

## ***Memories of My Turkish Abi***

### **Türk Ağabeyimle Hatıralar**

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It was September 1992 when I took over as IFLA Secretary General. Quite a serious responsibility for a relatively young library professional from the Netherlands. Working with an experienced team at IFLA HQ and with an inspiring and experienced President (Robert Wedgeworth), however, made the transfer from the National Library in The Netherlands quite smooth. When we discussed the challenges for the coming years with the retiring IFLA Secretary General and President, it became clear to Wedgeworth and myself that our first professional visit together should be to Ankara to discuss progress for the IFLA Conference in 1995. A first meeting during the Delhi Conference in August 1992 had indicated that there were some serious planning issues.

I was looking forward to this visit, particularly since Turkey had become one of my favourite holiday destinations since my first trip in 1986. Although my basic understanding of language and culture were very limited, I had a good feeling about the necessary collaboration to jointly work towards a successful Istanbul conference.

My memories of that first visit to Ankara are still very strong. It was my first visit to Ankara - and an impressive one (incl. the Ataturk Mausoleum and the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations). Furthermore, it was my first experience with real Turkish hospitality (outside of the tourist environment) - and a very rewarding experience too. Lastly, and most importantly, the visit provided for the confidence that the preparations for IFLA 95 were off to a good start.

I remember so very clearly Bob Wedgeworth's and my satisfaction with the fact that Hilmi Çelik was one of the prominent members of the Organizing Committee. As the Parliamentary librarian he had already played an active role in the IFLA Standing Committee for parliamentary librarians, under the leadership of the German parliamentary librarian Ernst Kohl.

With Hilmi's knowledge and experience of the IFLA 'machinery' he became an invaluable partner both for IFLA HQ and the IFLA Executive Board, and for his colleagues in Turkey, both in the Organizing Committee, the various committees and working groups and a special seminar for the parliamentary librarians. With Altınay Sernikli and Meral Alakus he was one of the three organisational pillars behind the ultimate success of the conference. Later (with the addition of Günes Kara) to become the Secretary General's Turkish 'Quartet'.

Hilmi, in particular, made great and important efforts to 'bridge the gap' between the IFLA team and the Turkish team. He used all means necessary for this (including raki, belly dancers, the enjoyment of hamsi, and much more), but most of all his warm personality and his humour. It was a serious contribution to the success of the first IFLA General Conference in Turkey. The Istanbul Conference was a very successful one attracting around 3000 participants, many of whom still revel in their Istanbul experiences.

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Hilmi himself wrote about our personal relationship in his autobiographical memoirs, saying about me “He did not have that “Gavur ukalalığı”, i.e. he did not have the ‘over-wise’ (‘too clever’) attitude of the foreigners. If he had, I think we would both suffer.” For me, Hilmi became my one and only Turkish Abi, and I used that term of endearment with so much enthusiasm that some people outside Turkey sometimes thought his name was Mr. Abi.

Those personal experiences have made the friendship last beyond the Istanbul Conference. Our first meeting after the conference itself was in 1995 too, at the end of the year, when I visited Ankara to finalize the financial books and thank the Organizing Committee. For a long time I have treasured Hilmi’s gift on that occasion, a special coffee-set marked H.C. He presented this to me as a very special object from his family (hence his own initials on it). I carried it home like it was not made of porcelain, but something much more valuable and it has always occupied a place of pride in my house.

Whenever or wherever on the planet we would meet in the years after, and there would be time and opportunity for 'monkey business' (one of Hilmi's favourite pastimes), we would continue to build our friendship, amidst mutual enjoyment and abundant laughter.

I was aware of his move from the Parliamentary Library to Sabanci University Library around 1997. When we met we obviously talked about it and I was impressed by the pride that he took in building up the library, reflecting on his international experiences and his focus on the needs of both the researchers and the students. I remember him talking about it when he visited my house in 1998, after the IFLA General Conference in Amsterdam, at which occasion I could show him his coffee cups in my house.

So, when I had an opportunity to visit Istanbul again in 2008 (trying to lay the foundation for a special exhibit in the Netherlands’ Book Museum on Turkish manuscripts), I was not going to miss the opportunity to see his library. Hilmi gave me a personal tour of his library, really enjoying my interest and taking great pride in what the library had grown into in some 10 years.

After the visit Hilmi asked me to sit down in his office and told me he had something difficult to share with me. I had no idea what he was going to discuss. He then told me that he needed to explain about the special gift he gave me in 1995. First of all, I received a copy of his book *Hüzünleri Tasidim Sevincleri Yasadim – Anılar*. He then pointed me to the story H.C. on page 293. For those readers that don’t know the book (I warmly recommend it) I will only say that he admits that the coffee-set he gave me was NOT from his family, but he had been provided with one of the packages prepared for the special guests of Mr. Hüsamettin Cindoruk, the President of the Parliament (also H.C.). I must say I was taken completely aback for a short while, but very happy to see Hilmi’s relief that he could leave the deceit and falsification behind us. It had clearly bothered him. That night we shared a drink together, knowing that we had an extra joke that we would share many a time in the future. Later, my Turkish abla Sönmez Taner translated the H.C.-chapter for me, so I could enjoy the whole background to the story.

My visit to Istanbul also allowed me to reconnect with Günes Kara, who had a strong role in the support of the work of the 1995 Organizing Committee. In 2008 she was the deputy university librarian at Koc University Library. As my Abi, it was clear that Hilmi was going to be amongst the first to know that after the visit special feelings had developed between me and a Turkish lady librarian. It was a happy tidings for us that Hilmi was very much supportive of our special bond (later: a marriage), that – like the friendship between Hilmi and me - had grown out of working together for the IFLA Conference.

My wife Günes and I kept in touch with Hilmi, also since his retirement. Obviously, Hilmi missed his (international) library network, but enjoyed his holiday house on the coast and his

family. The last time we met him in his summer house, he had invited his whole family and we enjoyed reminiscing and talking, while he was entertaining and grilling the köfte at the same time.

To me, Hilmi's passing last month came unexpected. I feel he had deserved to enjoy his retirement much longer. Hilmi has made a difference in my life and that of many others. May he rest in peace. Goodbye, my dear Abi.

## Özet

Eylül 1992'de nispeten genç sayılabilecek bir yaşta IFLA Genel Sekreterliği görevini üstlenmiştim. O zamanki IFLA Başkanı Robert Wedgworth ile ilk resmi ziyaretimizi, 1995'de İstanbul'da düzenlenecek olan IFLA Konferansı ile ilgili görüşmek üzere Ankara'ya yapmıştık. 1986'daki ilk ziyaretimden sonra Türkiye benim favori tatil bölgelerimden biri olmuştu. Ankara ziyaretim de oldukça etkileyiciydi. Hilmi Çelik Düzenleme Komitesi'nin önemli isimlerindendi ve üyesi olduğu IFLA Parlamento Kütüphanecileri Komitesi'nde de aktif rol oynuyordu. IFLA 'mekanizması' hakkında sahip olduğu bilgi ve tecrübesiyle Hilmi Çelik, IFLA Genel Merkezi, Yürütme Kurulu, Türkiye'deki meslektaşları, Düzenleme Komitesi ve diğer komite ve çalışma grupları için paha biçilmez bir ortak olmuştu. Hilmi Çelik IFLA grubu ile Türk grubu arasındaki boşluğu doldurmak için önemli ölçüde çaba sarf etmiştir. Bunu, geleneksel Türk misafirperverliğinin yollarından ziyade özellikle kendi sıcak şahsiyeti ve şakacı yanını kullanarak başarmıştır. Yaklaşık 3000 katılımcı çeken IFLA 1995 Konferansı'nın çok başarılı geçmesindeki ciddi katkısı yadsınamaz. Benim için "bunda gavur ukalalığı yok" derdi. Hilmi Bey benim için sahip olduğum tek ve Türk ağabeyimdi. Türkiye dışında Abi kelimesini büyük bir heyecanla kullandığımda onun adının Mr. Abi olduğunu sanıyorlardı.

Bu şahsi tecrübelerimiz arkadaşlığımızı İstanbul Konferansı sonrasında da sürdürmemizi sağlamıştı. 1995 yılının sonuna doğru Ankara'yı tekrar ziyaret ettiğimde Hilmi Bey'in ailesinden çok özel bir obje olarak hediye ettiği H.C. damgalı kahve seti benim için çok değerli olup, evimde her zaman gurur veren bir yer işgal etmiştir. Yeryüzünde nerede ve ne zaman karşılaştıysak Hilmi Bey'in geçmişteki favori anılarını konuşmak ve birlikte eğlenceli, bol kahkahalı vakit geçirmek için fırsat bulmuşuzdur. 1997'de Meclis Kütüphanesi'nden Sabancı Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi'ne geçtiğini biliyordum. 1998'de Amsterdam'da evimi ziyaret ettiğinde onun uluslararası tecrübesini yansıtarak, hem araştırmacılar, hem de öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarına odaklanarak bir kütüphane inşa etmesinden duyduğu gurur beni çok etkilemiştir. 2008'de kendisini ziyaret ettiğimde, on senede kütüphanesinin geldiği nokta onu gururlandırmış ve benim ilgimden hoşnut kalmıştı. Bana önce Hüzünleri Taşımam Sevdiğim Yaşadım – Anılar kitabını vermiş, sonra da bana hediye ettiği H.C. damgalı kahve setinin hikayesini anlatmıştı (bkz. s. 293). Aslında H.C. kendisinin değil, o dönemdeki Meclis Başkanı Hüsamettin Cindoruk'un isim ve soyadının baş harfleriydi ve kahve seti de onun özel ziyaretçileri için hazırlanmış hediyelerden biriydi. Böylece Hilmi Bey bu aldatmacayı arkamızda bıraktığı için rahatlamıştı.

Türk eşim Güneş Kara ile olan özel bağımızda ve evliliğimizde hep destekçimiz olmuştur. Hilmi Bey ile olan ilişkimiz emekliliği sonrasında da devam etmiştir. Uluslararası kütüphanecilik ortamını özliyordu ama deniz kıyısındaki yazlık evinin ve ailesinin de keyfini çıkarıyordu. En son yazlık evinde buluşmuş, bizi mangalda yaptığı köfteler ve hoş sohbetiyle eğlendirmişti. Hilmi Bey'in ölümü çok ani oldu. Emekliliğinin tadını daha uzun yıllar çıkarmalıydı. Benim olduğu kadar başkalarının hayatında da farklılık yaratmıştır. Huzur içinde yatsın. Güle güle çok sevgili ağabeyim.

