

Turkish Archival Studies

İsmet Binark*

The Importance and Value of Archives

Every nation owns an historical heritage. An important part of this heritage consists of cultural properties, both material and virtual, such as archives, libraries and ancient remains. These cultural properties play a big role in being and continuing to be a nation.

Archives are the deed of a country, the identity, the diary, and the whole existence of a people, the fundamental feature and the most valuable cultural and historical treasury of a country connecting the past with the present and the present with the future by carrying the rights and the priorities.

History of the Turkish Archives

The ancient archives of the Turkish administrative and cultural life reach out to the period of the Middle Asia Turks. The Turkish people having a very old history and a wealthy culture also owns the archives of its history and culture.

The Uigur Turks were one of the most civilized people during the Middle Ages. In their cities there were rich libraries, official institutions, notaries, custom organizations, law courts and archives where official correspondence was preserved.

Today it is known that the idea of archives has always been present since the very early periods as a state tradition deriving from the Anatolian Seljuks and the other Turkish states.

All the written records of state affairs including their draft copies were preserved with care, because in the Turkish-Muslim tradition respect is shown to the written paper.

Archival Practices and the Importance and Value of Our Archives During the Period of the Ottoman State

The fact that archives have been present since the earliest period of the Ottoman State is evident by the millions of archival documents which have been preserved without any destruction.

The archival phenomenon has been alive for a very long period since the very beginning of the Ottoman State which had been a strong and influential state among the Middle and Near East, the Balkan and the Mediterranean countries.

* Mr. İsmet Binark is the General Director of the State Archives of Turkey

For this reason, the Ottoman Archives are forming an example of institutions where administrative records were arranged by the state and preserved up till the present.

The official correspondence of the Ottoman State, being the archival material of the central organization, is preserved in Istanbul at the Prime Ministry General Directorate of the State Archives, Directorate of Ottoman Archives. In some museums, libraries, religious institutions and other official institutions, there are also valuable archival records relating to the history of this period.

The richest and most valuable archival material inherited from the Ottoman State is also preserved in the Prime Ministry General Directorate of the State Archives, Directorate of Ottoman Archives. The Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives holds registers, registration books and records of the offices of the Divân-ı Hümâyûn, Bâb-ı Defter-î and the Bâb-ı Âsafî (Bâb-ı Âlî) which were all central administrative bodies of the Ottoman State. Due to the features of its archival holdings, the Ottoman Archives carries the feature of being undoubtedly the state archives of this period.

Apart from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives, the following archives are important, too, and they are more specific in the holdings of their archival material: Archives of the Museum at the Topkapı Palace which was in a way the archives of the Palace, Archives of Donation (Vakfiyeler) which holds registers and records of deeds of trust relating to pious donations within the Ottoman social community, Archives of Şer'î Siciller holding the decisions, the evidences and the final sentences of the Kadi at the courts, Archives of the General Directorate of Registration and Cadastre of Real Estates (Kuyûd-ı Kadime) holding registration books of title deeds and written surveys of land and records of these procedures.

It is also known that in the archives of various countries there are a lot of archival records relating to the Turkish history of the Ottoman period.

The first modern Turkish archival institution, the so-called *Hazine-i Evrak*, was established by Sadrâzam (grand vizier) Mustafa Reşid Pasha who collected the records of the Divân-ı Hümâyûn,¹ the Bâb-ı Âsafî² and the Bâb-ı Defteri³ belonging to the central organization of the Ottoman State.

During the period of the Ottoman State, archives were considered important. For this reason, our ancestors who perceived that archives are the historical and cultural treasury of a people, called their archival organization *Hazine-i Evrak*, treasury of records. It was also called *Mahzen-i Evrak* (storeroom of records) and *Müstahfaz-ı Evrak* (guardian of records). We notice that equivalents of the terms such as 'conservateur' and 'keeper' used as protector of archives in the archival terminology of western languages, were also used by the Ottomans.

Turkey who has taken over a valuable historical heritage of the Ottoman State is now one of the few countries owning rich archives both in quantity and in quality. This rich and precious archival heritage, passed over to the Turkish Republic from the Ottoman State which had dominated the three continents

¹ The name of the assembly responsible for state affairs meeting under the head of the Vezir-i Âzam. It is also called *Divân*, today's Council of the Ministers.

² Today's Prime Ministry. Until the end of the 18th century it was called *Vezir Kapısı*, *Miri Saray*, *Paşa Sarayı*, *Bâb-ı Âsafî*, or *Sadrâzam Kapısı*. During the period of Abdülhamid I, it was called *Bâb-ı Âlî*.

³ Today's Organization of Finance, also called *Defterdar Kapısı*

expanding over a wide geographical area for a period longer than six hundred years and ruled various peoples under one state, is the only authentic and unique source not only for Turkey but also for various new nations. Having established their own states these new nations that emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman State want to make use of those records to determine and write their national and common histories.

Our archives also include records on Acculturation which is a new field of study in international scientific literature of the second half of the 20th century. Acculturation is the effect of one culture on another; in other words, the intercultural confrontations and changes. In our archives there are various valuable sources on the culture and civilization of the Ottoman State on one side and on the cultures and civilizations of the Western countries on the other.

The most important feature of the Ottoman archives is their special value regarding the clarification of the cultural, economic and political histories of countries in the Middle and Near East, the Balkans, the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. They also prove and preserve international rights. Moreover, they are, when necessary, the legal support of the rights of individuals.

Work Done During the Republic Period to Improve Archival Services

After the establishment of the Republic, the archival subject taken over from the Ottoman Administration has been rendered as a central administrative service by the Prime Ministry up to the present. The neglect of the services of the state archives has caused the following harmful results:

After the abolishment of the Ottoman State, the Republic Government reorganized the 'Hazine-i Evrak'. It was renamed as the 'Mahzen-i Evrak Mümeyyizliği' (Control Office of Records). This office was under the responsibility of the Private Secretariat of the Prime Ministry. All the records belonging to the Office of the Grand Vizier were kept in the Mahzen-i Evrak Mümeyyizliği. In 1927, this office was attached to the Undersecretariat of the Prime Ministry as the Assisting Directorate of the Hazine-i Evrak.

Meanwhile, in 1976, the Directorate of Republic Archives was established under the pioneering efforts of the present author with the directives of the former Undersecretary of the Prime Ministry, Mr. Ekrem Ceyhun, as part of the Prime Ministry Organization. The aims of establishing the mentioned directorate are to have the archival and potential archival material of the Republic period controlled by the General Directorate of the State Archives; to preserve, organize, and classify these records according to archival methods and techniques; to produce them for research and to render all these services individually and centrally.

As a result, there was no more doubt about the future, preservation, maintenance, use, and the fate of all the records belonging to the state which had accumulated during and after the National Struggle and after the declaration of the Republic. These were historical, administrative, political, judicial, economic, scientific, technical and cultural records showing the whole history of the above mentioned period, the birth of the Turkish Republic, the phases of progress and their results.

Finally, on 10 October 1984, according to the Prime Ministry Organization Law numbered 3056, the General Directorate of the State Archives was established.

Work Carried Out to Develop the Services of the State Archives According to “The Prime Ministry Organization Law” Numbered 3056

The Law numbered 3056 arranges the principles of the organization and functions of the Prime Ministry. Among the functions of the Prime Ministry, the one relating to the archives states:

g) To collect historical, judicial, administrative, economic, and scientific documents and records which are of interest for the Turkish State and people, to appraise and organize these records, to reproduce unique records by filming or microfilming, to build an archival laboratory in order to prevent the destruction of records, to follow up developments in the international archival field, and to publicize important archival material for native and foreign scientific media.

All the functions relating to the preservation and evaluation of our national archives are appointed to the Prime Ministry by statement (g) of the 2nd article of Law numbered 3056 and to the General Directorate of the State Archives the 11th article of the same Law by which the infrastructure of the reforms for our national archives has been founded.

Functions of the General Directorate of the State Archives

The functions of the General Directorate of the State Archives are:

- a) To state the principles of the national archival policy, to follow up and investigate the implementation of these principles,
- b) To collect, appraise and preserve all kind of information and records concerning the state and the people,
- c) To specify, collect, and buy archival material which belongs to various institutions, organizations or individuals, and to repair, restore, classify, translate and if suitable publish these,
- d) To follow archival and related scientific developments occurring abroad and in Turkey, to translate and publish works in this field; to introduce important and valuable archival material to native and foreign scientific media,
- e) To make collections of archival material which have historical, cultural and esthetic value and when necessary to establish an archival museum and to prepare exhibitions,
- f) To take measures in order to prevent the destruction of archival material,
- g) To provide the continuity of archival material by reproducing copies and to use applications such as filming, microfilming, photocopying, and when necessary other advanced techniques in order to convert the material to smaller volumes,
- h) To state the principles of research in the State Archives, to evaluate research request in the archives and when necessary to permit research,
- i) To collect, sort and classify all kind of information and archival material and to keep it always ready for research,

- j) To inspect the procedures of sorting, preserving and destruction in official institutions and organizations.

Before the mentioned Law had become effective, there were several legal regulations relating to archival services. But in spite of all the positive intentions, these have not been able to solve the archival matters fundamentally.

Until recently, the services of the state archives could not be developed satisfactorily as the legislation was not sufficient; there were organizational problems and the Organization lacked financial resources.

Consequently, "The Directorate of Ottoman Archives" and "The Directorate of Republic Archives" were brought together which both used to function separately. At the same time "The Directorate of Documentation" has also been established within the General Directorate of the State Archives.

The Directorate of Ottoman Archives in Istanbul is appointed to specify archival material belonging to the Ottoman period and the period before, and the Directorate of Republic Archives in Ankara, to the period of the National Struggle, the Governments of the Grand Turkish National Assembly, and the Republic period. These directorates are also appointed to control, preserve, and arrange archival materials according to archival methods and techniques, and to carry out scientific and technical activities for the assessment of these records by the state, science, and other bodies and individuals.

The Directorate of Documentation in Ankara is appointed to specify administrative documents, organize and control them centrally, classify them according to documentation methods and techniques for use by the state, science, and other bodies or individuals in order to supply required knowledge and documents in a practical and healthy way which are necessary for the services and activities of the Prime Ministry.

Legal Arrangements

Until recently, there was no legal description conforming to archival terminology for the terms archives, potential archives and records which need not to be preserved.

The Law numbered 3056 has formed a basis for new arrangements of the legislation which could provide administrative, legal and technical archival applications.

Under this framework:

– The Prime Ministry has prepared "A Decree In Force of Law Concerning the Destruction of Documents and Material Which Need Not Be Preserved", numbered 316, and published in the *Resmî Gazete* (Official Journal) on 4 April 1988 to replace the Law numbered 6696. This Decree states the objective and the scope of archival applications. It adopts the new arrangements which are wanted to be performed. It states the principles and methods for weeding and destruction procedures of records which need not be preserved and should be disposed of because they do not carry the features of archives but which are still kept in the archives of institutions and organizations. As a result, doubts on application arising from the former law were cleared. The mentioned Decree has become law on 28 September 1988.

– Another current arrangement was "The Regulation Concerning the Services of the State Archives", prepared by the Prime Ministry and published in the *Resmî Gazete* (Official Journal) on 16 May 1988. This regulation states the specification of archival material and potential archival material belonging to official institutions and organizations or to individuals, the prevention of their destruction, the preservation of

archival material under suitable conditions, the functions and authorities of the General Directorate of the State Archives, the relation of the State Archives with the institutions and organizations and their responsibilities, the use of archival material by the state, corporate bodies, individuals and science, and the weeding and destruction procedures of material which need not be preserved.

– Another new arrangement of the Prime Ministry is related to “The Principles to Which Native or Foreign Individuals or Corporate Bodies Must Conform to Carry Out Scientific Research and Investigation or to Take Examples”.

As was expressed before, the Prime Ministry has reorganized these principles and put into force the Decision of the Council of Ministers, numbered 89/14269, which states the essential principles that apply to real or corporate bodies either native or foreign wanting to carry out research or investigation in the State Archives.

With this Decision of the Council of Ministers, the procedures relating to the applications for research and investigation by native and foreign researchers have been minimized, the bureaucratic procedures have been simplified and the applications for research are answered within one or two days.

With these legislative arrangements, the future of our national archives has been secured and archival services have been tied to scientific archival discipline.

Evaluation of the Activities of the General Directorate of the State Archives

As a result of all these activities, it can be said that the reforms for the consultation of original sources in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives have been realized, in accordance with the national archival policy, in order to reveal historical realities in the light of science, to render a more rational service and to control the archives of the Republic period in a central way.

Thus, we have achieved our goal of establishing the Republic Archive, which will enlighten our cultural heritage, which will make Republic of Turkey and the future generations feel proud and which will give them our historical and national conscience.

Accepting the services of the state archives as a state policy by arranging the necessary regulations and by dealing with it at a national level and in a radical way, is extremely satisfactory and honorable not only for the Turkish State and people but also for Turkish culture, science and archives.

In order to put forward the historical past of the Turkish people it is necessary to make use of the authentic and original archival records in our archives and to make them available for scientific circles.

Making archives useful for the present is in a way providing the title deed of our geography.

It should be known that, first of all, archives are necessary for our national culture and identity as they are the first-hand and authentic sources of our national history and culture. We will find in our archives the common points of belief which will avoid the destruction of the structure of our society. By reviving archives, the respect for justice, rights and science shown by this noble people will be proven.

Reading List

- Aktaş, Necati ve İsmet Binark. (1986). *Ottoman archives = Başbakanlık Arşivi*. Amman: Research Center for Islamic History Art and Culture in Istanbul and the Centre for Archives and Manuscripts, University of Jordan.
- Binark, İsmet. (1980). *Arşiv ve arşivcilik bilgileri = Archives and archival information*. The Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate of the Republic Archives; publication no. 3 . Gn. no. 049. Ankara: The Prime Ministry Printing House.
- . (1980). "Arşivlerimizin değeri ve son Vak'anüvis Abdurrahman Şeref Bey'in 'Evrâk-ı Atıka ve Vesâik-i Tarihiyemiz' adlı yazısı" (The value of our archives and the essay of the last history writer Abdurrahman Şeref Bey entitled 'Evrâk-ı Afıka ve Vesâik-i Tarihiyemiz'), *Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği Bülteni* 29 (1): 23-38.
- . (1980). "Arşiv tarihimize ait kaynaklar: Musa Kâzım: Vesâik-i tarihiyemiz" (Sources of our archival history: Musa Kâzım: records of our history). *Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği Bülteni* 29 (4): 254-259.
- . (1981). "Bizde Devlet Arşivi konusu, kısa tarihçesi ve günümüzdeki gelişmeler" (The matter of state archives in Turkey: Its short history and the present developments). *Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği Bülteni* 30 (2): 57-66.
- . (1985). "Arşivlerle ilgili mevzuat, çalışmalar ve öneriler" (Legislation, work and suggestions relating to archives) *Symposium on Ottoman Archives and Ottoman Studies (May 1985, İstanbul)* içinde (215-248). Publications of the Foundation for Studies on Turkish-Arabic Relations; 1. İstanbul: Foundation for Studies on Turkish-Arabic Relations.
- . (1986). "Arşivlerimizin önemi ve değeri ve Osmanlı Devleti döneminde arşivlerimizin ıslahı ile ilgili olarak yapılmış çalışmalar" (The importance and value of our archives and the work done to improve our archives during the period of the Ottoman State. *The Fifth International Congress on Turcology (23-28 September 1985, İstanbul)*. içinde (155-162). İstanbul: İstanbul University Faculty of Letters Research Center for Turcology.
- . (1991). *Cumhuriyet Döneminde arşiv hizmetlerinin geliştirilmesi konusunda yapılmış çalışmalar ve Cumhuriyet Arşivi* (Work done to improve archival services during the Republican Period and the Republic Archives). The Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate of the Republic Archives; publication no. 11. Ankara: The Prime Ministry General Directorate of the State Archives.
- . (1994). *A short history of the Turkish archives and the activities of the General Directorate of the State Archives*. The Turkish Republic Prime Ministry General Directorate of the State Archives; publication no. 4. Ankara: The Prime Ministry General Directorate of the State Archives.