

Preface

As early as the end of the nineteenth century, scholars had entertained the idea of writing histories of Ottoman libraries, but these early attempts did not come to fruition.¹ In the early Republican period (1923–1938), scholars such as Selim Nüzhet Gerçek took a keen interest in the Ottoman library and, although some newspaper articles were written, no serious study of the subject emerged. This gap in Ottoman cultural history may well have gone unnoticed had it not been for the opening of departments of librarianship in Turkish universities in the 1950s. It quickly came to light that there was very little written about Ottoman libraries and certainly no comprehensive study of the subject.

In 1977, after returning to Turkey from Scotland with a PhD in Ottoman literature, I found myself appointed to teach Ottoman language and culture in the Department of Librarianship at Istanbul University. Naturally, I looked for

1 Serkis Orpelyan and Abdülzâde Mehmed Tahir had planned a six-volume history of Ottoman sciences entitled *Mahzen-i Ulum*, of which the sixth volume was to be devoted to the history of Ottoman libraries. Only the first volume of this work was published (İstanbul: A. Asaduryan Şirket-i Mürettibiye Matbaası, 1308H). Another scholar, Mahmud Cevad İbnü’ş-Şeyh Nâfi, planned a two-volume history of Turkish educational institutions entitled *Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti, Tarihçe-i Teşkilatı ve İcraatı* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1338H), of which the second volume was to be devoted to the history of Istanbul libraries. This second volume never appeared.

materials to allow me to teach the history of Ottoman libraries. It was then that I discovered this huge gap in the history of Ottoman institutions. I also noticed that works in English dealing with libraries throughout the world avoided the subject of Ottoman libraries, for the very good reason that there was virtually nothing written about it in Western languages.

Looking through the materials available to me, I noted that the only useful materials were some articles by the late Süheyl Ünver and Müjgan Cunbur. Neither of these scholars studied Ottoman libraries per se, but as they came across documents dealing with libraries, especially foundation deeds or records, they made these materials available to scholars in a number of articles. Although I do not always share the opinions at which they arrived, we should be grateful for their contribution to this field of study.

In the complete absence of secondary sources on the subject, the decision regarding how to go about the task of writing the history of Ottoman libraries was made for me: I would have to look almost exclusively at primary sources, and most of these would be archival materials. Since almost all educational institutions in the period I wished to deal with began as religious foundations, there had to be written foundation deeds. If I could find these, I would be able to make a start on the task I had given myself. When I searched for these deeds in the Archives of the Directorate of Endowments (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi-VGMA.), the Ottoman Archives (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi-BOA), the Archives of Court Registers in Istanbul, Ankara and Bursa (Şer'i Siciller Arşivi-ŞS), the Topkapı Palace Archives (Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi-TSA), and in some libraries, I was able to trace almost four hundred foundation deeds.² However, it was clear that while there was much useful material in these deeds they represented the wishes of the various founders and, as noted by Ömer Lütfi Barkan, were prescriptive and did not reflect how the libraries operated in reality.³

To discover how the libraries functioned, I had to search through various account books in the archives, starting with salary accounts and registers of appointments, and then proceeded to the account books and general correspondence. Unfortunately, the materials on libraries were scattered amongst all the other materials in the archives, and the only way to find it was to

2 Much of information to emerge from these deeds was repetitive and I have therefore only cited or quoted from the more interesting ones or from deeds that supported an argument.

3 Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Süleymaniye Camii ve İmareti Tesislerine ait Bir Yıllık Bir Muhasebe Bilançosu 993/994 (1585/1586)," *VD* 9 (1971): 109-110. Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Edirne ve Civarındaki Bazı İmaret Te'şislerinin Yıllık Muhasebe Bilançoları," *Belgeler* 1, no. 2 (1965): 237-239; See also Maya Shatzmiller, "Islamic Institutions and Property Rights: The Case of the Public Waqf," *JESHO* 44, no. 1 (2001): 48.

sift through the documents looking for small nuggets of information. This task took me over thirty years, by the end of which I had gone through some 250,000 documents.⁴

I looked at other materials as well as the archival sources. On reading the official Ottoman chronicles, I discovered that they invariably seemed to have taken little interest in libraries, and the few instances where they mention the existence of a library would be, for example, on an occasion when the sultan attended an official opening. Travel works were far more promising, because foreign travellers were at pains to describe things of interest they came across on their travels. However, with rare exceptions, such as Toderini and Ubicini, these travellers either stated the obvious or, worse still, were misinformed by their guides. Unless they had something useful to contribute, I have not mentioned these travel works in the notes.

This book is therefore, by necessity, based on archival material which is piecemeal in its nature and scattered throughout the archives. I have tried to organize it to the best of my ability, but if in parts it comes across to the reader as a list of archival entries it is precisely because that is what the book is based on. For this I ask for the reader's indulgence. Throughout my research, I attempted to discover what patterns could be discerned in the development of the Ottoman library network, and in this I hope I can claim some success. I hope too that I have laid to rest some mistaken notions that have held sway among scholars due mainly to the complete lack of serious study on the subject.

This work is divided into two sections. First, I survey the discernible phases through which the history of Ottoman libraries developed. With the earliest libraries, those founded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, I have gone into considerable detail as I believe that given their relative rarity, they may be of interest to the reader. Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, however, libraries had become relatively commonplace, and I have tended to note their foundation and give only information which makes them unusual. The latter part of the book deals with the various functions of the Ottoman library, such as lending, staffing, budgeting, cataloguing, and so forth, to which I have appended a small chapter on archival materials referring to the architecture and furnishing of the library building. I have written a short introduction intended for the reader who is unfamiliar with the Ottoman college system and the nature of the Islamic book.

4 The text of the most interesting of these documents has been published in a two-volume anthology: İsmail E. Erünsal, *Kütüphanecilikle İlgili Metinler ve Belgeler*, 2 vols. (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1982-1990) and in "Tanzimat Sonrası Türk Kütüphaneciliği ile İlgili Belgeler," *The Journal of Ottoman Studies* 31 (2008): 229-339.

Throughout the text I have given the foundation dates of libraries or their foundation deeds whenever they are known. The date following the name of a founder refers to the date of the foundation deed and not to the death of the founder, unless the date is preceded by the letter “d.” The dates following the sultans’ names are the dates of their reigns. Ottoman personal names and technical terms appear in their modern Turkish form.

I imagined when writing this book that my readership would be scholars interested in the development of libraries throughout the world. For this reason, I have included much material and explanation that I felt would be necessary for any reader unfamiliar with the Ottoman Empire and its institutions. As the first comprehensive monograph on Ottoman libraries, this work will naturally have many defects and no doubt mistakes will have been made. I hope that in the future these deficiencies will be made good and mistakes corrected.

Some of the material in this book has been previously published in a number of articles in journals. I am grateful to these journals for allowing me to reproduce much of the material. Of course, with the passage of time, I have, in many places, reviewed my original findings and some passages have had to be rewritten to incorporate new research.