
PROLOGUE

Rhodes Illibrated

In Celebration of the Revival of the Hafız Ahmed Library
as a Repository of Learning and a Site of Cross-Cultural Conversations



CEMAL KAFADAR is the Vehbi Koç Professor of Turkish Studies at Harvard University, where he has been a member of the Department of History since 1990. A leading historian of the early modern Ottoman Empire, Kafadar's scholarship illuminates the cultural, intellectual, and social dimensions of Ottoman and wider Islamic history. He earned his B.A. from Hamilton College and his M.A. and Ph.D. from McGill University, and he previously served on the faculty at Princeton University from 1985 to 1989.

Kafadar's influential scholarship challenges conventional periodizations and binaries in Ottoman historiography, particularly in relation to identity, sovereignty, and subjectivity. His seminal book *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* earned Dr. Kafadar the Turkish Studies Associations's M. Fuat Köprülü Award and offers a nuanced reinterpretation of the Empire's formative years, moving beyond nationalist and orientalist paradigms. *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library, 1502/3–1503/4*, co-edited with Gülru Necipoğlu and Cornell Fleischer published in two volumes by Brill, studies the contents of the Ottoman palace library during Sultan Bayezid II's reign. *Kendine Ait Bir Roma: Diyar-i Rum'da Kültürel Coğrafya ve Kimlik Üzerine*, published in Turkish (roughly translates as *A Rome of One's Own: On Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum*) explores the cultural geography and identity of the historical region known as *Diyar-i Rum*—an area corresponding to parts of Anatolia and Rumelia. Dr. Kafadar's research ranges widely, from manuscript culture and Sufi literature to urban life and the historiography of the Mediterranean.

In addition to his academic publications, Kafadar is known for his deep engagement with archival materials, especially Ottoman manuscripts, waqf documents, and marginalia. He has contributed significantly to the intellectual history of the early modern Islamic world and is recognized for his interdisciplinary approach, which draws from literature, philosophy, anthropology and material culture.

A gifted lecturer and public intellectual, Cemal Kafadar has played a central role in fostering critical Ottoman studies both in Turkey and internationally, and in fighting for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in his hometown Istanbul. His work continues to inspire a new generation of scholars committed to exploring the complexities of Ottoman and Islamic pasts beyond rigid political or religious categorizations.

GÜLRU NECİPOĞLU is the Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Director of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University. She earned her PhD in the History of Art and Architecture from Harvard University and holds a BA in Art History (Summa Cum Laude) from Wesleyan University.

A preeminent scholar in the field of Islamic art and architecture, Necipoğlu's research encompasses the medieval to early modern periods, with a particular emphasis on the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires. Her work synthesizes visual analysis with intellectual history, architectural theory, and the histories of science and aesthetics.

Necipoğlu's publications have had a transformative impact on the field. *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* is groundbreaking for its pioneering integration of architectural analysis with court ritual and imperial ideology, revealing how the palace's spatial design functioned as a deliberate instrument of Ottoman political power. Her monograph *The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* opened new perspectives on the role of mathematical thinking in design and earned her both The Spiro Kostof Book Award from the Society of Architectural Historians and The Albert Hourani Book Award from the Middle East Studies Association. *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* recontextualized the work of the celebrated Ottoman architect within broader cultural and political frameworks. She is also the co-editor of the influential volumes *Histories of Ornament* and *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, reflecting her commitment to interdisciplinary approaches and cross-cultural transmission of knowledge.

Necipoğlu's scholarship is distinguished by its philological rigor, theoretical depth, and engagement with primary sources, including architectural drawings, archival documents, and manuscripts. Her work contributes not only to the study of Islamic visual culture but also to broader conversations about early modernity, transcultural exchange, and the aesthetics of knowledge. She is an elected member of the American Philosophical Society and American Academy of Arts and Sciences as well as the British Academy and the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio.

Gülru Necipoğlu continues to shape the field through her rigorous research and scholarship, and her sustained commitment to teaching and mentorship.



Cemal Kafadar and Gülrü Necipoğlu
immersed in the luminous mastery of Maksûd et-Tabrîzî's sixteenth-century calligraphy.
Hafız Ahmed Agha Library, Rhodes, 2025.
Photo: T. Tuten

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On another island in another big sea, recently, a verbal exchange between a celebrity lawyer and a vendor who refused to serve him for his repeated defense of celebrity perpetrators of sexual abuse, ended with a brilliant quip by the vendor's assistant: "this is not a cross-examination but a conversation."¹

Important difference for historians to keep in mind. A conversation can be challenging, it can be about difficult subjects, it can be intensely tense, but it is certainly *not* a cross-examination. It is a sincere engagement with others, including cultivated empathy and even readiness for submission to their view. Commiserating may well be, and often is, the substance to the degree there is one. Conversationists might be moved between joking and poking, sharing pleasantries and good-natured mockery. It could simply be "of airs and waters" to cite wise Hippocrates whose formula has become an everyday expression in Turkish about going over mundane matters. Yet it is always edifying, gratifying, satisfying if conducted among people who want to converse. Conversation is an art.

National historiographies, to state the obvious, emerged under specific historical circumstances that did not encourage conversations and made sense for nation-building enterprises that had a prosecutory as well as a celebratory dimension. It is easy, and becoming increasingly kneejerk, to dismiss them as mere fabrications and to malign them as poisonous. For one thing, they were not created out of the blue but had some roots in the collective memories of different communities. When a youthful Osman Kavala, who has been made to suffer for all the productive conversations he nurtured among people barred from conversing with each other, visited Greece in the early 1990s as a member of the newly-established Greek-Turkish Businessmen's Friendship Association, he met Manos Hadjidakis (d.1994), the legendary composer we both admire, and started by explaining the purpose of his visit to Greece. It is hard to tell how sarcastic Hadjidakis was when he responded, "Why ruin an enmity that we worked on for so long?"

Moreover, it is worth recognizing that national historiographies accomplished a good deal by way of producing a huge and still growing body of research that needs to be taken seriously rather than being thrown out with the washwater. Yet they did not, notwithstanding some worthy exceptions, shake loose of the litigiousness they adopted, thought they had to adopt, from the get-go: we've been good, they've been bad. An often self-appointed mission to cross-examine the histories of "the other side," along with a naturalized sense that the sides of historical argumentation need to be shaped along national lines, implied that *their* histories were dubious, self-serving accounts and certainly needed rebuttal and correction much of the time.

The book that you are venturing to read is a tribute to the art of conversation. It celebrates and wishes to revive the spirit of the agora, the coffeehouse, the hammam, or the salon, in their inclusive incarnations. It also evokes the sense of conversation in its Arabo-Turkish rendering, namely *muhabbet*, with connotations of an affective bond between conversational partners, much stronger than implied in *schmoozing* but still open to differences of opinion. And given that it is

1 <https://vineyardgazette.com/news/2025/08/06/after-dershowitz-dustup-islanders-line-pierogis>

mostly about Turks and Greeks, it is also worth invoking the simple Turkish *kon-uş-mak*, deriving from conversations initiated by instances like two tribes setting up camp next to each other or two birds of the same species alighting close to one another and chirping away.

The substance of the conversation in our case, or the excuse for having one, is a library established and endowed in Rhodes in 1793 by Hafız Ahmed Agha (d.1800?), an Ottoman dignitary, born and raised on the island. Among other things to be noted below, it is a good example of the proliferation of free-standing libraries in the provinces after a century or so when Istanbul had already set the trend with several sultanic and vizirial endowments of such buildings as widely recognized tokens of both public service and personal prestige. Earlier Ottoman libraries were nested within other institutions, like a mosque or a madrasa, but starting with the Köprülü Library in 1678 things changed, as several pieces in this volume will illustrate.

Let us also note that the library in Rhodes was built and endowed at a time when, arguably, something like a reading revolution was taking place in different parts of the world, including the Ottoman empire. Our focus today on the nature of books, of reading, and of institutions and practices related to reading, is not independent of our own context. With growing awareness by the day, we realize that books and reading are not what they used to be. In even larger terms, the means of production and transmission of knowledge that used to be so heavily reliant on *books as physical objects in the form of bound volumes* and on *reading primarily as an ocular and silent practice* best learned and sustained in schools and libraries, are rapidly changing. The long eighteenth century likewise saw a big shift in attitudes toward reading, and free-standing libraries were particularly hospitable to this shift.

The “new” mode of reading revolved around the prioritization and cultivation of what was part of the reader’s toolkit for centuries, known as *mutālaʿa* in Arabic and other languages of Islamic learning, namely deep private reading by an individual in silence in an enclosed space if possible, as the best way to study and learn.² This may seem like the most obvious thing to readers of the last few generations (but probably not to those growing up after the digital revolution). Medieval pedagogical attitudes, however, considered it to be secondary to learning from the “mouths of men,” namely teachers and masters, possibly in the company of others as students or listeners. It was only toward the very end of the seventeenth century and in the early eighteenth century that those norms seem to have shifted, as the first few treatises dedicated specifically to *mutālaʿa* were composed and aimed to cultivate deep and analytical reading as the primary mode of learning.

The relationship between the Ottoman “reading revolution” and similar phenomena elsewhere in the world, or the ways it was experienced by different segments of society, are challenging matters yet to be explored, which make the library in Rhodes all the more enticing for deeper exploration.

What did Hafız Ahmed think of manuscripts versus, or along with, printed books which (in the Arabic script) became part of his world during his lifetime? What about musical notation versus *meşk*, namely learning through practice with a master? We may never have good answers to these questions, but we know that his near-contemporaries were reflecting on related matters. A certain Hamparsum Limondjian (1768-1839), for instance, Armenian composer and theorist of Ottoman classical music, and Abdalbaki Nasir Dede (1765-1820) of the Mevlevi order, were developing

2 On changing attitudes to reading, see Cemal Kafadar’s “Green Reading: Books and the Outdoors in the Early Modern Ottoman World.” *Muqarnas* 40, no. 1 (2023): 353–87. doi:10.1163/22118993_0040_011. The ground for this argument was paved by the work of Khaled el-Rouayheb cited there.

successful notational systems that embodied a new attitude toward transmission of musical learning. Their efforts are to be read, of course, as sequels to the theorizing and notational systems of Ali Ufkî (né Bobowski, 1610-1675) and Dimitri Cantemir (1673-1723), whose experiments took place, respectively, within a decade or two before and after the Köprülü library mentioned above.

The long eighteenth century, in other words, witnessed the gradual but unmistakable development of a profoundly new attitude toward production and transmission of knowledge. Free-standing libraries, musical notation, printed books, and a newly-found focus on an age-old mode of reading are highlights of the transformations that give us a sense of changing attitudes toward the written or rather, and more broadly, towards recorded knowledge in written format as *authoritative*. Such a defining calibration of emphasis and valorization from the oral and the communal to the written and the individual is clearly not only about ways of reading but also about the nature of authority in any given society.

Ultimately, if we consider the inevitably conflictual nature of power relations, be they at the level of family or school or guild or community or nation, the production and transmission of knowledge is hardly ever free of social tension and of political consequences. Local libraries, like the one in Rhodes, were interventions in the universe of learning and production of knowledge. They also had something to do with the rise of new localisms and of provincial notability, instantiated by increasing use and eventual institutionalization of the word *aʿyān* to denote local/provincial notables, or men of some distinction, loosely like the Greek word *árchontes*.

With his impressive commercial activities as well that echoed what his Greek compatriots were doing, Hafız Ahmed was a man of his times as well as *his places*, namely Istanbul and Rhodes above all. No matter what his enterprises and accomplishments in the capital city, his attachment to his birthplace obviously played a key role in his sense of self. Hafız Ahmed used the nisba “Rodosī,” i.e., Rhodian, in his endowment deed and inscriptions, and even on his personal seal imprinted on each book to be seen by generations of users of the library who cannot but be aware that they are “here in Rhodes, in a library built by a Rhodian, and reading a book endowed by that Rhodian.” His strong identification with his patria continued (and continues) for later generations of his heirs to forge affective bonds with the island and to be caring custodians, when circumstances allow, of the foundation with the library as its centerpiece.

Notability, whether it had official recognition as one of the *aʿyān* or not, entailed patronage among other things. And patronage in the cultural sphere was acquiring some new dimensions at the turn of the nineteenth century. One after another, libraries were built and endowed in different towns by various dignitaries and notables: within a few years after the foundation of Hafız Ahmed Agha came, for instance, those of Yusuf Agha (Konya, 1794), Raşid Efendi (Kayseri, 1796), Zeynelzade Hacı Ali Efendi (Akhisar, 1798), Yusuf Ziya Paşa (Keban, 1797-98). Many others followed in the next two or three decades, including the relatively better-known ones by Vahid Paşa (Kütahya, 1811-12) and Necib Paşa (Tire, 1826-27).³

3 For these endowments and many others of those decades, see the magisterial work of İsmail Erünsal, *Osmanlı Vakıf Kütüphaneleri* (Ankara, 2008), pp.259-293.

Like any founder or builder, Hafız Ahmed must have been concerned with the quality of the 828 volumes that he endowed, namely a respectable but *modestly* respectable collection.⁴ Who would want to be subject to the kind of critique that Cavafy, writing a century later, would place in the mouth of Apollonius of Tyana?

Apollonius was talking about
proper education and conduct with a young
man who was building a luxurious
house in Rhodes. “As for me” said the Tyanian
at last, “when I enter a temple
however small it may be, I very much prefer
to see a statue of ivory and gold
than a clay and vulgar one in a large temple”.--

Likewise with books in a library, however modest it may be. There are indeed some gems among the books Hafız Ahmed Ağa endowed for readers in his cherished patria. Two of those stand out but let us start with some general observations about the collection.⁵

Certain aspects of the collection need to be underlined and deserve eventual comparison with others, especially contemporary ones, to be able to identify peculiarities. In terms of their dates of composition, the books in the collection--not considering the Qur’an, of course--range from the second century of the Islamic calendar to the era of the library’s foundation a millennium later. Eighteenth-century authors like Ismail el-Konevi (d.1780, see entry #29 and #30) are represented next to Abu Bishr Sibawayh (d.180/796) or Muhammad bin Hasan al-Shaybani (d.189/805. The work of Ismail el-Konevi is a two-volume gloss on Baydawi’s (d.685/1286) *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, namely an eighteenth-century study of a thirteenth-century exegesis which is also in the collection by itself (#91). In other words, many classics of the early Islamic as well as of the late medieval era, which mattered so much to the formation of Ottoman higher learning, are represented either on their own or through commentaries and glosses, continuously worked on into the times of the library’s foundation. There are, however, clear signs of a focus on the sources closer in time, namely to authors of the sixteenth century and later.

A comparison to the1502/03 inventory of the Topkapı Palace library might be useful here.⁶ One of the most glaring differences is the less-than-impressive presence, here in Rhodes in 1793, of the top three authors in the palace inventory: Ghazali (d.1111), Ibn Arabi (d.1240) and Rumi (d.1273). Instead, we have three new stars topping the charts: Suyuti (d.1505), Kemalpaşazade (d.1534), and Birgivi (d.1573).

Dated copies indicate a preponderance of copies made during the two and a half centuries before Hafız Ahmed’s time (see **TABLE**). These must have been the most readily (and inexpensively?) available copies in the marketplace which obviously kept copyists busily reproducing works from all periods

of Islamic learning and belles lettres. At least fifteen of the volumes were copied during the decade preceding the foundation. In other words, Hafız Ahmed was active in the book market until or quite close to the time of his decision to make the endowment.

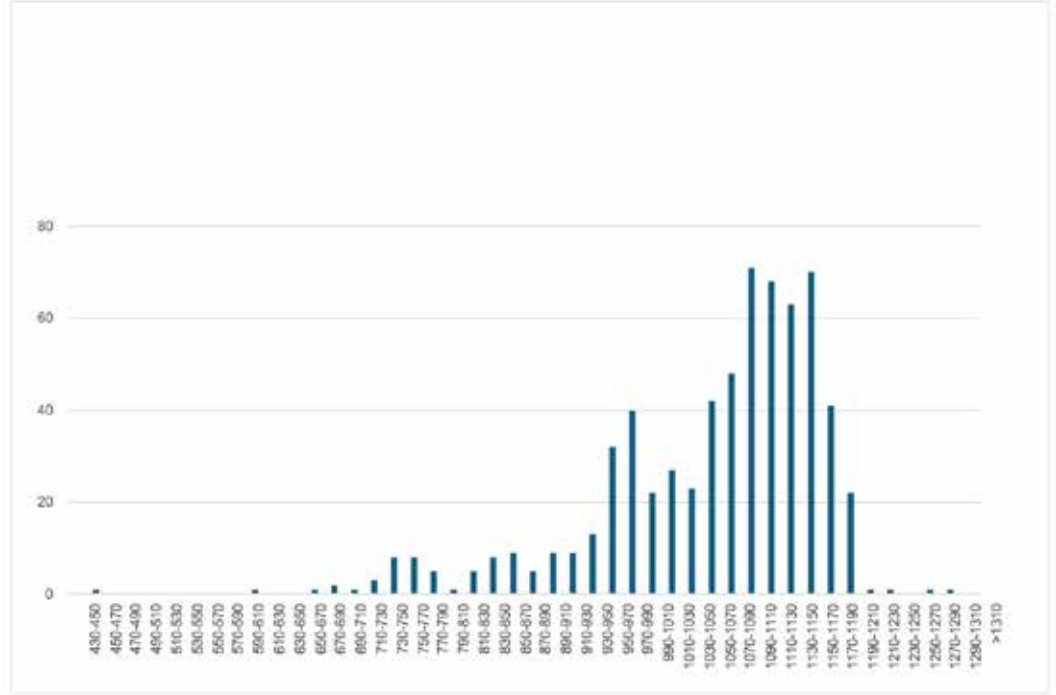


TABLE: Dated manuscripts in the original endowment collection (662 total)

The oldest dated manuscript (#862 of the catalogue) is from the year 607 A.H./1210-11 CE. It is a copy of a popular work on the seven types of Qur’an recitation by al-Mahdavi (d.1048). Hafız Ahmed was clearly not hunting for precious old or rare copies, or autographs, as such.⁷

Of all the volumes endowed by Hafız Ahmed, 177 consist of compilations (sing. *mecmū’a*) of more than one work, with 1288 titles represented altogether. There are 649 titles in those 177 volumes of compilations, some of which include as many as twenty or more separate works which is not unusual, but this could happen for many different reasons. In this book collection, the overall characteristic of the *mecmū’as* is that they are of the “scientific” type, be they in the religious or rational sciences. They include materials of relative homogeneity within a field of learning, or genre, unlike the “hodgepodge” or “helter-skelter” anthologies, with an orientation toward compiling verse and pleasantries and urban lore that characterized many other compilations in many other collections, particularly in the long seventeenth century.

4 At the time of its foundation in 1811-12, the comparable Kütahya Vahid Paşa Library was initiated with 217 volumes and grew rapidly with further donations by the pasha; *ibid*, 277. Necib Paşa’s original endowment included 671 manuscripts; see Ali İhsan Yıldırım, *Necip Paşa Kütüphanesi Yazma eserler Kataloğu* I (Tire, 2003), p. 11. Not in a provincial town but in Üsküdar, Hacı Selim Ağa founded his library in 1782 with appr.1200 volumes; see Erünsal, “Hacı Selim Ağa Kütüphanesi,” *TDVİA*, s.v.

5 For a full catalogue of the collection, see *Rodos Fethi Paşa Vakfı Hafız Ahmed Ağa Kütüphanesi Yazma Eserler Kataloğu*, eds. Bekir Şahin and Faruk Ağartan (Konya, 2010).

6 See Gülrü Necipoğlu, Cemal Kafadar and Cornell H. Fleischer, eds., *Treasures of Knowledge: An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3-1503/4)*, two vols., (Brill, 2019). doi:10.1163/9789004402508.

7 The copy date of 438 A.H. is given in the catalogue for item #404, the *Risāla* of Kushayri (d.465 A.H.), which would have made it exceedingly rare but that is clearly the date of the composition of the work, which is given in the same manner in various other copies we were able to consult in the Yazmalar portal: https://portal.yek.gov.tr/works/search/full?key=er-risaletu%271-ku%C5%9Feyriyye&search_key_type=3&search_form_type=ALL_FIELDS

Books on fiqh (jurisprudence), especially considering them together with those classified under ‘uṣūl (methods) of jurisprudence and under ferā’iz (inheritance law), dominate the collection by a wide margin. Sufism, for instance, is not poorly represented at all but books under that classification are underwhelming next to the former. The reverse was the case in the Topkapı Palace library of Bayezid II.

There are several Ottoman histories, primarily some highly-regarded examples from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but there is also a copy of Ahmedi’s (d.1412-13) Iskendernâme (#1182), which contains the oldest extant historical account of the House of Osman. A volume on the conquest of Rhodes, *Tevārīḥ-i feth-i Rodos*, (#1183) is most intriguing and certainly deserves closer attention.⁸ There are also signs of an interest in histories of Egypt, which is not surprising given the location of the island on the main sea route connecting the northern Ottoman lands to Alexandria.

What the collection contains is best understood if considered also with respect what it does *not* contain. As indicated by the abovementioned characteristic of the compilations, the founder does not seem to have been interested in literary and adab works at the same level as in some other areas of learning. There are surprisingly few books of what is now considered “classical Ottoman poetry,” especially lyrical poetry. Baki (d.1600), for instance, is represented not with his ghazals but only with his translation of a book on the theme of jihad (#697). Fuzuli is here only with his *Ḥadīkatü’s-sü’edā’* on the tragedy of Karbala. Instead, one finds robust representation of the poet Nābī (d.1712), who is best known for his didactic works, with five different titles. There is, however, the divan of Sünbülzade Vehbi (d.1809) which contains several imitative poems with humorously competitive intent to challenge by name many of those well-known Ottoman poets.

Also in the literary sphere, the ubiquitous medieval Persian classics (Sa’di’s *Bōstān* and *Gulistān* as well as the *Dīvān* of Hafız) are here by themselves and in Turkish translations/commentaries by Sururi (d.1562) and Sudi Bosnevi (d. after 1598). Overall, Persian divans outnumber the Ottoman ones.

If there were any readers of Haşmet (d.1768/69) in Rhodes, they would not be able to consult any work of this famous poet whose exceptional talent for biting satire was the cause of his fall from grace and led to exile there, where his tomb is still visited. Likewise missing is any sign of interest in the historical and literary legacy of the Crimean khans several of whom spent many years in Rhodian exile and remain buried on the island.⁹ Do these absences say something about Hafız Ahmed’s loyalties and his politics? Note, for instance, that the abovementioned Vehbi had served as kadi in Rhodes in 1787 and is considered to have played a role in the execution of the exiled Şahin Giray Khan II of Crimea, himself a poet.¹⁰

There are obviously choices to be made by a collector, and perhaps assistants, while some other types of items are to be avoided, neglected or downplayed. Each collection reveals a particular taste and vision. What those neglected areas were in our case needs to be investigated more systematically but the observations listed above suggest that, relatively speaking, Hafız Ahmed was a man interested in didactic and “sober” works more than in lyrical, mystical and “amusing” ones.

There are also questions regarding book-owning and the book market at that time that remain largely unanswered for now. Did Hafız Ahmed make his own choices, or did he have someone helping him choose and purchase? Did Ayşe Hatun, his mother (d. 1795), or another member of the household contribute somehow? Who was there purchasing the copy of the classic *Kımyā’-i Sa’ādet* (#377) of Ghazali from the, presumably, post-mortem dispersal of the collection of the famous historian Çeşmizade Mustafa Reşid Efendi (d.1770), as suggested by the latter’s ex libris on the flyleaf? Several purchases were made evidently from different legacies, with (former) ownership records, including one (#458) dated 1206 A.H./1791-92, namely very close to the date of Hafız Ahmed’s endowment. To have a better understanding of the book market at that time, it might be worth collating information of this kind with evidence among the copious probate records in Istanbul, or elsewhere when relevant, which offer the names of the deceased and their belongings, including books, as well as the prices for which they were sold. In other words, there is much fun awaiting the adventurous researcher digging deeper into the codices in this collection, especially with a comparative perspective looking at those contemporaneous libraries mentioned above.

Two books in particular stand out within this wide-ranging collection as touches by an Ottoman reader/collector of the eighteenth century specifically, namely as representative of the intellectual world of the Ottomans just before and during Hafız Ahmed’s lifetime.

Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), long before his “discovery” in Europe in the late-nineteenth century, had been seized and revered by Ottoman intellectuals for his eye-opening reflections on the cycle of rise-and-decline of empires. At least with Katib Çelebi (1609-1657) from around the mid-seventeenth century, Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima* became a significant part of the conversation in Ottoman intellectual circles, and Pirizade Mehmed Sahib Efendi (d.1749) ventured a translation between 1725-30. The copy of the work in the library in Rhodes (#1153) stands witness to Hafız Ahmed’s awareness of this conversation and its significance.¹¹

The other standout reminds one of an exchange between two Oxford professors in Harold Pinter’s brilliant script of *The Accident* (1967 film, Joseph Losey). One of them is “reading from a learned journal” that “a statistical analysis of sexual intercourse at Colenso University, Milwaukee, showed that 70% did it in the evening, 29.9% between 2 and 4 in the afternoon and 0.1% during a lecture on Aristotle.” The provost responds: “I’m surprised to hear that Aristotle is on the syllabus in the State of Wisconsin.”¹²

Readers not familiar with the history of Islamic learning might be surprised that Aristotle is also on the inventory of our library. That fact in and of itself would not have been exceptional at all since Aristotle (or sometimes pseudo-Aristotle) is a regular presence in madrasa education, and he is revered as “the First Teacher.” What makes his presence in the Hafız Ahmed collection noteworthy is that this is a paraphrastic translation (into Arabic) from Aristotle by Yanyalı Esad Efendi (d.1731), making use

8 While this history is attributed to Elhac Halil Sofyevi in the catalogue (and in the Yazmalar portal), the author seems to have been Tabib Ramazan Efendi, a physician serving Sultan Süleyman, as identified by a modern hand writing in the Arabic script on the back flyleaf and by Dikmen Oral, “Tabib Ramazan’ın *Kitâb-ı Tevâriḥ-i Rodos* adlı eseri (Tahlil ve metin),” unpubl. Master’s Thesis (Selçuk University, 2014). On Ramazan Efendi, also see Hüseyin Yurdaydın, “Tabib Ramazân’ın Yeni Bir Eseri,” *İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 8 (1960): 55-58.

9 For these figures and some other famous names buried in Rhodes, including many who were exiled there, see Celalettin Rodoslu, *Rodos ve İstanköy Adalarında Gömülü Tarihi Simalar* (Ankara, 1945).

10 Selim Sırrı Kuru, “Sünbülzâde Vehbî,” *TDVİA*, s.v.

11 The copy is in its Arabic original and from the year 1148 A.H./1735-36. The Yazmalar portal gives the title of this specific manuscript as “*Kitābü’l-İber...*,” which is not absolutely incorrect, technically speaking, since the *Muqaddima* was initially meant to be the prolegomena of *Kitābü’l-İber* but it is definitely a misleading identification since the former has always been treated as an independent work and copied as such. In fact, the word “*muqaddima*” is written on the spine of the copy in the Hafız Ahmed Library, and the cataloguers Şahin and Ağartan have rightly prepared their entry under that title. Note that the Tire Necib Paşa Library has both Pirizade’s translation of the *Muqaddima* and a copy of the *İber* in its Arabic original (# 383 and 391, respectively).

12 The insider’s joke within the joke has to do with the fact that the director, better known as a representative of British cinema, was himself an American from Wisconsin who had been hounded by McCarthy’s “House UnAmerican Activities Committee,” and barely avoided being prosecuted and cross-examined.

of a Latin translation and commentary by Ioannis Kouttounios (1577-1658) who was himself working within an Averroist (Ibn Rushd's) line of interpretation of the medieval Islamic philosophical tradition. The implications of this translation, titled “Terceme-i mantık li-Aristo” on the spine, along with other manuscripts containing his translations from Aristotle’s *Categories* and *Physics*, and their meaning for our understanding of Ottoman natural philosophy await closer study. They have already elicited a lively discussion.¹³

These are merely a few impressions of a medium-sized book collection from the late eighteenth century that deserves a far more systematic investigation of its content and its cultural historical import.



Hâfız Ahmed Agha Library 1153
Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), *Muqaddima*
The opening folios (1b-2a) of the manuscript, featuring the title of the work and the name of its author, along with the endowment seal of the library.
Photo: T. Tuten



Hâfız Ahmed Agha Library 1153
Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), *Muqaddima*
Closing folios of the manuscript (367b-368a). The scribe (the *müstensih*) records that Ibn Khaldun completed this work, the *Muqaddima*, in five months in the year 779 [1377]. This copy (the *nüsha*) however, was completed by the *müstensih* - Ibn Sham'a Muhammed b. Osman al-Dimashqî - on 28 Jumada al-Thani 1148 [15 November 1735].
Photo: T. Tuten

13 Mehmet Sami Baga, “Yanyalı Esad Efendi’nin Fizika Tercümesine Dair Bazı Notlar”, *Beytulhikme An International Journal of Philosophy* (2023), 198-220. Also see Ahmed Alperen Can, “Yanyalı Esad Efendi’nin Fizik Tercümesi,” which is a review of Cahid Şenel, *Osmanlı Döneminde İbn Rüşdçülüğe Dönüş Denemesi: Yanyalı Esad Efendi’nin Fizik Tercümesi* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2024), published in *Kutadgubilig Felsefe-Bilim Araştırmaları* 51 (June 2025): 83-87.



Hâfız Ahmed Agha Library 798
Hoca Mehmed Es'ad b. Alî Yanyalı (d. 1142/1729), *Tercümetü'l-Kütübî's-Semaniyye li Aristo*.
The excerpt from the *zahiriya* page with the title, *Terceme-i Mantık*, and author's name, Yanyalı Esad Efendi and opening folios (1b-2a) of the manuscript.
Photos: T. Tuten



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The closing folios (57b-58a) of the manuscript, bearing the endowment seal of the library.
Photo: T. Tuten

It is also worth commenting on the distinctive architectural and spatial aspects of the library in Rhodes. Notably, the library complex is situated in a walled enclosure with its monumental round-arched gateway directly across from the courtyard gate of the Friday Mosque of Rhodes, built by and named after Sultan Süleyman soon after the 1522 conquest of the island. This alignment suggests the close relationship between both monuments, as if the library were part of a socio-religious complex (*külliye*). The daily traffic between these two monumental stone masonry buildings, crowned by typically Ottoman hemispherical domes, must have been considerable. The commercial avenue running between the two buildings leads to the harbor of Rhodes from which these monuments were visible.



Hafız Ahmed Agha Library courtyard with the marble stairs leading to the library on the right, the former class room with the wooden balcony supported on stone columns and the Süleymaniye Mosque with its minaret in the background.

Photo: G. Necipoğlu

Upon entering from the main gate of the library into its walled courtyard, one is surrounded by a magnificent oasis. The courtyard, paved in white and black pebble-stones forming attractive zigzag patterns, is planted with trees and flowers arranged in pots and features a wall fountain that has an inscription eulogizing the founder's father, namely Hasan Agha. Besides the central library building itself, which is composed of two rooms each surmounted by a hemispherical dome, the courtyard features a residence for the library attendant on the right and a two-story mansion with a wooden projecting upper balcony supported by two round arches that rest on stone columns below.



Hafız Ahmed Agha Library reading room's dome, the corner squinches and the two-tiered windows.

Photo: G. Necipoğlu

Each dome inside the library is raised on four corner squinches. Their two-tiered windows render the light-filled serene interior an ideal space for reading. The manuscripts are kept behind the reading room in a space that still features authentic wooden bookshelves. Two iron-grilled windows opening to that space from the reading room flank the round arched gate. Visitors sitting around the central long table of the reading room are therefore offered an enticing preview of treasures of knowledge awaiting them. It is remarkable that the original bookshelves are still arranged according to designated fields of classical knowledge in twenty categories, and the bindings on the manuscripts list their titles in Arabic script. Surely, this library with its rare and illuminated manuscripts must have provided to readers, to those disposed to *mutāla'a*, a serene immersive experience within its beautiful architecture and lush and well-tended garden.



Hafız Ahmed Agha Library's manuscript collection is kept behind the reading room in a space that still features authentic wooden bookshelves (below). Iron-grilled windows opening to that space from the reading room flank a round arched gate (above).
Photos: G. Necipoğlu



Hafız Ahmed Agha Library's original bookshelves are arranged according to designated fields of classical knowledge. Here a shelf of the history section.
Photo: T. Tuten

In an age when our reading practices, along with relevant technologies and institutions, are changing in drastic ways yet again, and with potentially grave consequences for state-society relations, it might be worthwhile for the readers of this volume to reflect on the nexus of intricate relationships between public life and the means as well as spaces of production, transmission and exchange of knowledge. Relations of power, be they at the family or local or (inter)national levels, take shape and are perpetuated or questioned and resisted by access to and control over those means and spaces, among other things.

A library like the one Hafız Ahmed Agha built and endowed in Rhodes more than two and a quarter centuries ago may not function fully and exactly as it was intended once, but on the one hand it still serves some of its original purposes for the intrepid scholarly researcher and, on the other, it can be repurposed toward new uses for the public. This is precisely what the heirs and trustees of the foundation have set out to do, to re-imagine it as a public institution. For a generation or two, a growing number of academics and other intellectuals of various backgrounds, such as the contributors to these two volumes, working on the histories of Greeks and Turks and their neighbors, have critically engaged with the cross-examining mode of history-writing and found imaginative ways to transcend it. Many have dreamt to have access to institutions that aim to foster sustained conversations along those lines, and aim to encourage others into those conversations, especially new generations and the broader public. As these volumes eloquently articulate, the foundation initiated by Hafız Ahmed Agha is now poised to play that role in a robust manner as an institutional setting where conversations flourish.