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A General Outlook on Turkish Librarianship and Libraries

Hilmi Çelik

Director, Information Centre, Sabancı University,
Orhanlı, 34956 Tuzla, İstanbul-Turkey,
hilmi@sabanciuniv.edu.tr

Didar Bayır

Director, Suna Kıraç Library, Koç University,
Rumelifeneri Yolu, 34450 Sarıyer, İstanbul-Turkey,
dbayir@ku.edu.tr

Abstract

Turkey has a rich book and library tradition going back centuries. This article presents an overview of Turkish libraries and librarianship by providing information specifically on the library tradition in Turkey, public and special libraries, librarianship education, professional associations and publications, and recent developments including some special projects run by the state and NGOs.

Key Words: Turkish libraries; Turkish librarianship; Turkish librarianship education; Turkish librarians' associations

General Framework

Turkey has a rich book and library tradition going back centuries. This tradition has continued to these days as the Ottoman sultans and other wealthy people supported the production of manuscripts and established libraries. In 1729 the first printing house was established, and after the 1850s libraries and their

collections started getting better organised within governmental institutions. The period between 1856 and 1876 is notable for the pronounced progress in the field of traditional Turkish librarianship. The Beyazıt State Library, the first library established by the state in 1882, is the result of this progress, as was the publication of the first printed library catalogues in 1884–1886.

One of the greatest reforms realised by the Government of the Republic is the Educational Reform of 1924. With this reform, the management of all *waqf* libraries, established for different purposes over the years and in a sense serving as public libraries, was entrusted to the General Directorate of Libraries operating within the Ministry of Education. Today, the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications, as it is now called, and which operates under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, is responsible for all the public and manuscript libraries in Turkey.

By means of the Legal Deposit Law, which was enacted in 1934 and still is in force today, an effort was made to organise nationwide supervision of all printed material. By law it was made mandatory that all printing houses supply six copies of the material they printed to the Directorate of Depository. Beyazıt State Library, İstanbul University Central Library, Ankara National Library, the Library of Parliament, Adnan Ötüken Provincial Public Library and İzmir National Library are the libraries benefiting from this law. Work is now underway to adapt the law to the present-day requirements.

The idea of 'establishing a national library' had been around since 1871. All attempts at this, however, were fruitless until 1948, when new efforts bore fruit and soon after, in 1950, the Turkish National Library was established by a specific law that was the first of its kind in this field.

At the same time so-called 'community centres' (*halkevi*) and village community centres (*halk odası*) which had been established by Atatürk on 19 February 1932 grew into public libraries and culture centres. There were over 500 such centres in 1936. However, due to various political reasons these community centres were closed in 1951 and segments of their collections were incorporated into libraries affiliated with the Ministry of Education's General Directorate of Libraries.

Public libraries which started off as *waqf* (*vakıf*) libraries and continued as community centres, and which today also include children's libraries, are

continuing their activities. Of late plans have been developed to turn over public libraries to municipal administrations.

According to 2007 statistics, there are 1,163 public libraries in 81 provinces. These libraries house 13,198,814 publications, and 2,796 staff annually serve 20,228,517 users. Sadly, only 333 of these staff members are librarians. In addition, library services are being provided by 59 mobile libraries to 763 areas nationwide.

Turkey continues to work on expanding public library services on a national scale. In addition, Turkey participates in collaborations on an international level it is involved in exchanging knowledge and skills. In this context, between 2002–2003, Turkey participated in the PULMAN-XT () Project which was developed by EU member and candidate states with the aim of strengthening the potential roles of public libraries, museums and archives towards e-Europe. As a result, a significant step was taken towards restructuring public libraries, promoting best practices and increasing their numbers. Subsequently, Turkey participated in yet another European Union Project called CALIMERA () which paved the way for promoting cooperation between public libraries and other local cultural institutions (archives and museums).

Other projects spearheaded by certain non-governmental organisations and some individuals and institutions followed this significant work towards the modernisation of public libraries. Significant nationwide examples of such projects include the 'renaissance in the Villages' project through Rasime – Recai şeyhoğlu's village libraries, the 'My Library' project by the Community Volunteers Foundation in coordination with university students and the 'For Libraries' project started by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which calls for for support in many ways, ranging from construction of library buildings to donation of books.

Various Turkish works are being published in different languages within the scope of the TEDA Project, an effort in translation and publication support started in 2005 by the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, with the purpose of 'publicising Turkish culture, art and literature overseas and the languages of the world to gain from the riches of the Turkish literary language'.

Services provided to disabled citizens at public libraries have been expanded. Talking books were produced, specifically for the blind, and CD recordings

were made available for checking out. Within the scope of the 'Talking Books' Project of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, books on various subjects from science and technology to literature were recorded and made available on the website of the Ministry for the use of visually impaired citizens.

In 1997, automation was introduced and preparations started for a project to transfer the catalogue records of the collections at the public libraries affiliated with the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications to a central database and then be made accessible to the public. In 2006 the project was finalised and MİLAS Library Automation Software was made available to libraries for shared use. At the moment 385 libraries participate in this system, and 3,633,000 bibliographic records have been transferred onto electronic medium by April 2008. These records are all available from the main server. Libraries with the appropriate infrastructure (meaning those equipped with at least one computer and an internet connection) will be added to the system as soon as possible. The main purpose is to promote the widespread use of a single interface system in all our libraries, thereby push usage levels to the highest level.

Within the 'Public Libraries Internet Access Centres Project', members at 81 provincial public libraries and İstanbul Beyazıt State Library are being given free internet access since 2006. The aim is to increase the number of libraries providing internet access to 400 in 2008. The 'Books Delivered to Home Project' was started in 20 pilot provinces for home-bound, ill and disabled citizens who cannot make use of established libraries. The General Directorate of Libraries and Publications became a partner in the READCOM project financed by the European Union within the framework of the Grundtvig 2 Adult Education Programme, and as a consequence reading clubs for adults were formed.

Aside from public libraries affiliated with the General Directorate of Libraries and Publications of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, there exist public libraries established by municipal administrations. The best and established example of such a library is the Atatürk Library in İstanbul, which houses numerous historical resources and as such has the identity of a research library.

In 2007 Turkey was introduced to the 'Boutique Library' idea. The boutique library opened by the Municipality of Kadıköy in İstanbul became the focus of attention with its up-to-date arts oriented collection and technological hardware.

Turkey has a rich diversity of private libraries and there are specialised libraries alongside the manuscript libraries, and local and foreign cultural centres' libraries, e.g., the Women's Library and Information Centre Foundation established in 1990. The libraries of the German Archaeological Institute, the Orient Institute, the French Institute for Anatolian Studies (IFEA), the Netherlands Institute, the Swedish Research Institute and the American Research Institute (ARIT) can be mentioned as examples of foreign research libraries. In addition, a number of cultural centres such as the Goethe-Institut, the Institut Français, the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, the Instituto Cervantes and the American Information Resource Centre have their own libraries. Aside from providing information and documents on their own cultures, these centres contribute to the cultural and social life of the city in which they are located.

The Borusan Music Library with approximately 8,500 books, 10,500 CDs and around 7,000 musical scores and the Yapı Kredi Sermet Çifter Research Library, with around 80,000 manuscripts and printed books, are just two examples of the domestic cultural centre libraries. The library of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), a subsidiary organ of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), located within the Yıldız Palace complex in İstanbul, with its extensive collection is also worth mentioning.

Today, there are over 50,000 schools at the elementary, secondary and vocational/technical levels in Turkey. These schools are supervised by the Ministry of Education as are their libraries and, sadly, it cannot be said that the libraries of these schools are sufficiently developed. However, in some schools, most of which are private schools, it is possible to find libraries that are considerably better organised. Even though the 'School Libraries Regulation' of 1950 (and updated in 2006) required these schools to establish libraries, it has not been possible to realise their establishment, development and management, nor their management by trained professionals. Their collections were not kept up to date and do not complement educational programmes. Nonetheless, there are some private school libraries with vocationally trained librarians and purposive collections located within easy reach of students. Some of these schools play important roles in contemporary schooling/educational programmes. Their collections can comprise between 3,000 and 50,000 volumes. School librarians teach subjects such as information literacy, proper use of resources, internet security and cooperation with the teachers which complement school curricula. Although few in number, some school libraries have

e-catalogues, computers with internet access and different databases, and with these resources are directly contributing to education.

In general it can be said that the need for public and school libraries has increased, and issues such as the need for organising and technically facilitating access to information and the need for creating buildings which conform to international standards, have found their way to the country's agenda.

Education of Information Professionals

Four Turkish universities have a Department of Information and Document Management which educates librarians, archivists and information specialists at the undergraduate level and also offers graduate degrees (Ankara University, İstanbul University, Hacettepe University and Marmara University). The aim of these departments is to educate both personnel who can generally undertake information and document management successfully as 'information professionals' and personnel who will be researchers in the field of information-document management for the public and private sectors. The first such Department was established at Ankara University in 1954–1955 with the support of the Ford Foundation and the American Library Association. The second Department of Librarianship in Turkey was opened at İstanbul University through the efforts of Rudolf Juchhof, a German Professor. Hacettepe University's Department of Librarianship was set up in the 1972–1973 academic year, at first only at the graduate level and later with BA-level education. Marmara University, with its Department of Archives, opened up in 1987 and having been renamed Department of Information and Document Management in 2002, it has taken its place among those institutions educating information professionals.

Professional Associations and Support Groups

There are two non-governmental organisations acting as professional associations for the librarians in Turkey:

The Turkish Librarians' Association (TKD): The Turkish Librarians' Association is the first vocational organisation in Turkey. Since 1949, it has been actively serving as a non-governmental institution of the world of books and libraries and as the voice of librarians. Today, it has 25 branches and 1931 members. From

1952 onwards, it has been publishing the periodical *Turkish Librarianship*. There have been 154 book publications. Each year, TKD, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and with the cooperation of Directorates of Provincial Culture and Tourism and National Education and all other libraries, organises the Library Week during the last week of March. During this week professional issues and expectations are discussed and social activities organised. In addition, TKD organises on-the-job training programmes with the purpose of assisting colleagues' integration into the contemporary world of information. TKD cooperates with national and international professional organisations; it is a member of IFLA and LIBER and it played an important role in bringing the 1995 IFLA Annual Conference to İstanbul. In addition, TKD participates in book fairs, it puts on exhibitions, and it organises book donations and activities such as trips and dinners, aimed at increasing social solidarity.

The University and Research Librarians' Association (ÜNAK): The University and Research Librarians' Association was established in 1991 with the purpose of examining issues arising from the rapid change and advance of technology concerning university and research libraries, documentation and information centres and private libraries, and comparing these to similar issues and solutions in other countries; investigating and resolving different issues concerning the personnel working in these information centres; implementing the application of new technology. In short, to realise what is required to get these information centres to be compatible with the contemporary librarianship concept and operations. At present, ÜNAK has 630 members and itself is a member of international organisations such as LIBER. ÜNAK, along with its standard professional and social activities, has been publishing the periodical *Information World* since 2000 and it has been involved in a consortium effort together with international organisations such as OCLC.

The Innovative Library Initiatives Promotion Group (ILIPG): The Innovative Library Initiatives Promotion Group is made up of a group of librarians carrying out and supporting various activities towards goals listed below:

- to accelerate the upgrading of public libraries in Turkey,
- to activate and/or develop the librarian and global network, on an international level and in Turkey,
- to develop lobbying activities for libraries in Turkey,
- to develop professional and technical abilities of librarians' and librarianship students.

For this purpose, ILIPG organises regional and national workshops with local and foreign participants, it provides short-term work experience in 'model' libraries locally and overseas, it translates documents on innovative developments/new standards from English or other European languages (German, French, Spanish, etc.) into Turkish. ILIPG works in close cooperation with the Turkish Librarians' Association (TKD). It is made up of librarians from various libraries in İstanbul. These include librarians from university libraries and foreign culture centres' libraries together with faculty members from Departments of Information and Document Management.

Professional Publications

Publications concerning librarianship are generally realised by professional associations and Information and Document Management departments.

However, it is hard to say that these publications are sufficient. Nevertheless, two professional periodicals have to be mentioned:



- *Turkish Librarianship (Türk Kütüphanec-iliği)* – A peer-reviewed journal published every 3 months by the Turkish Librarians' Association (TKD). This journal, included in the 30 oldest journals published

according to world standards, took its place on the international platform in 1994 and was indexed in the LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts) and electronically published in 1999.



- *Information World (Bilgi Dünyası)* – A peer-reviewed journal published every 6 months by the University and Research Librarians' Association (ÜNAK). It is indexed in LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts) and EBSCOHOST-LISTA (Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts).

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