamphleteers published their works under their own names, likely because they were more educated, respected, and authoritative. These dynamics make it challenging to reconstruct the pamphlet debates, especially on the Legalist side.

*Hikma*: What is the modern equivalent of polemical *risāla* literature? Can we compare it to modern media such as journal articles, essays, columns in magazines or online channels, blog articles, or social media platforms?

*Nir Shafir*: To my students, I often say that the book, in a nutshell, is about “social media in 17th-century Middle East”, albeit in a world where there was no print, much less the internet and social media. Pamphlets share the relative brevity and, at times, the polemical character of a social media thread or a post that tries to encapsulate a larger debate within a set of shorter, pointed statements. Pamphlets likewise exacerbated the problem of false ascription simply because readers gravitated toward authors who were considered canonical or respected. This, too, became part of the dynamics of polarisation fuelled by pamphlets, as Sufi writers often accused opposing pamphlets of being fakes. Having said that, I think that ultimately Ottoman-era pamphlets do not fit neatly into any one model, neither today nor in the past. Unlike their Early Modern European namesakes, Ottoman pamphlets do not deal with new political events, what came to be called the “news”. Instead, they discussed socio-religious controversies and thus had a different temporality and longevity, often remaining relevant for decades. Moreover, they push us to imagine a world in which law itself was the primary, if not the only, idiom of popular and public debate.

*Hikma*: What was the social function of *risālas*? Who read them, how did they circulate, etc.?

*Nir Shafir*: I hone in on four broad social processes that occurred in the 17th century and turned *risālas* into pamphlets, as it were. Firstly, the most basic transformation was the expansion of the empire’s body politic to include hundreds of thousands of free-born Muslims over the course of the 17th century. Beforehand, the state was comprised of a couple thousand individuals, mainly recruited and trained through slavery (the infamous *devşirme*). Equally important is, secondly, what Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu have respectively termed the confessional transformation or Sunnitization of the empire over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries. The dynasty and its subjects became increasingly invested in cultivating a Sunni identity both for the state and its populace, an identity often grounded in a legalistic vision of Islam. The polemical debates were an extension of this process, as Ottoman subjects continuously questioned whether their coreligionists were sufficiently pious Muslims, constantly raising and altering their standards over the years. Thirdly, the creation of a legal hierarchy in the Ottoman Empire, in which a chief jurist (the *şeyhülislām*) and other state functionaries had an outsized authority in shaping law, made pamphlets an essential tool for those outside the legal hierarchy to express and disseminate their views. Finally and fourthly, the expansion of the government in the 17th century also resulted in the fracturing of a shared intellectual milieu of the Ottomans into three separate spaces or tracks: the madrasa, the bureau, and the Sufi lodge. This division, in turn, resulted in often radically different

and competing visions of reading and knowledge. Overall, I argue that the intersection of these four social processes produced a larger shift in communication practices, of which the pamphlet is its material instantiation. As for reading, one of the main ideas driving the book (though perhaps this is overshadowed by my emphasis on practices and technologies of communication) is that historians need to look not only at the production of Islamic law (i.e., the creation of new rulings of legal concepts), or its application (i.e., the work of judges and courts) but also its reception. Readers could take the ideas found in legal treatises and interpret them in their own manner. This meant that the same pamphlet could be read in multiple ways. The pamphlets, at least the ones that have survived to today, were nearly always written by learned scholars trained in jurisprudence. Moreover, they were written with the assumption that their readers were familiar with the linguistic disciplines that undergirded a madrasa education: grammar, rhetoric, logic, and disputation. These sciences structured the very act of reading for many of the educated elite, though by no means all. However, many segments of Ottoman society rejected or were ignorant of these sciences. The secretarial corps, for example, were not trained in the madrasa but in their bureaus and thus came to develop different principles of reading. Moreover, semi-educated and non-educated Muslims sometimes resented the obsession of the educated elite with these linguistic disciplines, especially logic. They considered them to be “a shovel and a pick” given to students “to demolish the foundations of the Islamic religion”, in the words of one writer. When these less educated Muslims read pamphlets, they were ferociously critiqued by their better-educated coreligionists for arriving at simplistic, superficial, or misguided interpretations because of faulty grammar, rhetoric, and logic. And yet, popular readers continued to engage with pamphlets because they were interested in participating in these large societal debates over what it meant to be a Muslim. Sometimes, their interpretations resulted in extreme or bizarre positions, like declaring that anyone who said “I belong to the religion of Abraham” was a heretic or saying that Birgivi’s renewal-of-faith prayer, mentioned above, actually invited Muslims to commit heresy.

These spaces and usages of Islamic law are not commonly recognised or acknowledged by historians today, however. This is partly because such discussions and debates rarely resulted in canonical legal decisions that would be recorded, say, in the summa of Ibn ‘Abidin. Pamphlets had a different purpose. They were intended to animate public debate and rally partisans to a cause, to drive ordinary Muslims to change their daily actions and those of their neighbours, or to nudge the decisions of the *seyhülislām* or the sultan. More importantly, I think they are overlooked because historians regard public participation and the open circulation of texts in the

premodern Middle East as an impossibility prior to the adoption of print, but, as I have been at pains to point out, that is not necessarily true.

*Hikma*: What were the most discussed topics in the Ottoman context of the 17th century?

*Nir Shafir*: As mentioned above, the issues that animated the fiercest debates were those over everyday social practices, usually those practised across the empire: smoking tobacco, Sufi rituals like *dhikr*, the worship of saints and praying at their tombs, daily prayers, and attestations of faith, and medical procedures like chickpea cauterisation, which I will come to shortly. Interestingly, these debates were often interlinked into general positions in a sort of culture war. If someone believed that Muslims could declare that they belonged to the religion of Abraham, then most likely that person also thought that tobacco smoking was licit. If you look at miscellanies from the period, you'll find pamphlets on all these topics grouped together repeatedly, showing that readers connected these issues together. Abstruse legal or theological questions never ignited much fervour, however, perhaps with the sole exception of the general status of Ibn 'Arabī and his ideas. Moreover, "local" issues also did not fuel pamphlet debates simply because they did not have relevance to many Muslims across the empire. For example, in the last chapter of the book, I detail the career of perhaps the most successful pamphleteer in the Ottoman Empire, 'Abd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī. Now, an-Nābulusī managed to propel his pamphlets to all corners of the empire, such as his work on smoking tobacco. He was also, however, a fierce advocate for Syrian and Palestinian peasants and city-dwellers against the depredations of the imperial government and its agents. For example, the local garrison of imperial soldiers in Damascus apparently was in the habit of seizing from butchers the heads and hooves of all slaughtered sheep and claiming that these were the property of the sultan. The soldiers would then cook and roast these pieces of mutton themselves, sell them, and pocket the profit. An-Nābulusī wrote a pamphlet arguing that this was an act of illegal seizure, and it had to stop. For all intents and purposes, there are no copies of this pamphlet in the Turcophone central lands of the Ottoman Empire, i.e., Anatolia and the Balkans, but there are a few in the Arab lands. Obviously, the topic lacked a broader appeal, so it failed to circulate throughout the empire.

*Hikma*: Can you give an example of a debate that took place through pamphlets?

*Nir Shafir*: It is hard to provide a single archetypal pamphlet debate. I have found that each pamphlet debate has a different dynamic and reveals varied points about the nature of communication in the Ottoman Empire of the 17th century. The debate over smoking tobacco, for example, revolved around not

only the legality of tobacco, a new substance introduced from the Americas in the 17th century, but also around the usage of sultanic law (*qānūn*) to enforce and expand the jurists' law, i.e., the sharia. The debate over whether the prayer to renew one's faith (*tecdīd-i imān*) was an act of heresy reveals the tension between educated and vernacular interpretations of the sharia. The debate over whether a Muslim can state that he or she "belongs to the religion of Abraham (*millet-i Ibrāhīm*)" deals with the question of popular participation in public intellectual debates. Another debate about whether a text attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, the *Fiqh al-akbar*, was indeed his, centred on the problem of false attributions in the period. Many of these polemics are touched upon by the scribe and scholar Kātib Çelebi in his 1656 book *Mizanu'l-ḥakḳ* (*The Balance of Truth*). That said, I do devote a significant part of one chapter to describing a pamphlet debate that Kātib Çelebi did not mention: the debate over chickpea cauterisation or *kayy al-ḥimmaṣa*. Doctors in Damascus invented this medical procedure in the early 17th century to treat pain in the body by drawing out harmful substances. A patient would have an opening created in the afflicted limb or body part with a cautery, after which a chickpea would be placed inside the wound to keep it from closing and healing. Over time, a liquid, believed to be the harmful substance in the body, would escape from the wound, which would be caught by a bandage wrapped tight around the wound. The controversy was not over the efficacy or legality of the medical procedure but whether or not the liquid (*mā'*) that escaped negated a Muslim's ritual purity. A subsidiary question was whether or not a patient undergoing the procedure qualified as *ṣāhib al-'udhr*, as "possessing an exemption" from the requirements of ritual purity, a state more often given to menstruating women or those who were incontinent. This topic was dealt with in fatwa collections of independent and government muftis and in the pamphlet literature. The Cairene scholar ash-Shurunbulālī was the first to write about the topic, but it was the Damascene pamphleteer an-Nābulusī who set off the major controversy by saying that the procedure did not negate ritual purity. He wrote two pamphlets on the topic, granting patients undergoing the procedure the status of *ṣāhib al-'udhr*. The works of ash-Shurunbulālī and an-Nābulusī are the most commonly copied texts on the topic, of which there are hundreds if not thousands of copies today. However, it was an-Nābulusī's pamphlet that set off many more responses and debates. Most notably, a scholar in Istanbul known as Meḥmed el-'Aynī wrote two responses to an-Nābulusī, and these pamphlets were often abbreviated and circulated in shorter versions. Eventually, the debate became so fierce that it turned to the question of whether cauterisation, in general, was Islamic or not. And if you read my book, you'll find out much more.