

MEDIEVAL OTTOMAN LIBRARIES *

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Before the conquest of Istanbul, in 1453, the fledgling Ottoman state had already established itself in several towns and cities in Anatolia and the Balkans, and we know that as soon as they had consolidated their political control the Ottomans had begun to build mosques and colleges, some of which have survived to the present day. However due to lack of any supporting evidence, historians could, so far, only assume that some of these colleges and mosques had been endowed with libraries. It is the purpose of this article to examine all the available evidence for the existence of these early Ottoman libraries.

The political events and chronology of the reign of Osman Gazi, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, are far from clear and established, let alone the cultural history of the period. There is no evidence for, or indeed mention of, any cultural institution founded in his reign. As the late professor Wittek pointed out, the early Ottoman state was essentially a Beylik, a small political territory ruled by a minor potentate, established precariously on the Byzantine border, and principally engaged in a holy war against the Byzantine Empire.¹ It is probable that Osman Gazi's reign, which was entirely taken up with the promotion of the holy war and the expansion of the fledgling state, witnessed no significant cultural development. In fact, in a small state, such as that ruled by Osman Gazi, the continual state of war produced conditions which were not naturally conducive to the establishment of institutions of education. Another factor which mitigated against cultural development was

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¹ P. Wittek, "Ankara Bozgunundan İstanbulun Zaptına", translated by Halil İnalçık, *Bellesten* (Ankara 1943), p. 559.

the lack of any common cultural or religious heritage in the territories they conquered from the Byzantines.²

The famous Ottoman biography of scholars and sufi saints, the *Şakâik-i Nu'mâniyye*, which is classified by the reigns of the sultans, lists only two scholars for the reign of Osman Gazi, which would suggest that a scholarly class had yet to be established. Without scholars and scholarly institutions, one would hardly expect to find libraries or even collections of books; indeed we have evidence suggesting that Osman Gazi himself possessed no books.³

With the death of Osman Gazi, his son, Orhan, was to consolidate his father's conquest and continue to expand the borders of his state successfully. This created an environment of confidence in the prospect of the Ottoman Beylik which attracted not only gazis who had come in Osman Gazi's reign, but also scholars such as Mevlânâ Sinan and Kara Alaaddin. Some years later, with the conquest of Iznik (Nicaea), the first Ottoman college was established (1331), and Davud-ı Kayser invited to be its principal teacher.⁴

We may assume that in this college books were available for the use of the teachers and students, but without specific information, we cannot talk of a library room, or even a book cupboard. The late İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, in a paper delivered to a conference of librarians, claimed that Orhan Gazi founded libraries in various institutions founded in Bursa, İzmit and Iznik after their conquest.⁵ Unfortunately it has not been possible to support this claim with evidence and the extant foundation deeds and account books for these institutions make no reference to a library or a librarian, nor is there

² It may be noted that Islamic cultural activities developed rapidly in the Ottoman state only after it had annexed other Islamic territories, principally the Germiyan Beylik, which itself had already developed an Islamic cultural infrastructure.

³ The Ottoman historian, Neşrî, gives a list of his effects when he died. This list includes such humble items as a salt cellar, a cutlery box, a herd of sheep etc., but no books (*Kitâb-i Cihânnümâ* I, edited by Faik Reşit Unat and Mehmed A. Köymen, Ankara 1949, p. 147). The image of Osman Gazi offered by the list is that of a simple man leading a simple life.

⁴ Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age 1300-1600*, London 1973, p. 166.

⁵ "Türk Kütüphanelerinde Gelişmeler", *Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği Bülteni*, XXII/2, (1974), p. 88.

any mention of libraries or librarian in any of the extant records for any institution in Bursa and Iznik during the reign of Orhan.⁶ Scholars have naturally assumed that these Ottoman institutions would have been endowed with books just as they were in many colleges and mosques in other Islamic lands. However, we ought to bear in mind that as the Ottomans were conquering areas which had never been Islamic, they had to bring scholars in from other areas, and book production would have only just begun. In view of this lack of educational infrastructure it is not surprising that we have no mention of libraries at this early stage.

The reign of Murad I witnessed several significant developments. With the conquest of Edirne it was felt that the Ottomans had established themselves in Europe and their successful exploits produced the confidence necessary to encourage scholars to immigrate into Ottoman territories. As the Ottomans began to annex some of the small Beyliks in Anatolia and established friendly relations with others, the Ottoman state began to acquire the status of the prime Turkish state in Asia minor and the expanding frontier of Islam in Europe. Its new status further encouraged the immigration of scholars. Ottoman scholars, for their part travelled to the Islamic cultural centres to increase their knowledge, and we see, for example, the judge of Bursa, Mevlânâ Mahmud travelling to Horasan and Transoxania, while Molla Fenârî went to Egypt.⁷ As a result of these scholarly relations with the established Islamic centres and the influx of scholars it is likely that books will have begun to come into the Ottoman state in significant quantities. The *Şakâik-i Nu'mâniyye*, a reliable source, notes that Molla Fenârî left 10 000 volumes on his death,⁸ and although this figure should naturally be treated with caution, it would nevertheless suggest that books were becoming increasingly available.

⁶ E. H. Ayverdi reconstructed a floor for the college built by Süleyman Paşa, Orhan Gazi's son, in Yenişehir, on the plan of which he indicated a room set aside as a library (*Osmanlı Mimarisinin İlk Devri*, İstanbul 1966, p. 207-208). However, as no reference to a library can be found either in the account books of this college (Başbakanlık Arşivi, M. Müd. 626, p. 29-30) or in other sources, we must assume that the library belonged to a later period.

⁷ *Şakâik-i Nu'mâniyye*, Beirut 1975, p. 13, 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The Ottoman scholars themselves began, in this period, to write books and commentaries on the established classics of Islamic scholarship. At the same time their students began to copy the books which had been chosen as the class texts. Despite the increase in books there is still no evidence to suggest that libraries were established in the reign of Murad I. We must assume that books were made available to the students on an informal basis out of the private collections of the teachers. The *Şakâik-i Nu'mâniyye* recounts that students of this period, wanting to read Sa'deddîn Teftâzânî's works, were unable to buy copies. Molla Fenârî therefore increased the college holidays from two to three days a week to allow students more free time in which to copy texts.⁹

During the reign of Bayezid I, the Ottomans not only established themselves firmly in the Balkans but also annexed most of the remaining small independent Turkish states in Anatolia. This gave Ottomans scholars and the educational institutions access to the private collections and book markets which could be found in centres of Islamic culture such as Kütahya, Manisa and Kastamonu. At the same time the older Ottoman cities of Bursa and Edirne began to acquire dominant positions as the new centres of Islamic scholarship in Anatolia and Europe, and consequently they attracted scholars who had previously taught in the older centres of Anatolia. Also during Bayezid I's reign, the Ottoman state began to produce its own scholars in significant quantities so that we note that of the nineteen scholars in the reign of Bayezid I, whose origins are given in the *Şakâik-i Nu'mâniyye*, eleven were educated within the Ottoman territories and eight were immigrants.¹⁰ To the five colleges which had been established in Bursa before the reign of Bayezid I, the following colleges were added in his reign: Ali Paşa, Ebû İshak, Gülçiçek Hatun, Eyne Bey, Eyne Bey Subaşı, Ferhâdiyye, Molla Fenârî, Vâziyye and Yıldırım.¹¹ In the college of Eyne Subaşı there was an upper room set aside for books.¹² Unfortunately the deeds for this college have not survived and consequently we have no information on its

⁹ *Şakâik-i Nu'mâniyye*, p. 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16-34.

¹¹ Mustafa Bilge, *İlk Osmanlı Medreseleri*, İstanbul 1984, pp. 102-115.

¹² Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

organization or collection. It is very likely that other colleges also had libraries, but it is difficult to find any reference to them as their foundation deeds and all other relevant documents were probably destroyed during the period of the invasion and occupation led by Timur Leng.

Apart from Bursa, other cities were also endowed with colleges during Bayezid I's reign.¹³ In one of these, Eyne Bey Subaşı's college in Balıkesir, a library was established and a librarian appointed.¹⁴ Another college to be furnished with a library was Bayezid I's own foundation in the city of Bolu. Although there is no mention of a librarian being on the staff,¹⁵ there is conclusive evidence that Bayezid established a library in this college.¹⁶

With the defeat of Bayezid I by Timur Leng in 1402, the Ottoman presence in Anatolia was weakened considerably and a period of civil war, which lasted for eleven years, began. During this interregnum the efforts of the Ottomans were spent in consolidating the political position, leaving little time for the expansion of the educational infrastructure. With the emergence of Mehmed I as the undisputed ruler of the Ottoman state we see the establishment of some more colleges, but in only one do we have evidence of a library: in the college built by Sultan Mehmed at Merzifon a book-binder was appointed,¹⁷ suggesting the existence of a library.

On the death of Mehmed I, Murad II inherited a state which enjoyed political unity, and the Ottomans began to enjoy a period of cultural resurgence, especially after the relocation of the capital to Edirne in Europe.¹⁸ Murad II was a patron of scholars and poets, and it is claimed by Latifî that he spent two days a week in their company.¹⁹ As a result, many books were written in this period, most of which were dedicated to him.²⁰

¹³ Bilge, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-207.

¹⁴ Başbakanlık Arşivi (Prime Ministry Archives), Ruus 64, p. 295.

¹⁵ Ayverdi, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

¹⁶ Documents to this effect are in the private collection of Turgut Kut.

¹⁷ Belediye Library (İstanbul), Mc. o. 70, p. 335.

¹⁸ Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 1, Cambridge 1976, p. 142.

¹⁹ *Tezkire-i Latifî*, İstanbul 1314, p. 60.

²⁰ Uzunçarşılı gives a list of these books in *Osmanlı Tarihi*, vol. 1, Ankara 1972, pp. 539-542.

In 1430 Murad II built a *Darülhadis* college in Edirne on the banks of Tunca river.²¹ In the deeds for this college, drawn up on 24 March 1435, it is stated that the Sultan endowed books for the benefit of the students and teachers of the college.²² Although the deeds make no mention of a librarian, we observe from an account book for the years January 1489-June 1491 that a certain Sinan was paid 2 aspers daily to act as a librarian, the money coming from the surplus funds for that period.²³ This would suggest that as no post of librarian was envisaged in the deeds, the shortcoming was made up on an *ad hoc* basis by paying a person out of surplus revenues of the foundation. According to the deeds, this library was open to students and teachers of the college.²⁴ As all of the 71 volumes were in Arabic, the language of scholarship, it is hardly likely that there would have been much demand for access to the library by the lay community.

Murad II also founded the Saatli Medrese in Edirne, which was to become the most important Ottoman college of its day, and maintained its reputation as the leading institution of higher education up to the time of the foundation of the Sahn-ı Seman college in 1470 by Mehmed II after the conquest of Istanbul.²⁵ Although the deeds are not extant, we can see from some later documents that a librarian had been appointed at a daily stipend of two aspers.²⁶ According to a record, dated 1586, when the administration of the college was amalgamated with that of the Darü'l-hadith college mentioned above, the posts of the librarians were reorganized so that in the amalgamated structure of the colleges, one of the librarian's post was made into that of assistant librarian.²⁷

Two further libraries were established in Edirne during the reign of Murad II. The first, a mosque library, founded by Gazi

²¹ Mustafa Bilge, *İlk Osmanlı Medreseleri*, İstanbul 1984, p. 140.

²² Topkapı Palace Archive, D. 7081.

²³ Belediye Library (İstanbul), Mc. 0.91, p. 263 and 270.

²⁴ Topkapı Palace Archive, D. 7081.

²⁵ Şahabettin Tekindağ, "Medrese Dönemi", *Cumhuriyetin 50. Yılında İstanbul Üniversitesi*, İstanbul 1973, pp. 11-12.

²⁶ Ömer L. Barkan, "Edirne ve Civarındaki Bazı İmaret Tesislerinin Yıllık Muhasebe Bilançoları", *Belgeler* 1/2 (Ankara 1965), p. 322.

²⁷ Başbakanlık Arşivi, M. Müd. 5455, p. 18.

Mihal Bey in 1422, is known to us through a reference to the appointment of a librarian to this mosque.²⁸ The second, also a mosque library, was founded by Fazlullah Paşa, who appointed a librarian to it with a stipend of 3 aspers daily.²⁹ Libraries were also established outside Edirne during the reign of Murad II. In Skopje a library was founded in the college of Ishak Bey, the first Ottoman library to be established in what is present day Yugoslavia.³⁰ One of Murad II's vezirs, Saruca Paşa, founded a college in Gelibolu (1443) and endowed it with eighteen books. The foundation deeds of the college makes no provision for a librarian.³¹

The best documented library in this period is that founded by Umur Bey, son of Kara Timurtaş Paşa, who endowed some text books to his college in Bergama and several Turkish books in his mosque in Bursa. We have documents and deeds drawn up in different years by him for endowments in Bursa, Bergama and Biga. According to the earliest deed prepared in April of 1440, Umur Bey donated some Arabic text books to the college, which he had founded in Bergama, for the use of students and teachers and 33 volumes of Turkish books to the mosque he had built in Bursa, to be used by the congregation.³² In his endowment deed, he places books into two categories: Arabic books which were destined for the college where they would be used as texts, and the Turkish books which were to be sent to the mosque where they were to be available for the common man who had little or no knowledge of Arabic or Persian. In this deed we find that the books are endowed on the condition that they may not be taken out of college or mosque.³³ For the safekeeping of the Turkish books he provided a salary of one asper per day for the *muezzin*, who was placed in charge of the collection.³⁴

²⁸ BA. Ruus 64, p. 145.

²⁹ BA. Ruus 13.

³⁰ Hasan Kaleşi, "Yugoslavyada İlk Türk Kütüphaneleri", *Türk Kültürü*, IV/38 (Ankara 1965), p. 169; Hasan Kaleşi, *Nejstrariji Vakufski Dokumenti u Jugoslaviji na Arapskom Jeziku*, Pristina 1972, pp. 89-109.

³¹ M. Teyyib Gökbilgin, *XV-XVI. Asırlarda Edirne ve Paşa Livası*, İstanbul 1952, p. 248-252.

³² Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Archive, No. 591, p. 181.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

In a deed record written in Arabic in 1449 we discover that Umur Bey made the deposit of a pledge, a condition of borrowing, and emphasised that his books should remain within the city of Bursa.³⁵ A further document concerning his books can be found on the last page of a commentary entitled *Enfesü'l-Cevâhir*, one of the books he had endowed. In this document he lists the names of "sixty volumes of books" and places the following conditions on their keeping, borrowing, and control:

"It is furthermore a condition that these books should be placed in his ancestral *imaret* mosque and whosoever be shaykh of the *imaret* should be the supervisor and keep the books. Students and reciters of Koran and others should benefit from these books in ease, and the learned people who are not associated with this foundation should not benefit from the books unless they provide a reliable guarantor. If any such person use the books without providing a guarantor he should be cursed both in this world and the next, and his use of any book should be interdicted. And it is also a condition that as long as he [Umur Bey] lives he should be able to use his books both when journeying and while in residence [seferde ve hazerde]. Whosoever be the Sheykh of the *imaret* should check the books every six months".³⁶

In this document Umur Bey seems to have changed his original disposition and removed the books from his own mosque and placed them in his father's mosque and appointed the shaykh of the foundation (*imaret*) as guardian of the collection.

In the last of the endowment deeds prepared by Umur Bey in 1454 all the endowments are codified in their final form. Of the two copies of this endowment deed, one is inscribed in stone on both sides of the main doorway to his mosque.³⁷ The inscription placed in 859 H. represents a Turkish translation of part of the deeds, the original having been prepared in Arabic four months previously.

³⁵ Bursa Eski Eserler Library, Ulu Cami section, No. 435, f. 1a.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The transcription of the stone inscription can be found in several publications, the best version being in Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi's book: *Osmanlı Mimarisinde Çelebi Mehmed ve II. Sultan Murad Devri*, İstanbul 1972, p. 339-340.

In these two versions of Umur Bey's codification, we find his final instruction for the care of the books. In the complete Arabic version³⁸ Umur Bey states that the books, the titles of which are to be found on the obverse of the scroll, were for the benefit of all who could read and thereby profit from them. The administrator who was to be the guardian of the books was charged with distributing and collecting them.³⁹

In the original Arabic version no provision is made for housing the collection which now numbered some 300 volumes.⁴⁰ The Turkish inscription, however, adds the following condition which tells us where the books were to be kept: "I have detailed and endowed my books. They should not be taken from the mosque."⁴¹

From the examination of these four documents spanning two decades we see Umur Bey changing the arrangements for the care of his books several times and we can note a significant increase in the size of the collection. In fact, the number of the books probably continued to increase after 1454, the date of the last document, for we have a book endowed by Umur Bey in 1456.⁴²

The reason for the changes in the conditions placed on the lending, guardianship, and housing of the collection probably stems from the fact that at this period of Ottoman history there was little precedent for founding libraries on which Umur Bey could rely.

The libraries of this period were invariably endowed to colleges and mosques with the sole exception of the library at the tomb of Yazıcıoğlu Mehmet Efendi, the famous mystic poet buried in Gelibolu. We know little about this library, save that it was the first Ottoman library to be built at a shrine, and that it contained the works of Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed Efendi (including one autograph). Telhisizade Mustafa Efendi, an Ottoman *kadı*, on his way to Manisa, visited the tomb in 1712 and noted the following in his diary:

³⁸ The complete Arabic scroll, now in the Belediye Library in İstanbul (No. 38), measures 5.15 metres in length by 27 cm. width. It bears the signature of the judge of Bursa, Molla Hüsrev.

³⁹ Belediye Library, Mc. 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Ayverdi, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁴² Murat Yüksel, "Kara Timurtaşoğlu Umur Bey'in Bursa'da vakfettiği Kitaplar ve Vakıf Kayıtları", *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 31 (August 1984), p. 143.

Sunday, beginning of the month of Ramazan 1124. Anchored at Gallipoli. I left the ship and visited the tomb of Yazıcıoğlu Mehmed Efendi. I offered up a prayer at his tomb and saw the autograph manuscript of his work which is very famous . . . ⁴³

A document from a later period records that the librarian at his tomb was unsalaried. ⁴⁴

Another two libraries founded in this period are mentioned by Osman Nuri Peremeci, who, writing at the beginning of this century, claimed that Murad II and Şahabeddin Paşa founded libraries in Filibe. ⁴⁵ However, there is no documentary evidence to support this assertion, which should therefore be treated with caution.

Thus we see that the salient characteristics of the medieval Ottoman library was that it contained a small collection, and sometimes did not have a librarian appointed for its custody. When librarians were appointed, it was usually on a part-time basis and they were, therefore, poorly paid, and the work often being carried out by the existing staff of the institution, usually a mosque or college, to which the library had been endowed.

With the conquest of Istanbul by Murad II's son, Mehmed II, the Ottoman state came of age and acquired a city fit for the endowment of numerous colleges and libraries. Thus was completed the first stage in the history of Ottoman cultural institutions, a stage which witnessed its development from a fledgling Turkish beylik in Anatolia to an empire straddling two continents with its capital in the ancient city of Istanbul. The middle part of the fourteenth century had consisted of a slow expansion into Christian territories where there had been no tradition of Islamic book production and it is only towards the end of century that we can confidently talk about an Ottoman library as such. The beginning of the fifteenth century saw little development due to the civil strife following the Ottoman defeat in 1402 at the Battle of Ankara. For the second quarter of the fifteenth century the momentum behind the establishment of colleges, mosques, and libraries increased rapidly so that the Ottoman state was poised, on the eve of the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, for an explosion in the development of its cultural institutions.

⁴³ BA (Başbakanlık Arşivi), Kepeci section, No. 7500, p. 32.

⁴⁴ Başbakanlık Arşivi, Cevdet-Maarif, No. 5043.

⁴⁵ *Tuna Boyu Tarihi*, İstanbul 1942, p. 191.