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Erünsal İsmail E.: *Ottoman Libraries: A Survey of the History, Development and Organization of Ottoman Foundation Libraries*. Cambridge, Mass.: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Harvard University 2008 (Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 84/Turkish Sources LXXIV). 254 Pages. ISBN 296794.

The book here under review is, as the author explains in the Preface, meant for a general readership, 'scholars interested in the development of libraries throughout the world' but who cannot read Turkish and, therefore, are not familiar with the literature in Turkish on the subject. Such people may get the impression from the Preface that the book is new, the more so because Erünsal calls the book 'the first comprehensive treatise on the Ottoman library' which 'will naturally have many defects and no doubt mistakes' that in the future hopefully will be made good (p. xv). But this impression is wrong. Although he refers the specialist to his 'books and articles in Turkish', he fails to mention that among the books is his pioneering study on Ottoman libraries of 1988.¹ Comparison between the text under review and his book of 1988 shows that our book clearly is a, for the most part, updated translation² of that earlier study. The main difference with the Turkish original is an additional chapter (number 6) on general developments after 1839, the year when mayor political and legal reforms were initiated by the state. (Erünsal had originally intended to devote a separate, third, volume to the modern period; the Ottoman

¹ *Türk Kütüphaneleri Tarihi* ("The History of Turkish Libraries") II, *Kuruluştan Tanzimat'a Kadar Osmanlı Vakıf Kütüphaneleri* ("Ottoman Endowment Libraries from the Foundation [of the Empire] until the Period of Reform"), Ankara 1988; a reprint under the slightly different title of *Osmanlı Vakıf Kütüphaneleri, Tarihi Gelişimi ve Organizasyonu* ("Ottoman Endowment Libraries, their Historical Development and Organization") appeared in Ankara in 2008.

² The translation was, it seems, made by Erünsal himself, with the assistance of Christopher Ferrard, cf. p. vii.

volume – the book published in 1988 – was originally marked ‘II’, and a first volume was to comprise the history of Turkish libraries before the Ottomans appeared on the historical scene.) Some of the chapters of the English version, including the additional one, had earlier been published in the journal *Libri* between 1987 and 1993 as is clear from footnotes at the beginning of the relevant chapters. In the Turkish journal *Belleten*, moreover, the author had published two long articles in English on the general history of Ottoman libraries entitled, respectively, ‘The Development of Ottoman Libraries from the Conquest of Istanbul (1453) to the Emergence of the Independent Library’ (in 1996), and ‘The Expansion and Reorganization of the Ottoman Library System 1752-1839’ (in 1998). Although Erünsal’s book of 1988 is mentioned in the bibliography, the articles are not. One wonders why the author does not explain the full history of this book in his Preface. There is nothing to be ashamed of; it is perfectly legitimate and also most desirable that important studies of this rare type are made more widely available to the scholarly world in updated versions and in a language everyone can read. The more so as the original book, moreover, had received little attention even from the specialists who can read Turkish. If we may rely on data in the Vienna *Turcology Annual*, only three reviews appeared in the years following 1988; these were written by Markus Köhbach (in German in 1989),³ Caroline Finkel and Orhan Şaik Gökyay (in, respectively, English and Turkish, in 1991).⁴ Neither has the author run out of steam, his assiduous research on Ottoman literature having since resulted in at least one other major, likewise pioneering and amazing publication, and like the book here discussed, based on massive archival research: *The Archival Sources of Turkish Literary History*.⁵ For ‘Turkish’ one should rather read here ‘pre-modern Ottoman’; as far as I can see the book does not cover materials later than 1800.

As has been pointed out in the earlier reviews, the publication of 1988 covers the history of Ottoman libraries financed by pious endowments from about 1400 – earlier data are almost non-existent – to 1839 and does not only pay attention to manuscripts and library collections but also, and in great detail, on institutional data as found in archival sources, mainly the endowment charters (*vakfiyes*) of the libraries. These data range from, to mention only a few examples, tasks and salaries of librarians and doormen, lending policies, budgets, cataloguing and dusting of manuscripts and maintenance of the buildings. Caroline Finkel has pointed out that little is said about the content of the collections gathered in the many libraries taken under scrutiny (‘consideration of the contents of the many libraries mentioned is unfortunately brief’), but that would clearly have been an impossibility, given the great number of libraries involved, both in Istanbul and the provinces. That is not to say that, with a few exceptions, most *vakf* libraries, especially the ones connected to mosques and *medreses*, usually contained a restricted range of a hundred or so preferred, ‘canonical’ (Arabic) texts related to grammar, logic, the law and other subjects taught in these institutions. Less ‘canonical’ however were collections found in independent

³ In *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 79 (1989), pp. 320-1.

⁴ In the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54 (1991), pp. 236-7, and *Tarih ve Toplum* 16.93 (1991), pp. 175-9.

⁵ In: *Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures* 85/Turkish Sources LXXV, The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Harvard University 2008.

libraries, such as the Köprülü Library in Istanbul, founded in 1667, or the Ragıp Paşa Library in the same city, founded in 1762, which offered more manuscripts and also texts of a different genre. The first could boast, for instance, of 90 volumes with Persian texts, the second even of 1165 with texts in that language (whereas the numbers of Turkish and Arabic manuscripts comprised, respectively, 326 and 2359, and 68 and 41 items).⁶

Around 1800, the centuries-old system of libraries financed by pious endowments and, more generally, the world of the handwritten manuscript in general came under pressure. Although *vakf* libraries kept being founded until well into the 20th century, their number declined. The conservative-religious nature of these libraries, Erünsal points out in Chapter 6, began to run out of fashion with the more enlightened readers and scholars, because it prevented the acquisition of works inspired by modernity, let alone in Western languages. Their preservation also declined after 1826 when the Ministry of Endowments, increasingly short of funds, took over their administration. Accessibility declined at the same time by the severe restriction of opening hours mainly caused by the paltry salaries of the staff fixed in the endowment charter and therefore increasingly eroded by inflation. Plans for reform were made from the second half of the 19th century onward, but none were realized owing, mainly, to juridical and financial problems and, above all, to the increasing marginalization of the traditional libraries: by 1918 they had become ‘more like museums than places of learning’ (p. 93). The early years of the Republic, finally, brought the end of the foundation library and the scattered Istanbul collections were concentrated in the Süleymaniye Library, which as a consequence became the world’s largest research library of Islamic manuscripts.

A final remark: Erünsal in his Preface writes that he was tempted to adopt ‘some contemporary approaches such as the theoretical as propounded by Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault’, but felt that ‘the story of the Ottoman Library was not yet ready for theoretical treatment such as this’ (p. xv). Should we really believe this? I am at a loss what this could mean anyway, apart from paying lip service to a trend begun in the US and now the accepted gospel in the humanities’ faculties of European universities as well, and clearly motivated by the wish to upgrade reputedly stuffy philological scholarship to the glittering heights of fashionable abstract philosophy. Gramsci, however, was a Marxist and Foucault a ‘Structuralist’, and, as far as I know, neither of them ever paid any serious attention to the history of the book or the history of libraries, although Foucault did publish a booklet of 30 pages in 1983 in which the word ‘library’ occurred: *La Bibliothèque fantastique* with the subtitle *À propos de La Tentation de saint Antoine de Gustave Flaubert*. There we read sentences like ‘*La Tentation* is the first literary work which takes into account these greenish institutions (*ces insitutions verdâtres*) where books accumulate and where the slow and certain vegetation of their knowledge grows. Flaubert is for the library what Manet is for the museum.’ And ‘Bouvard and Pécuchet [the protagonists of Flaubert’s unfinished last novel] are directly tempted by books, by their indefinite multiplicity, by the splash (*moutonnement*) of works in the gray space of the

⁶ Cf. Frédéric Hitzel, ‘Manuscripts, livres et culture livresque à Istanbul’, in: Hitzel, ed., *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman*, Aix-en-Provence 1999, p. 25.

library...’ (p. 27). What does Foucault mean by this? Does it point to a theory that some libraries are green and others gray? Joking apart, rather than getting lost on such illusory side-tracks, I prefer the English common sense approach as represented by the ‘classical source-based’ research (p. xvi) undertaken by Erünsal.

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