

Manuscripts and Rare Books Libraries in Turkey

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The first Turkish-Islamic libraries were founded in Khorasan.

Some 30.000 manuscripts had been found in the excavations in the big cities where Uigur Turks lived.

The largest library of the State of Samanids is the one named after Nuh Ibn Nasr. The great physician Avicenna was the keeper of this library. Avicenna reached the highest scientific level by studying the books in that library. A library called "Sayvan-al Hikme" was set up in Isfahan, too. It contained the works of Fârâbî as well. Most of the books in this library were studied and corrected by Farabi. Avicenna wrote his famous work *Kitâb al-Shifa* (Book of Healing [of the Soul]) by making use of that library's books.

The library of the Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, a famous one in the State of Ghaznavid, is a palace library. There were several manuscripts in this library written on behalf of the Sultan and dedicated to him. The great Persian poet Firdawsi wrote his famous "Şahname" (The Book of Kings) for this Turkish sultan (in which he said he reanimated the Persian history and language). The original copy of the manuscript could be found in the library.

There were 10 libraries in the city of Merv only during the great Seljuks period. These libraries even lent books to their users. Sultans used to be brought up as booklovers and they used to have their ownership marks (temellük kaydı) on the books in their libraries. The library collection of the Sultan Sencer, called "Hizanetü's Sultan," was the most famous among them. The Sultan of Mongolia Hülagu Khan set up a 400.000-volume library in Meraga for the name of the great scientist Nasireddini Tusi by collecting several books from different collections and from libraries in Baghdad, Damascus, and Mesopotamia. Besides sultans, the viziers also used to set up libraries.

It is known that one of the great Seljuk viziers Nizam al-Mülk had established scientific libraries within the madrasas of the Regular Army in Baghdad and Nishapur.

Şemseddin Altınaba and Sadreddin Konevi had established libraries, in 1201 and 1274 respectively, in the İplikçi Madrasa in Konya during the Anatolian Seljuks period. Many Seljuk sultans and commanders had valuable copies of Qorans written and send them to several places as gifts. They added several books in Arabic and Persian on *tefsir* (commentary on the Qoran), *hadith* (words of the Prophet Mohammad), medicine, history and sufism to their collections by having them first translated to Turkish. Thus, they enabled people to promote their level of literacy. This curiosity of books and exchange of scientists had continued

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during the period of Anatolian Principalities. Today's manuscript collections of Turkish libraries contain several books written during those periods.

We see that books had been copied and the special sections of madrasas and mosques in cities had been converted to manuscript libraries during the Ottoman period. Sultans being at the forefront, and several Turkish dignitaries collected books and offered them to the use of the humanity. They set up waqfs whose income came from their own wealth, not from the state's treasury.

All Ottoman sultans set up libraries in the mosques they had established and set aside a section containing the Qoran and *kıraat* books (science of reciting the Qoran) as well as books on tefsir, hadith, *fikh* (the science of religious law in Islam), *kalâm* (theology), and *siyer* (canon laws of Islam). Also, they set up libraries containing books according to the scientific disciplines studied in their madrasas. We learn from the books in their collections that, besides theological studies, astronomy and mathematics were also studied.

Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror had collected exquisite books that were embroidered, embellished and bound in his embroidery houses (*nakışhane*) and binderies of the Topkapı Palace, the Fatih Mosque and the Madrasa, and the Mosque of Abu Eyyub Ensari, and offered them to the use of humanity under the name of the 'The Conqueror's collections'. Manuscripts are crowning those collections as the masterpieces of art. Also there is a group of valuable works in Latin in the Topkapı Palace. (Deisman published a special catalog for these works.)

When he was in Amasya as the governor, Bayezid II was sending the books that he copied with his teacher Şeyh Hamdullah to the collection of the Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror and creating a very valuable collection of books for himself from rare scientific books. After he became the Sultan, he set up two *külliyes*, one each in Istanbul and Amasya, and donated very important manuscripts to the mosque libraries. He reviewed all his father's books regularly every day and stamped the first and last pages of the manuscripts that he checked with his *tuğra*.

In the *vakfiye* (the deed of trust of the waqf) of the Amasya Library, one can find several interesting records ranging from an explanation of how to use the library to the salaries of staff to the control of books by counting them. Those library rules are very important records showing that we used to have libraries before the discovery of the continent of America.

Sultan Selim was a booklover, poet and scientist who would take his scientists with him even to wars, have scientific talks with them on the way, read, and have them read to him. While returning from Egypt, he brought the private manuscript library of Kansu Gavri to Istanbul with him and opened it to the use of humanity.

Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent established libraries in the Şehzade and Süleymaniye mosques and madrasas and in the palace in Istanbul which contained very valuable manuscript collections. Great scientists wrote several books in his time, thereby increasing the number of scientific works. Today, most of the manuscripts in Istanbul were brought together in the first and second madrasas of the Süleymaniye Külliye established by Süleyman the Magnificent, and they were opened to the use of researchers from all over the world. In addition, the usefulness of these collections is increased by providing photocopy and microfilming services. The Süleymaniye Library, which consists of libraries such as Atıf Efendi, Hacı Selim Ağa, Köprülü Koca Ragıp Pasha, and Nuruosmaniye

and various manuscripts collections transferred to the Library since 1915, is the largest and most valuable Islamic manuscripts collection in the world.

Precious manuscripts collections were survived ranging from the mosque and madrasa collections of Sultan Ahmed I to the collections of the New Mosque of Ahmed III, from the Ayasofya collection of Mahmud I (it was Sultan Mahmud I who had the mosque libraries of Fatih, Süleymaniye and Ayasofya built and started the building of Nuruosmaniye mosque and library), from the madrasa library established by Abdulhamid. Aside from sultans, valide sultans (mother of the reigning sultan) and daughters of sultans also set up manuscripts collections. Among the most important ones are those of Mihrimah Sultan, Gülnuş Valide Sultan, Esmehan (İsmihan) Sultan, Nurbanu Sultan, and Turhan Valide Sultan. The valuable manuscript collections of Pertevniyal Sultan are in the service of users in the Süleymaniye Library today.

The sadrazams, viziers, sheikhulislams and other religious dignitaries also took place in the competition of establishing libraries and donating them. Thus, unequaled collections in Istanbul and all over the country continue to be open to the use of humanity for centuries.

Along with the abovementioned collections, thousands of manuscripts in the collections of the Istanbul Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul University Library, Bayezit State Library, Fatih National Library and Molla Murad Library are open to the use of and continue to serve researchers from all over the world. To know the collections of the abovementioned libraries better, selected samples of calligraphy, gilding, miniature, marble paper and binding that were primarily developed by Turkish artists, are presented here.

Translated by Yaşar Tonta



1. Marble paper



2. İstefan b. Basil *Kitabü'l-Haşayiş fi't-Tıp*. Arabic, 154 leaves, Nesih. (Ayasofya 3703)



3. Kelâmi. Vekayi-i Ali Paşa. Turkish, 1-61 leaves, Talik. (Halet Efendi 612)



4. Sa'di-yi Şirazi, Muslihad-din Sa'di b. Abdullah. Persian, 1008 H. 322 leaves. (Cover, lacquered binding) (Muğla Hoca Mustafa Efendi 84)



5. Seljuki gilding, *Ed'iyet al-Eyyam al-Seb'a*. Arabic. 682 H. Yakut el-Mustasimi. Sülüs-Nesih 18 leaves. (Ayasofya 2765)



6. Müslim b. el-Haccac el-Kuşeyri an-Nisaburi. *Camiü's-sahih*. Arabic, 622 leaves. 1157 H. Nesih (binder of the cover and mikleb by Çakeri 1157 H.). (Hacı Beşir Ağa 163)



7. *Qoran*. Arabic, 1167 H. Şevketzade Muhammed b. Ahmed Han. 349 leaves, Nesih (cover). (Yeni Cami 1)



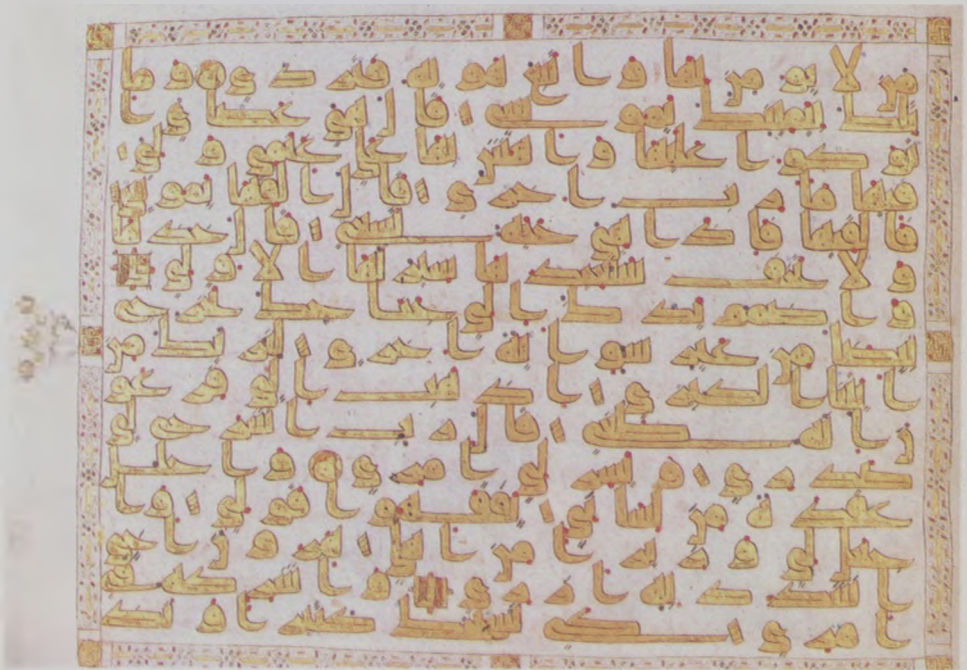
8. Calligraphy on marble paper by Necmeddin Okyay



9. *Qoran*. Arabic, 358 leaves, 1205 H. Üsküdarlı Salih. (signature of the gilder. Hasan el-Üsküdari). (Pertevniyal)



10. Baykara, Sultan Hüseyin. *Divan*. Turkish, 96 leaves. Talik. (Herat gilding). (Ayasofya 3911)



11. A page of Qoran with Kûfi calligraphy. Hz. Ali b. Ebi Talib. (Nuruosmaniye 27)