



Said Aljoumani, Guy Burak, and
Konrad Hirschler, eds. *The Library
of Aḥmaḍ Pařba al-Jazzār: Book
Culture in Late Ottoman Palestine*,
Leiden: Brill, 2025. xiii+480.

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Makale Türü / Article Type:
Kitâbiyât / Book Review

ATIF© Uğurlu, İsa. "The Library of Aḥmaḍ Pařba al-Jazzār: Book Culture in Late Ottoman Palestine, edited by Said Aljoumani, Guy Burak, ve Konrad Hirschler, üzerine deęerlendirme." *Yazmabilim* 1/1 (Eylül 2025): 367–372.

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Over the past decade, scholarship on Ottoman libraries and book culture has produced two major edited volumes. Both were the outcome of interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and both focused on libraries located in the imperial center: first, the library of Veliyüddin Cârullah Efendi (d. 1738), and second, the palace library of Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512).¹ A recently published third example, however, turns attention to a provincial and dispersed collection: the library founded by the renowned Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzār (d. 1804) as part of his Nūr al-Aḥmadiyya mosque complex, completed in Acre in 1196/1781–82. The volume consists of an introduction, followed by three parts containing seven, four, and fourteen chapters respectively, and an appendix with the Arabic edition of the library's inventory and its facsimile, an index of the titles listed in the inventory, and a catalogue of identified books once belonging to al-Jazzār.

In their introduction, which doubles as a review of the project, editors Said Aljoumani, Guy Burak, and Konrad Hirschler explain the rationale for the volume and outline the research strategies used to trace al-Jazzār's surviving books. They emphasize that by placing "the Jazzār library onto the map of Palestinian history and Ottoman Palestine onto the map of West Asian book history," the work seeks to extend the study of Ottoman libraries "beyond the core, Turkish-speaking lands of the empire." More specifically, it "aims at bringing the scholarship of libraries in the Arabic-speaking provinces of the empire into dialogue with the studies of libraries in Anatolia and the Balkans" (p. 1-2). To identify scattered books, the editors adopted three main strategies. First, they conducted a thorough search of manuscript collections, building in particular on Boris Liebrecht's long-term research in European and American holdings, as well as surveys of West Asian collections. Second, they employed automated searches of digitized collections using the "learning-free Visual-Pattern Detector" developed by Hussein Mohammed (CSMC/Hamburg), a tool that can compare endowment seals and suggest possible matches across large corpora of catalogues. While this method is fast, it fails in cases "where the endowment seal erased, defaced, or pasted over". The volume does not fully clarify which collections were scanned in this way, though it appears that the digitized holdings of the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library were included. Third, the team aimed "to search for exemplars of a specific title mentioned in the Jazzār library inventory" (p. 22-24). The initial result of these combined efforts was the identification of seventy-eight books, a number that will likely grow as further research proceeds.

¹ Berat Açı, ed., *Osmanlı Kitap Kültürü: Cârullah Efendi Kütüphanesi ve Notları*, Ankara: Nobel, 2015; idem, *Osmanlı Kitap Kültürü: Cârullah Efendi Kütüphanesi ve Derkenar Notları* (İstanbul: İLEM, 2020); and Gülru Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar, and Cornell H. Fleischer, eds., *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, vols. I-II (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019).

The three main parts of the book address, respectively, “the library’s historical context (Part 1), the materiality of its books (Part 2), and its intellectual profile (Part 3)” (p. 25). Yet this description understates the volume’s actual scope, since the authors take on far more than these categories suggest. In the introduction and the first part alone, the library itself (Ch. 1), its inventory (Ch. 2), manuscripts (Ch. 3), founder (Ch. 4), the founder’s wealth (Ch. 5) and influence as a patron (Ch. 6), and finally the relocation and dismantling of the collection (Ch. 7) are all historicized. A recurring theme across several chapters is the centrality of elite culture and the refined tastes of Ottoman dignitaries, with Istanbul serving as the primary source of inspiration for Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzār. In the introduction, the editors highlight the parallels between the Nuruosmaniye Mosque and al-Jazzār’s mosque in Acre. In Chapter 1, Berat Açı, Nimet İpek, and Guy Burak compellingly argue for an “Ottomanization” of provincial library culture, reflecting the “complex dynamics between the imperial centre and the provinces, whereby members of the provincial administrative elites, either natives to the provinces or governors sent from the imperial centre, shared cultural and intellectual sensibilities with, and saw themselves as part of, the imperial elite” (p. 34). Boris Liebrecht (Ch. 3) similarly underscores Istanbul’s role as the hub from which al-Jazzār acquired much of his collection, and he further notes visual parallels between al-Jazzār’s endowment seal and those of high-ranking officials in the central administration (Ch. 10). Walid A. Saleh, pointing to the large number of Qur’an copies in the library’s inventory, likens the collection to a palace library and emphasizes that al-Jazzār consciously modeled his library on Istanbul rather than on Cairo or Levantine precedents, sourcing his books primarily from the imperial capital (Ch. 12). This Istanbul connection is echoed in Christopher Bahl’s analysis, which identifies both parallels and divergences between al-Jazzār’s holdings and those of Bayezid II’s palace library, particularly in the field of Arabic philology (Ch. 18). Similarly, Asad Q. Ahmed identifies resemblances between al-Jazzār’s library and that of Topkapı Palace, particularly in the inclusion and exclusion of works on logic (Ch. 20). With regard to *tawhīd* and *taṣawwuf*, Hadel Jarada observes the significant presence of *waḥdat al-wujūd* texts among the holdings but refrains from drawing comparisons with other central libraries. Instead, she underscores the importance of Egyptian and Syrian book markets and demonstrates that “the North African theological tradition reigns supreme in the library’s holdings” (Ch. 17).

The formation and dissolution of al-Jazzār’s library is another theme widely discussed in the volume, though explored on the basis of scant evidence—namely the surviving inventory and the scattered manuscripts identified in various collections. Said Aljoumani upholds the established view that confiscation politics played a central role in the library’s formation (Ch. 2). By contrast, Boris Liebrecht offers a more nuanced picture of

al-Jazzār, portraying him not as a tyrant but as a purchaser who legally acquired books from well-known bibliophiles of the time as well as from the markets of Damascus, Jerusalem, and Istanbul (Ch. 3). Still, as in the case of the Khayri family of Ramla, the negative image of al-Jazzār found in primary sources—often condemning him for seizing the private collections of distinguished local families—may lead to an overly dismissive stance toward the possibility that he purchased en bloc the libraries of local *‘ulamā’*. Aljoumani, by contrast, embraces the harsher portrait of al-Jazzār as a cruel and usurping governor, interpreting even legally sanctioned transfers of books, including those from members of his own household, as acts of confiscation.² On the subject of the library’s dismantlement, Konrad Hirschler highlights the crucial role of local actors and their regional and international networks. These individuals gradually weakened the library by removing its holdings, even as others sought to resist such losses and worked for its revival (Ch. 7).

The seventh chapter, written by Hirschler, is particularly important as it clearly recounts the story of the library’s demise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I would like, however, to highlight two devastating developments in the second quarter of the nineteenth century that caused severe damage to al-Jazzār’s library but went unnoticed by the contributors to the present volume. These were the sieges and bombardments of Acre, where the library was located: first by Egyptian forces under Ibrahim Pasha, son of Mehmed Ali Pasha, and later by the combined British, Austrian, and Ottoman fleets. The first siege lasted six months, from late November 1831 to late May 1832, and ended with the city’s destruction and surrender. The second, in November 1840, resulted in the capitulation of the Egyptian forces. It is highly likely that a substantial portion of al-Jazzār’s library was looted during the first siege by both Egyptian troops and local actors. At least two reports submitted to the Ottoman palace describe in detail the total destruction and pillage of the city by Ibrahim Pasha’s forces and its inhabitants.³ Similar observations were made by Edward Hogg, who visited Acre immediately after its capture in 1832. His testimony—overlooked by Boris Liebrecht, who otherwise cites five contemporary European visitors who reported on Acre and al-Jazzār’s library (Ch. 3)—is particularly telling. Given its importance, I quote from it in abbreviated form:

² In a unique case from 1859, the endower was permitted to dedicate not only his own 693 books to the library but also 139 volumes acquired from others. While he donated his personal books *aşāleten* (*in propria persona*), he endowed 136 as executor (*veşāyeten*) and three as agent (*vekāleten*). See İsa Uğurlu and Nimet İpek, “Söğüt Çelebi Mehmed Camii Kütüphanesi: Banisi, Kuruluşu ve Dönemi İçin Anlamı,” *Zemin* 5 (2023): 132–159.

³ See, for instance, BOA, HAT 908/39778 and BOA, TS.MA.e 381/19.

Acre ... is now a dreary, uninhabited waste ... Closely besieged for five months and twenty-one days, during which time upward of thirty-five thousand shells were thrown into the town, not a single habitation has escaped uninjured. Whole streets are blocked up with half-demolished houses, and others are filled to the first story with fractured remnants of roofs and floors. Every door and window has [sic] been torn down and consumed for fuel, shattered arches and tottering walls still seem to menace destruction, and narrow passages through heaps of rubbish afford the only access to various parts of the town.

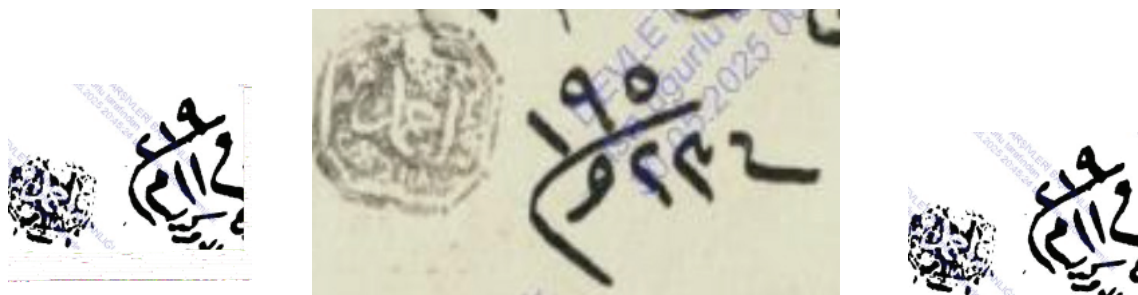
Near the magnificent mosk, built by the atrocious Jezzar, ... Here, a flight of steps leads into a court, surrounded by a half-demolished cloister, ... two richly-ornamented fountains were buried beneath the fragments of handsome domes. The interior, ... every where shivered and perforated. On one side, near a gallery, stood a high pulpit of Cipolino marble, *and the rich mosaic floor, cruelly mutilated, and strewed with book covers*, was heaped with broken masses of porphyry and granite, among which lay an enormous bronze crescent that had fallen from the summit of the dome. Shot and shells had here made fearful havoc, *the books had been carried off as a trophy*, and the court without was converted into a military station.⁴

The library must have lost part of its holdings not only during the period of Egyptian rule but also after the city's second siege. A reconnaissance report by Hacı Veli Agha, the official responsible for construction in Acre, written nine years after its recapture, records that al-Jazzār's mosque complex and all its extensions had been struck and severely damaged by cannon fire during the war, while a more recent lightning strike had caused further destruction. According to his report, forty-eight madrasa rooms and another room used as the library required urgent restoration. This included the installation of ten doors, twenty window sashes, and three marble pillars, along with the whitewashing of walls, the rebuilding of collapsed walls and domes, and the completion of plastering and painting.⁵ These critical historical sources strongly suggest that the sieges and bombardments of Acre in 1832 and 1840 directly contributed to the dissolution of al-Jazzār's library, with the first siege being particularly destructive. It seems probable that the initial plunder—or later "legal" acquisition—of books by Ibrahim Pasha and his men in Acre facilitated the transfer of al-Jazzār's volumes into Egyptian manuscript libraries. In light of Hirschler's statement that "the holdings of the National Library, the largest collection of handwritten books in the Arabic world, could not be systematically searched within the framework of

⁴ Edward Hogg, *Visit to Alexandria, Damascus, and Jerusalem During the Successful Campaign of Ibrahim Pasha*, vol. II (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835): 160-163. Emphases are mine. See also, Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army, and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cairo, New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 1997), 114.

⁵ See BOA, EV.d.. 13662, fol. 6a. The date of report is 5 Rā 65 / January 29, 1849.

the Jazzār Library Project” (p. 159), future research should prioritize Egyptian collections. Such work should take into account not only al-Jazzār’s well-known endowment seal but also his octagonal seal, which bore no titles, contained only his name, and appeared in his official correspondence. Likely engraved in or after 1180/1766–67 and used by al-Jazzār until his death, the presence of this seal on any manuscript would open an important new avenue for reconstructing the formation of his library.⁶



Three distinct impressions of Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzār’s seal

Finally, it is striking that a volume devoted to al-Jazzār, his wealth, and his library makes relatively limited use of official archival documents. There are, of course, notable exceptions, such as the chapters by Açı́l, Burak, and İpek (Ch. 1), Arslantaş (Ch. 5), and İpek and Burak (Ch. 9). Yet the book does not clarify whether any of al-Jazzār’s expense ledgers have been traced in the Ottoman Archives. Discovering such records would illuminate the local, regional, and transregional networks that facilitated the acquisition of books for his library.⁷ These gaps suggest that the editors either felt compelled, or were obliged, to bring the project to completion within a relatively short timeframe. As they note, “the idea to write the history of the Jazzār library goes back to October 2021” (p. 2), and the volume appeared in December 2024—less than three years later. One might reasonably expect that projects funded by institutions could allow a longer gestation period to yield near-definitive results. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, this book makes a significant contribution to the study of Ottoman book culture and the cultural history of the empire more broadly. By bringing to light a provincial library long consigned to oblivion, it situates provincial cultural politics within the larger narrative of the imperial center.

⁶ For the first seal that appears on a document dated Awā’il-i Muḥarram 1194 / January 8-18, 1780, see BOA, C. ML. 588/24202; for the one dated 23 Z. 195/December 10, 1781, see BOA, AE.SABH.L. 137/9239; for the one dated 11 M. 219/April 22, 1804, see BOA, HAT 85/3468.

It should also be noted that in the reading of al-Jazzār’s endowment seal, the name “Aḥmad” was mistakenly rendered as “Muḥammad.” See p. 207.

⁷ Expense ledgers reveal how Şehid Ali Pasha (d. 1716) expanded his library. See Tülay Artan, “On Sekizinci Yüzyıl Başında Osmanlı Bilgi Üretimi ve Dağılımı: Yazma Eser Koleksiyonları ve Koleksiyonerler Arasında Şehid Ali Paşa’nın Yeri,” *Müteferrika* 58 (2020): 5-40.

