Ottoman Foundation Libraries in the Age of Reform: The Final Period

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With the inauguration of institutional reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century, the classical Ottoman library system, which had served Ottoman society and the educational infrastructure successfully for many centuries became increasingly obsolete as the new type of library began to appear. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century complaints about the conditions of foundation libraries markedly increased. Some attempts to redress the causes for the complaints were made, but these were generally unsuccessful. By the beginning of the twentieth century, these libraries had become institutions serving researchers in the field of Islamic culture and the occasional student pursuing the classical curriculum at the Islamic colleges. This article will trace the gradual process of these libraries to obsolescence and will attempt to discover the causes.

As we have seen in previous articles (Erünsal 1984, 1985, 1996), the Ottoman library system grew from humble beginnings in the fourteenth century, when relatively small collections of books were donated to mosques, colleges and dervish convents, into sophisticated independent institutions by the end of the eighteenth century. As libraries were set up exclusively as charities, they were administered, as were all public institutions in the Ottoman Empire, according to the wishes of the founder, which were articulated in the donation deeds; this arrangement was protected by law. At the beginning the librarian in a mosque or college would work in the library on a part-time basis and would most likely have held a position as an *imam* or teacher, depending on the type of institution to which the library was attached. However, by the end of fifteenth century we find that founders were not only donating their books, but also providing the collections with an income to pay the salaries of librarians and other expenses connected with the care of the collections. By the second half of the seventeenth century we find large independent libraries established with large collections, with their own buildings and the necessary staff to service them. These libraries were founded to meet the needs of the students and teachers in the numerous colleges throughout the Empire. The works housed were almost exclusively manuscripts on classical Islamic subjects, such as law, exegesis, philosophy and theology, and the texts were mostly in Arabic. In some cases collections would house rare books on history, poetry, mysticism and other subjects reflecting the particular literary taste of the donor, but as mentioned, the vast majority of books were college texts in Arabic.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Ottoman library system had matured into a sophisticated network of collections of manuscript works, adequate to meet all the needs of the educational system. Paradoxically, this came at precisely the moment when a series of political crises and disastrous wars had convinced Ottoman statesmen to embrace modernisation, which effectively meant Westernization. Western institutions were to be set up throughout the empire in the next century and whilst the Empire was sustained, albeit within increasingly reduced borders, until the First World War, older institutions, including foundation libraries, were rendered redundant. The earlier reforms, beginning in the late eighteenth century,

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failed due to the intransigence of the Janissary corps, at that time the corrupt and ineffective backbone of the army. Modernisation had to wait until 1826 when Mahmud II destroyed the Janissary corps and then proceeded to introduce institutions based on Western models. The process of modernisation effected all institutions in the Empire, not least of all the library system.

It should, however, be emphasised that the Western-looking elite was still a very small minority of the reading public and for the vast majority foundation libraries continued to flourish. Unlike the destruction of the Janissary corps, the dysfunctionality within the library system crept in slowly, almost imperceptibly. Even after the announcement of the programme of reforms within the Empire in 1839, foundation libraries continued to be established, even up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Among these, the most important were the Hüsrev Pasha library in Eyüp (1839), the Esad Efendi library in Sultanahmet (1846), the Sheikh Mehmed Murad library in Darülmesnevi in Fatih (1844), the Nafiz Pasha library in Yenikapi Mevlevihane (1851), the Sheikhülislam Arif Hikmet Bey library in Medine (1855), the Pertevniyal Sultan library in Valide mosque (1871), the Hasan Hüsnü Pasha library in Eyüp (1895), and the Haci Mahmud Efendi library in the Tekke of Yahya Efendi in Beşiktaş (1901) (Çavdar 1995). Of course there were also many other libraries with small collections established in Istanbul and throughout Empire. However the number of donations to existing libraries and the foundation of new libraries declined markedly in this period, reflecting to some extent the increasing obsolescence of the system.

One of the basic causes of the decline of foundation libraries was that it had not been possible to introduce the new knowledge into these libraries, as they were essentially alienated from the State by their status as charities governed by Islamic law. What is more, the scholars and librarians who were familiar with the libraries would not have been able to deal with the new subject headings, least of all the foreign books in Western languages. There was no way that the classical Ottoman library could be modernized. It had to be ignored while new libraries with librarians acquainted with Western languages and culture were founded to serve the requirements of the State. The State, however, did not wish to ignore

the old library system, indeed it realised that this was a rich cultural treasury which had to be preserved. Various attempts to safeguard the collections were made throughout the remaining years of the Ottoman Empire (BOA MF.KTV. 1/2, 3/90, 4/68, 5/15, 5/57, 5/71, 6/31, 6/58, 7/8, 8/10).

In 1823 all charitable institutions, libraries included, were brought together under the administration of a Ministry of Charitable Foundations (Öztürk 1995). After the announcement, in 1839, of the intention of the government to introduce wide-sweeping reforms throughout the Empire, the responsibility for administering the libraries, appointing and supervising the staff was handed to the newly established Ministry of Education (BOA Ayniyat Defteri no. 421, 19). However, as charitable foundations, foundation libraries still received their budget from the Ministry of Charitable Foundations, which meant that they were under the twin responsibility of both the ministries of Charitable Foundations and Education. This state of affairs was to last for the rest of the century, so that we see in a report, dated 1904, that this twin responsibility was seen as a fundamental problem for the well-being of the system of foundation libraries:

> The main reason for the foundation libraries being in a pitiful condition is the system of shared responsibility. In one aspect, being foundations, the salary of the librarians, the cost of repair of the library buildings, the repair of books and bindings is the responsibility of the Ministry of Charitable Foundations. The other aspect is that responsibility for supervising and inspecting the running of the library belongs to the Ministry of Education. It is this twin responsibility which causes the problem. For instance, when a library is closed by the Ministry of Charitable Foundations to carry out repair work, it becomes impossible for the Ministry of Education to inspect it, and thus it effectively loses control of the library. (Erünsal 1990; BOA.ŞD.Evkaf 126/4; BOA.MF.KTV. 3/11, 3/12)

To overcome this problem, the day-to-day running and decision making was handed to the Ministry of Education which would be responsible for all aspects of administration, except for finance, which was to be provided by the Ministry of Charitable Foundations (Öztürk 1995). Thus, in the budget discussion of 1907, the minister of Education was able to summarize the situation: "We are entirely responsible for the running of the foundation libraries; the Ministry of Charitable Foundations provides the income" (Meclis-i Mebu'usanın … 1910).

However, this transfer of responsibility did not create the desired effect and the condition of the foundation libraries continued to deteriorate. A minister of Charitable Foundations, in 1911, proposed that responsibility for foundation libraries should be transferred back to the Minister of Charitable Foundations:

> It is understood that the responsibility for running foundation libraries was recently given to the Ministry of Education. In my humble opinion, if the responsibility were to be transferred to the Ministry of Charitable Foundations, where the responsibility used to be in the past, we will not only be acting in accordance with the wills of the founders but we will thus ensure their survival. (Evkaf Nâzırı n.d.)

In 1912 responsibility for the foundation libraries was given back to Ministry of Charitable Foundations (Soysal 1998; Düstûr 1915), but this time the Government allocated 200,000 Turkish piastres to the ministry's budget to help cover the shortfall between income and expenditure (Takvîm-i Vekayi' n.d.). Although a special office, entitled the Directorship of Charitable Educational Foundations, was established to administer foundation libraries, it appears that neither the change of responsibility, nor the creation or activities of this new department actually benefited them (Erünsal 1990).

In 1912 and 1913 Turkey was involved in the two Balkan wars which were followed by the First World War and the War of Independence (1919–1922). By 1923, when the Republic was declared, Turkey had been at war for 10 years and Istanbul was still under foreign occupation. In the first years of the Republic it was noted that the foundation libraries were in a disastrous state, some being no more than storage rooms for unread books. It was recommended that these libraries be re-opened and made available to scholars (Guyaş 1925).

It seems that from the turn of the century the decline in the condition of libraries began to accelerate. The criticism leveled at the deteriorated state of the libraries, be it in newspapers, official documents, reports, or noted by foreign travellers, dwelled on the irregular and unannounced opening times, the poor salaries allocated to librarians who were often incompetent, the poor condition of the books and the scattered nature of the collections.

The problem of the opening times of foundation libraries had existed for some years in the previous century. As early as 1861 Ahmed Faris aş-Şidyak, a scholar of Arabic language and literature and an eminent publisher, noted that when he attempted to work in Istanbul libraries:

> Some [libraries] were also shut for several months a year, the people of Istanbul seldom frequent these libraries, so their closure does not much matter to them: what is important is the closing time of the cafés. (Roper 1998)

In 1870 an anonymous correspondent in the *Hadika* newspaper complained:

> The aforementioned libraries close when the teaching term of the lessons given in the mosques comes to an end. During the term-time they are shut on Tuesdays and Fridays anyway, on the other days they are only open for one or two hours after six o' clock [i.e. 12:00 noon according to Western time keeping] if they open at all. Thus they are open when the normal reader is busy working in his occupation so they are in fact only of any practical use for college students. (Hadika 1870)

To rectify this problem, the Ministry of Education published a set of instructions in 1879 concerning the running of foundation libraries. The very first article addresses itself to this precise problem:

> Article one: Libraries will open one hour before noon and close three hours after noon and during these four hours the librarian will be on duty. (Mahmud 1922)

From complaints made in the following years it is clear that these instructions were being largely ignored. In a report dated 1904 it was noted that apart from famous libraries, there were many libraries in mosques and mausoleums where it was not possible to know if they were ever open to the public (Erünsal 1990). In 1908 H. G. Dwight, a British Journalist, visited Feyzullah Efendi's Library, where he noted that:

> I also saw a finely bound catalogue to which nothing has been added for two hundred years. For that matter the library does not look as if anyone had consulted it for two hundred years, though the librarian is supposed to be there every day except Tuesday and Friday. He accordingly spends most of his time in his book-shop in the mosque yard of the Conqueror. (Dwight 1915)

The authorities were not complacent and attempts were made, although ineffectual, to rectify

the situation. An Egyptian scholar, Ahmad Zeki Paşa, was invited by the Grand Vizier to survey Istanbul libraries and produce a report with recommendations. In his report, dated 1909, he also refers to opening times of foundation libraries as the main problem:

> A more important problem is that the librarian only opens after noon and closes the library before the afternoon prayer if he wants [effectively less than 2 hours]. The days on which libraries are open are quite rare. The librarians open the library whenever they feel like it so that the libraries are of very little use to potential readers. (Erünsal 1982)

By 1912 little had been done to ameliorate the position. In the budget debate held in parliament (Meclis-i Meb'usân) an MP complained "as we pay these librarians in Istanbul a mere 50, 60 or 100 piastres a month they do not feel that they are required to attend to their duties more than once a week or twice a month or even once a month"(Takvim-i Vekayi' 1910; BOA.MF.KTV. 3/91, 4/44, 4/120, 7/71, 7/77, 7/85, 8/104).

At the very beginning of the twentieth century we have the observations of a writer who witnessed this problem for himself:

> One day I visited a library surviving from our ancestors [i.e. a foundation library]. This was my third visit before I could find it open. By luck I could also find the librarian. However the time was approaching noon and the librarian wanted to make his ablutions for the noon prayer, so I waited until he was finished. After a while the book I requested was made available to me. I was shown to a small narrow room where I set myself on a cushion and began to read. (Tüccarzade 1913)

The whimsical behaviour of librarians in opening the libraries to the public even inspired poems. A certain poet called Seracettin, wrote some verses in imitation of La Fontaine, entitled "The Librarian Mouse":

> If the librarian was ever there, for he was always missed,
> Maybe he was a grocer or a herbalist
>
> In a foundation library, so the story goes
> For such a long time that nobody knows
>
> I can not say, for it was always shut
> And everyone said this can not go on, but
>
> There is nobody responsible and nobody cares
> And then the mice too saw the state of affairs
> (Hâfiz-i Kütüb 1924)

The point of the poem is that the poet was treating a topic that must have been a bone of contention among the reading public.

Many accounts, documents (BOA.MF.KTV. 7/22, 7/44), travellers' reports and other sources note that librarians were paid a derisory amount of money and had to perform other duties in order to survive, and their work elsewhere did not permit them to work as librarians for more than a few hours a week. The reason for the librarians' salaries being so low is explained by the inflexible nature of a foundation. The salaries stipulated in the foundation deed could not be changed (except in the case of Imperial foundations). As inflation ravaged the Ottoman Empire, just as in the rest of Europe, the value of the asper and piastre dropped until they were a mere fraction of their former value (Pamuk 2000). When the families of the founder were able to, they could create another foundation deed in which they specified which employees were to receive increases in their salary, and of course they would donate some source of income to cover the increased salary, but this was not a very common occurrence (Erünsal 1988). The older a foundation deed was the less people there were with a familial or other interest to insure that it was viable and working as intended.

The establishment of the Ministry of Charitable Foundations was set up partly with the intention of solving the financial problems most of the foundations faced, but most of the resources of the State were going to the modernization of the army, setting up new educational institutions and the attempt to quell the rebellion in Greece, which later led to Greek independence. In the face of all the demands being put on the Ottoman treasury, libraries held a low priority.

Ahmad Faris aş-Şidyak noted the injustice of paying salaries that had not been adjusted for inflation:

> So the librarians have an excuse for their failure to remain at their posts, since it is unjust to expect people to give up all the hours of the day in order to earn an amount insufficient to buy a single loaf of bread. (Roper 1998)

While in 1909 complaints were made that librarians could not be expected to work for between 25 and 120 piastres a month, we see an MP making the following suggestion in the 1911 budget debate:

As far as I know the salary for the head librarian at the Public Library is 1000 piastres, and the other librarian receive 800 while the porter receives 400 piastres and on the other hand the salaries of the famous foundation libraries is a mere 150 piastres. Since a porter at the Public Library receives 400 piastres how can we justify the salaries given to the librarians at Rustem Pasha and Selim Aga's libraries. I propose that they receive a 300 piastres increase in their salaries. (Takvim-i Vekayi' 1910)

The salaries at the Beyazit Public Library were relatively high because it was established and maintained by the State; it was not a foundation library. From this we see that the State recognized the importance of libraries and paid their staff reasonable salaries; it was the foundation libraries that could not do so, and this was a matter for public concern.

The fundamental problem underlying the foundation library system was a lack of money to keep the system running. However, there were other problems too. In the foundation system, positions could be inherited or sold by their holder. This may not have created problems for some of the institutions, but for libraries this was not an acceptable practice. Sometimes a child would inherit the librarianship and sometimes posts could be sold as useful extra sources of income to persons who were not competent to carry out the duties of librarian. In these cases, deputies were appointed and were paid even less than the derisory official salary. We cannot expect these deputies to have been either enthusiastic about their work or indeed even competent to perform it. Originally founders would intend that their sons or grandsons administer the foundation, but as the administration was handed down through succeeding generations, there was increasingly less enthusiasm to ensure that the founder's intentions were carried out. The posts of librarians and junior librarians, doormen, cleaners and sweepers were sometimes inherited and bought. From the 18th century onwards, certain library founders had noted the practice and had stipulated that the position of librarian was not be sold. However, as the inheritance of positions in the foundation system was an old established tradition, it was not possible to ban it categorically. Therefore, library founders permitted this practice under certain conditions (Erünsal 1988).

After the introduction of the programme of Reforms, the Ministry of Education attempted to stop this practice in the libraries. In a document from the Ministry of Education to the Grand Vizierate dated 1882 we see this concern for the libraries expressed quite frankly:

Your Servant's Humble Submission:
Since the positions of some of the libraries in Istanbul are held by some persons who are either government employees, tradesmen or menial workers, then they can not perform the duties themselves, so they appoint certain deputies who are ignorant and incompetent and since these deputies receive a pittance from the holders of the posts, they do not open the libraries regularly at the proper times and take no precaution to look after the books, so that some of the precious and rare books donated by benefactors suffer harm and sometimes are lost.

Later in the document, it is noted that a committee of the Ministry of Education reached certain conclusions and made the following recommendations: firstly, to ban the practice of allowing deputies to perform the work of the librarians. If the actual holder of the post of librarian is competent and willing, he himself may continue in the post, otherwise he is to resign. Secondly: holders of posts who are either not competent or unwilling to perform the duty of librarian may, if they have bought their post, sell it on to someone who is both willing and competent, provided that the person buying the post is approved by the Ministry of Education. In order to establish the competence of librarians the following criteria were established:

To know whether a person can be a librarian he should be examined to find out whether he can determine what language a book is written in and what the subject of the book is. He should be able to identify the catalogue number. He therefore should have familiarity with the basis of Arabic and Persian grammar and should be able to write and read Turkish. Those librarians who are considered to have those qualities should remain in their posts and those who have not should be educated so as to acquire these qualities.

It was recommended that as there were often several positions in a library, such as sweepers, doormen and second librarians, where the incumbents never appeared at their posts, such positions should be abolished and amalgamated into a single post, and likewise the salaries be amalgamated, creating a sum large enough to ensure that the personnel who attended the library were adequately paid (BOA.Şura-yı Devlet 209/9).

From correspondence between the Ministry of Education and the Grand Vizierate it seems that these recommendations were adopted and promulgated in a codex of regulations. The codex to which the correspondence refers is probably codex no. 568, entitled "Codex concerning the positions of primary school teachers and assistants, librarians, sweepers and doormen" (BOA. Şura-yı Devlet 568). In this codex, the qualifications, procedure for selection and appointment of librarians and other library personnel are given, but it also addresses the problems of eliminating deputy librarians and unqualified holders of librarian posts. We do not know how effectively the codex was applied, but from the criticism of librarians and libraries that continued through to the end of the Ottoman Empire, it would not be unfair to presume that its effect was minimal.

Another problem of the foundation library system was the location of small collections. Many of the smaller donations were located in mosques and dervish convents scattered throughout Istanbul, and even if there was a librarian in attendance it often meant a long walk to consult a single work and often no possibility of comparing two manuscripts. Smaller collections located in buildings that were not purpose-built libraries often deteriorated due to unsuitable storage conditions (BOA.MF.KTV.3/91). Several scholars and some reports complained of the deteriorating condition of the books in these collections. For example a certain scholar, Nuri Efendi, in a report dated 1900, noted:

> Our libraries are in pitiful condition. Some collections have been transferred to other locations and are no longer accessible while the doors of some libraries have been locked and are sealed. As for those that are open to the public, they are so filthy that you are hard pressed to find somewhere to sit. When a book arrives your heart sinks seeing its condition: it is covered in years' of dust and looks as if it is about to fall apart. (BOA.Yıldız Evrakı 14/2045/126/10)

In 1861 A. Faris aş-Şidyak noted that many scholars were wasting time and energy walking throughout the city from one collection to another. He recommended that all the small collections should be transferred to a single location in the centrally located Nuruosmaniye district of Istanbul and that a librarian be appointed and paid 500 piastres a month, but on condition that he be

present in the library from morning to evening on those days when the library was to be open to the public (Roper 1998). Münif Pasha also pointed out to the same problem in his report submitted to the Grand Vizier Âli Pasha, in 1870 (Cunbur 1964).

In a document dated 1904 it was noted that if immediate action was not taken there were some 50,000 to 60,000 books at risk of being damaged, among which were rare and valuable works. The document ends with the following suggestion:

> To sum up [one solution would be] to gather all collections to one location but to store the books in separate rooms, each room bearing the name of the donor. If it is not possible to bring the great libraries to this central location then at least the smaller collections which are rotting away in cupboards and chests in mosques and mausoleums should be centralized. (BOA.H.HMD.1322 (9.1))

Ahmed Zeki Paşa, the Egyptian scholar, echoes these ideas and he too recommended centralization of smaller collections, both to preserve the books and to facilitate scholarship (Erünsal 1982).

In a parliamentary debate (session 107) some members referred to this problem and the minister of Education replied thus:

> As I have previously mentioned, the ministry intends to build a central public library and funds for the building will be allocated in next year's budget. We are in the planning stage of this project. This belongs to the future. This library is absolutely essential for us. We [the Ministry] have a [public] library in Bayezid. The others belong to foundations. They are run according to the law governing foundations. If I can obtain a favorable legal opinion, I shall gather these libraries to one location. (Takvim-i Vekayi' 1910)

From the debate we realize that the members of the Ottoman parliament understood and accepted that as the foundations were governed by religious law it was necessary to obtain an opinion from the committee of the Chief Mufti as to whether the law permitted the transfer of a collection to a central location when this had not been envisaged by the founder (Takvim-i Vekayi' 1910). In fact in no case was this explicitly provided for in a foundation deed.

In fact this issue had arisen previously in 1909. The Ministry of Charitable Foundations had requested the Chief Mufti to issue an opinion to allow the Minister to gather libraries to a central location. On that occasion the Chief Mufti could

not issue an opinion allowing the books to be moved. In this letter to the Mufti's Office, the Minister of Charitable Foundations, Hammade-zâde Halil Paşa, explained to the chief mufti that there was a precedent for this. In Egypt, where Halil Paşa came from, exactly the same problem had existed, so they had sought the opinion of the scholars of Egypt who had issued a favourable opinion. With this opinion the smaller collections were gathered to one location and the religious establishment then realized the benefit to be gained from this. The Chief Mufti replied that the committee for issuing legal opinion was of the opinion that books could not be removed from the location to which the founder had donated them. He added however, that they could be temporarily removed to a suitable location while the storage place or building in which the books had be stored was being repaired. (Meşihat Archive Defter no 5)

Whatever the intention of The Mufti's Office was, the minister of Education interpreted it as the official go-ahead to centralize the smaller collections. In the parliamentary debate the Minister noted that the Chief Mufti had in the past" found a way to enable them to centralize the books which were deteriorating and scattered here and there in a newly-prepared place" (Meclis-i Meb'u-sân 1986). He was referring to an earlier request made by his Ministry from the Mufti's Office for an opinion on this exact question, and the opinion issued at that time was identical: the books could be moved while the designated repository was being repaired. [1]

The situation looked as if it could be resolved in the following year when a new minister of Charitable Foundations was appointed. He was Hayri Efendi, who was no less than incumbent Chief Mufti. Faced with the problem of administering the foundations himself, he shed some of his scruples and planned to build a large central library to house 400,000 books. However he realized that while the library was being built, steps would have to be taken to preserve the existing collections, so he embarked on a program of repairing the existing buildings and installing electricity where practicable. He then moved some of the smaller collections to the renovated libraries (Evkaf-ı Hümâyun 1919; BOA. MF.KTV. 5/36, 47, 6/20, 6/25, 6/31, 6/35, 6/51, 8/10).

During his term in office, Hayri Efendi tried to rationalize the foundation libraries by designating some of the larger libraries as specialist libraries, to where, presumably, the books from small collections would be moved. But we do not know to what extent this plan was implemented. However, an article in the journal Türk Yurdu, reports that 4,000 books on history and geography were removed from 21 libraries and housed in the Nuruosmaniye Library (Türk Yurdu 1915). Apparently the process of re-housing collections continued during the First World War. A letter from the Directorate of Charitable Foundations in Istanbul informs us that the Kılıç Ali Paşa library and some collections from the district of Fındıklı were re-housed in a new library building, completed a year earlier, in the Sultan Selim area of town [2]. No matter how desperate the need for a central foundation library was, the series of crises that befell the Ottoman Empire in its last years precluded the possibility of this being achieved.

Yet another problem for the user of foundation libraries was the lack of any union catalogue (Çavdar 1995). Foundation libraries did have catalogues, but like their sophisticated predecessors from the 16th century, they were drawn up primarily to audit the contents of a library, rather than to facilitate the reader in his search for a book. Even in the 19th century the catalogue was still an inventory of books rather than a modern catalogue. The only innovation was that in the last quarter of the century the catalogues of all of the Istanbul libraries were printed with location numbers, indicating that they were intended as aids for the reader to search for a book rather than as an inventory. The scattered nature of the collections in Istanbul created a need for a union catalogue of all the Istanbul libraries. As we have seen, two attempts were made, but neither of them was completed, the third promising attempt floundering in the course of the First World War (Erünsal 2001).

All attempts to rationalize, modernize or develop the foundation libraries in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century were to bear little fruit. This was for a number of reasons, the first being paradoxically, that the legal framework which protected foundations from government interference also prevented them from being modernized. The most vexing problem was money. While the larger li-

braries which had been founded by the Ottoman sultans or rich statesmen usually managed to survive on the funds allocated to it, the smaller collections could not. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a series of economic and political crises in which the preservation of books, no matter how rare, was not a priority.

Furthermore as the Ottoman State embraced westernisation from 1839 onwards, it gradually began to develop alternative schools based on Western models for the teaching of Western sciences. The educated elite were no longer to be educated in the traditional colleges, but in State schools where French was the foreign language rather than Arabic. The foundation libraries had been founded mainly to provide the students at these colleges with books which were mainly in Arabic concerning the Islamic sciences. Gradually, as the importance of the classical college disappeared, so did the need for this type of library. By the end of the Ottoman Empire the foundation library had become the preserve of only the most conservative of students or scholars of Islam and history.

The upheaval of the First World War, followed by the war of independence saw many libraries closed anyway. With the coming of the Republic after 1923, the existing legal and educational systems were abolished and replaced with western models. This marked the end of the foundation library as an information resource for the public. With the alphabet reforms of 1928, children entering school could not even recognize the alphabet, never mind read the books. The foundation library was now merely a source of knowledge for a very small minority of students studying Islamic culture. In 1927, on the eve of the adoption of the Latin alphabet, a Turkish scholar, Ali Canip wrote an article entitled "The Need for Modern Libraries" in which he observed the state of the Ottoman foundation library and explained succinctly how they had metamorphasized from public libraries to research libraries:

> There are at present, especially in Istanbul, libraries, which have very rich collections. But they only serve scholars; they are not for the people. The fact that readers come even from as far as [Western] Europe demonstrates their importance. However, we should not forget that the readers coming from Europe are involved in scholarly and historical research. When you enter the Nuruosmaniye, Ragıp Pasha, Köprülü or Ayasofya libraries you will find

> them empty, save for perhaps two or three people in some corner reading quietly and taking notes. Even the Bayezid Public library and the Millet Library, which are the busiest, are not very frequented. Why ? For this reason: These libraries are the repositories of works which belong to our life before the Reforms, the period when we formed a part of Eastern Civilization. They are very rich for the study of this period. (Hayat 1927)

Epilogue

The plan to centralize the smaller collections into one central location was finally realized from 1918 onwards. The books are now located in the Süleymaniye Library, which has the world's largest collection of Islamic manuscripts to which scholars from all over the world regularly have resource. It, together with the independent libraries housing larger collections, are now staffed by trained librarians who, in the spirit of the Turkish Republic and conscious of the rich heritage they have inherited from their ancestors, are at the service of the reader from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week. Furthermore, the books are well conserved and are being restored to their former conditions.

Notes

1. The above-mentioned document mentions that sometimes earlier about the same issue Ministry of Education requested their opinion and received the same answer.
2. Turgut Kut's Private Archive, Library Files.

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