

The Expansion and Reorganization
of the Ottoman Library System (1730–1839)*

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Mahmud I’s reign began ominously. His father had been deposed and his father’s grand vizier Damad İbrahim Pasha had been killed in a brutal riot in the Ottoman capital. Furthermore, his reign saw defeats on the Austrian, Russian, and Iranian fronts. But despite all the turmoil, there is one area in which cultural activities reached their apogee during this time: the development of the library system. Of all the sultans, Mahmud I truly deserves the epithet of bibliophile. We can observe his keen interest in books in a decree concerning the organization of libraries of Kastamonu, the capital city of one of the central Anatolian provinces, which he sent to its judge:

Whereas the order and basis of the World and Religion is given currency by the means of knowledge and science and associated with the acquisition of skill and virtue, and all depends on the collecting of books and making them available for the students ... and for this reason ... libraries were established.¹

Thus did Mahmud I express his view that the basis of Ottoman civilization, noless, was the library. In the following pages, we will see how he set out to make his philosophy a reality. Mahmud I first opened a paper factory at Yalova, conveniently situated on the opposite shore of the Marmara sea from Istanbul, ensuring a steady supply of paper for the printing press in Istanbul, which he had reopened.² In the capital, he founded large libraries, including the Fatih, Galata Palace, and Ayasofya Libraries, setting an example for his statesmen to follow.

Of all the libraries founded by Mahmud I, Ayasofya is the most interesting in terms of its furnishings,³ staffing,⁴ and the collection itself.⁵ This is quite appropriate when we consider the special position that the Ayasofya Mosque and the Medrese had acquired in Ottoman religious and cultural life. The name Ayasofya is the Turkish version of the Greek Hagia Sophia, the (Church of the) Holy Wisdom. As the largest building in Istanbul when it was taken, Mehmed II turned it into a mosque-medrese. In successive reigns, it was extensively repaired, as well as endowed with four minarets and a host of buildings including a medrese in the surrounding area. The Ayasofya Mosque acquired a particular status, so that while there is no concept of a “cathedral mosque” in Islam, the Ayasofya Mosque came close to fulfilling that role, and was not only the largest mosque, but remained the “senior” and most respected of all the mosques in the Ottoman world. Its position as the mosque closest to the imperial palace also reinforced its close connection with the ruling dynasty. The medrese at Ayasofya also played a significant role in the educational system. The teachers at this school had a particularly high status, on a level with the teachers at the Mehmed II’s medrese and the Süleymaniye medrese. It is no surprise then that it is to this mosque that Sultan Mahmud I devoted much of his energy.

1 BOA, Mühimme, No. 152, 136
2 It is recorded in the diary of the sultan (ruzname) that he discussed the quality of the paper being produced at Yalova with the pioneer of the Ottoman printing press, İbrahim Müteferrika. The sultan was particularly interested in the technological innovations behind the production of this paper, was pleased with the “new paper,” and demonstrated his pleasure with a gift of a purse of gold. It is recorded that İbrahim Muteferrika was pleased with the gift but more in the fact that he had found favor with the sultan. Özcan Özcan, “Kadı Ömer Efendi, Mahmud I Hakkında 1157, No. 1744–1160, No. 1747 Arası Ruzname” (BA Thesis, Istanbul University, 1965), 41–42.
3 Azade Akar, “Ayasofya’da Bulunan Türk Eserleri ve Süslemelerine Dair Bir Araştırma,” VD 8(1969): 284–286.
4 VGMA, Defter No. 87, 1–2 and 28; TSA, E. 1767.
5 According to the historian Subhi, there were four thousand works housed in the library and the several catalogues prepared in this period verify this figure.

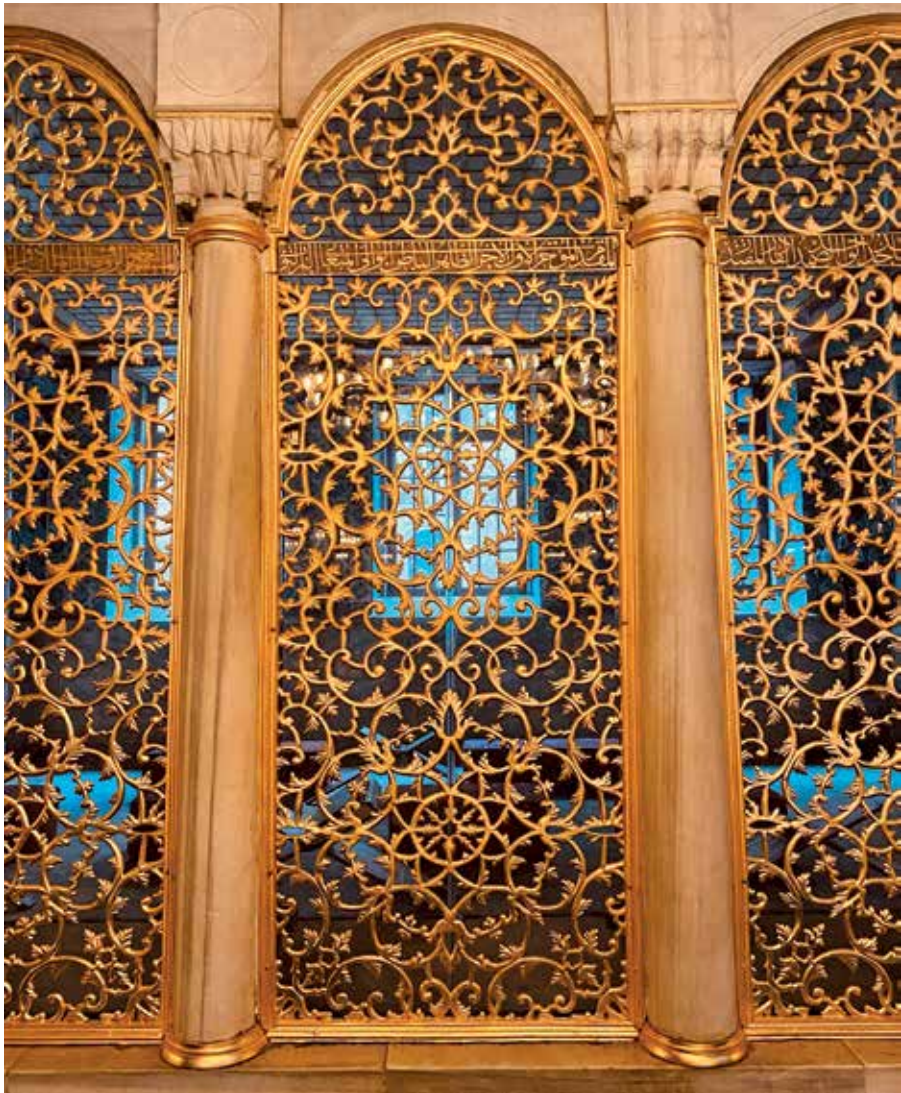


FIGURE 1: Section in cast brass tombak of the lattice divider in Ottoman Baroque style with floral motifs separating the Ayasofya Library reading room.
Photo: T. Tuten

In January 1740, a foundation deed was drawn up and many of books were endowed in that year.⁶ Two months later, the library was officially opened in a ceremony attended by the sultan himself and all the high officials of the state. The ceremony opened with a silent reading of Buharî's collection of the Prophet Muhammed's sayings.⁷ This was achieved by allocating a section of the work to each of the many attendant scholars. Each read their section silently and upon finishing recited a prayer. Each of the teachers appointed to the library - for this was to be a teaching library - gave an inaugural lesson, and the

preacher of the mosque gave a sermon and concluded the ceremony with a prayer. After the lessons, the sultan distributed largess, in the form of gold coins, to the staff of the library. Many of the state officials attending the ceremony presented the sultan with books, which he in turn presented to the library.⁸ The opening of the library has found a reflection in folklore. In a particular genre of versification, which is recited in coffee houses and in streets during the month of Ramadan, reference is made to the decoration of the library:

*The glory of the Ottoman line
All other states to it supine
From every corner comes great praise
For the library's design
Its decor famed in every clime
Praiseworthy be it through all time
In the Mosque of Ayasofya
The Sultan's made something sublime
Its success ensured by the Almighty
Let it be worthy of the Almighty
And all who viewed this library
Uttered praise to the Almighty⁹*

On several occasions, the sultan visited the library and distributed bounties, again in the form of gold coins, to the staff.¹⁰

At the beginning, the staff of the library consisted of four librarians, one assistant librarian, several teachers, two doormen, three cleaning staff, one binder, and two repairmen for the upkeep of the library building.¹¹ Within a year of its opening, it was realized that even this large staff would not suffice and we see that the number of librarians was increased from four to six and that their stipend was also raised.¹² In a clause appended to the foundation deed, dated August 1741, provision is made for the post of *buhurî*, that is, a thurifer, who would take burning incense around the library so that it would smell pleasant. An allowance of five aspers per day was made for the purchase of incense.¹³

In the foundation deed dated January 1740, provision was made for classes to be taught in the library, but in a better organized and on a more regular basis than was carried out in other libraries. The foundation deed specifies which books would be taught at what time, on what days, and allowances were to be given to all students who attended the classes.¹⁴

After inaugurating Ayasofya Library, Mahmud I's energy was focused on the establishment of a new library adjacent to Mehmed II's mosque. He first ordered a building to be constructed at the southeastern end of the mosque, a decision explained in one of the original catalogues of the library: "the noble mosque of Mehmed

⁶ VGMA, Kasa No. 47; TSA, D. 1067.
⁷ Subhi, *Tarih* (İstanbul: Raşid Mehmed Efendi Matbaası, 1198H), 174b–175a.

⁸ The names of these donors can be found in the list prepared by Süheyl Ünver. See Süheyl Ünver Archive in the Süleymaniye library, Ayasofya File.
⁹ Muhtar Yahya Dağlı, *İstanbul Mahalle Bekçilerinin Destan ve Mani Katarları* (İst., Türk Neşriyat Yurdu, 1948), 59–60.
¹⁰ TSA, D. 1067, 8a, 16a, and 19a.
¹¹ VGMA, Kasa No. 47.
¹² VGMA, No. 639, 62.
¹³ VGMA, No. 638, 7.
¹⁴ VGMA, Defter 87, 2–3; VGMA, No. 638, 7.

Han being the gathering place of the most eminent of scholars and a source of the religious sciences.”¹⁵ The opening ceremony was held in May 1742, *muezzins* recited prayers and professors held inaugural classes. İzzî, the imperial chronicler, was at the scene and recorded that the scholars in attendance were each given a robe of honor and money was distributed to the poor. He adds that the opening of the library was a cause of rejoicing and inspiration to the students of the district.¹⁶

When this library was first opened, its collection was not large, some two thousand books in all.¹⁷ But throughout his reign, Mahmud I regularly endowed books to the library in order to build up its collection.¹⁸ Furthermore, he ordered that all the books in the mosque should be transferred to the new library building and he also had the books from the nearby Şehzade Mosque join the new collection.¹⁹ It is not known how many books were in the library by the time Mahmud I died (1754), but some eighty years later a survey of this library recorded that there were more than 5,500 works in the collection.²⁰

The staffing of Fatih Library was markedly different from that of Ayasofya. Fatih already had a large staff of teachers in its well-established school, so there was little need to appoint teaching staff. The staff of Fatih Library consisted of six librarians, one assistant librarian, one cleaner, and one doorman.²¹



FIGURE 2: Süleymaniye Library courtyard.
Photo: T. Tuten

15 Süleymaniye Library, Yazma Bağışlar, No. 242, 1b.

16 İzzî, Tarih (İstanbul: Mehmed Raşid ve Ahmed Vasıf [Matbaası], 1199 H), 219b–220a.

17 Süleymaniye Library, Yazma Bağışlar, No. 243, 63b.

18 Süleymaniye Library, Yazma Bağışlar, No. 242.

19 Süleymaniye Library, Yazma Bağışlar, No. 242, 75b and 135a.

20 Süleymaniye Library, Yazma Bağışlar, No. 252; TSA, D. 3310.

21 TSA, E. 1767; VGMA, Defter 87, 5–6. An American lady who visited this library at the end of nineteenth century describes its inner decoration as: “The library that seemed to me the most beautiful of all belonged to the mosque of the Conqueror. There was a wonderful carpet on the floor, in pale blue and old rose, that had been sent as a gift to Sultan Mahmud II from the Shah of Persia. A very curious and interesting brass ornament hung from the dome. There was an illuminated scroll suspended on the wall, beginning, ‘O Ye Eternal Being,’ the golden letters of which shone in the dim light. The books were old manuscripts of great value, some of them containing rare specimens of Arabic and Persian illumination” (Mary Mills Patrick, *Under Five Sultans* [London: Williams and Norgate, 1930]), 96.

Having made provision for the Ayasofya and Fatih Libraries, Mahmud I then focused his attention on Süleymaniye Library together with Grand Vizier Köse Mustafa Bahir Pasha.²² There are very few records of what Mahmud I did in terms of organizing Süleymaniye Library. It appears that he moved all the books from various cabinets in which they were stored and created a central storagespace, created by putting large iron gratings between the pillars at the southeast corner of the mosque. All the books were brought here.²³ From a later record, we see that the library had fixed opening times from sunrise to the afternoon prayer, five days a week. Five librarians had also been appointed. Books were not to be lent out, but presumably read in the mosque itself.²⁴ With the organization of the Süleymaniye, Istanbul was now endowed with three large well-staffed and well-organized libraries, one of which (Ayasofya) was at the southeast point of the city next to the palace, and the other (Fatih) geographically at the center of the city. Given that much of the city was uninhabited between the land walls and the Fatih Mosque, it was in fact located at the opposite end of the populated area from Ayasofya. The third mosque, the Süleymaniye, lies in the middle forming a triangle of three centers of learning, and acting as a core for all the other smaller institutions of higher education in Istanbul.²⁵

These three libraries housed collections that specialized in the school curricula, and can essentially be viewed as the library system for Ottoman higher education in Istanbul. For the training of palace officials and future generations of statesmen, a different type of collection was necessary, as the medrese libraries did not generally house the types of books necessary for government training. Galata palace had been, for over two centuries prior to Mahmud I’s rule, the school for palace personnel, traditionally including the people who would become provincial governors, army officers and viziers. We must presume that, from an early stage, books were available for students to read; the historian Ata notes that many books had been donated to the palace by successive sultans.²⁶ Apart from this brief note, we have no information about the early stages of this collection.

It was Mahmud I who organized the books into a proper library. He also endowed more books, established a staff, and made provision for its functioning in an endowment deed. He first built a separate library building to which he appointed three librarians and three teachers, who were to give lessons in the library.²⁷ A catalogue drawn up in 1753 describes a rather rich collection of about two thousand works; but it is the subject matter of these works which is most remarkable. Although the collection contains some works one would expect to find on the school syllabus, the main emphasis is on grammar, literature, and history.²⁸ This school was not there for the study of religious subjects, but to educate students in Ottoman culture, as they would be the next generation of Ottoman officers and statesmen.

22 Hüseyin Ayyansarayi, *Hadikatü’l-Cevami’*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1281H), 18; Halit Dener, *Süleymaniye Umumi Kütüphanesi* (İstanbul: İstanbul Maarif Basımevi, 1957), 35.

23 N. Bayraktar, “İstanbul’daki Vakıf Kütüphaneler ve Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi,” *TKDB*, 15, no. 3 (1966): 134–135; Müjgan Cunbur, “Kanuni Devrinde Kitap Sanatı, Kütüphaneleri ve Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi,” *TKDB* 17, no. 3 (1968): 139.

24 BOA, Mütferrik Section No. 89, 114a–115b.

25 In an interesting book on the topography of Ottoman Buildings, Maurice Cerasi demonstrates that many of the medreses, mosques and libraries tended to cluster in a ridge in the center of Istanbul, stretching from the palace walls to the walls of the city. Ayasofya is at one end of this cluster, the Fatih Library in the middle and the Süleymaniye set slightly aside from the main cluster: *The Istanbul Divanyolu* (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag in Kommission, 2004), 80–82.

26 Fethi İsfendiyaroğlu, *Galatasaray Tarihi* (İstanbul: n.p., 1952), 60–61, 114, 267.

27 VGMA, Defter No. 87, 9–10.

28 Süleymaniye Library, Ayasofya Section, Fihrist, No. 5.

Apart from these four libraries in Istanbul, Mahmud I also set up libraries in Cairo,²⁹ Belgrade,³⁰ and Vidin,³¹ where he not only sent books, but also provided for librarians to look after them. He also provided books for establishments built by others. When the ruler of Crimea, Selamet Giray Han, built a mosque near to his palace it was Mahmud I who provided books for the library,³² and when the mother of Ahmed III built a mosque on the island of Chios the books for the library were again provided by the sultan.³³ In 1746, he sent a decree to the judge of Kastamonu ordering him to make a survey of the city's libraries and to catalogue the collections and to send these catalogues to the palace. This was all with a view to uniting all libraries in this city into a single collection which could be better maintained.³⁴

Throughout his reign Mahmud I actively acquired books at every opportunity. This was done in three ways: he received many books as gifts,³⁵ he enlarged the palace library by confiscating the book collections of officials who died or fell out of favor and thirdly, and, perhaps most conventionally, he purchased books on the open market from booksellers through palace officials.³⁶

For Mahmud I's officials, collecting books and subsequently founding libraries became an important charitable act during this period. Thus we see Hekimoğlu Ali Pasha, the grand vizier, founding a library in 1738 next to his mosque, which he had built in 1734 in the Davud Pasha district of Istanbul.³⁷ Although we have no information as to how many books the library contained, it had a relatively large staff of three librarians and other personnel, and teachers to give lessons in the library.³⁸ In 1740, Şeyh Mehmed Rıza Efendi donated his large collection of books to this library, and provided for extra staff to look after the expanded collection.³⁹

Of all of Mahmud I's officials, the most active in the field of creating charitable foundations seems to have been the chief eunuch of the palace, Hacı Beşir Ağa. As a recipient of a relatively large income, Beşir Ağa seems to have spent most of it on building mosques, fountains, schools, and not least of all libraries. Like his patron, he was also a bibliophile and built up large collections of books, which he then endowed to his libraries. In the Eyüp district of Istanbul, he founded a school, to which he donated a collection of books and provided that the library should be staffed by three librarians and an assistant librarian. According to the foundation deed, the senior librarian should be from outside the school, but the other librarians and assistant librarian should be chosen from the best of the students. His library was to be a teaching library and he provided for one teacher and also for a specialist to teach prophetic tradition (*hadis*). Students who attended the lectures were also to receive five aspers scholarship per day. It was determined that the library should be open every day, the librarians taking turns to be on duty.⁴⁰ The library was further enlarged

by a donation of books made by a certain woman named Rabia Hatun. This collection had originally been donated to Ayasofya, but when it was realized that the books would be more useful at Eyüp they were transferred there in 1743.⁴¹

Very close to Ayasofya and the Topkapı Palace, in the district of Cağaloğlu, Hacı Beşir Ağa founded a complex consisting of a mosque, a medrese, a dervish convent, a primary school, and a library. The library consisted of a room adjoining the mosque. The foundation deed, dated 1745, provided for four librarians, of which the third librarian also had the duty of doorman. The deed forbade lending books.⁴² However, it seems that despite the prohibition, later librarians acceded to the plea of scholars to be allowed to take the books out of library for a limited period of five days. An inspection of the collection revealed that, likely due to the librarians' lenience, thirty-eight of the 714 books had gone missing. It was therefore decided to close the library and prepare a new catalogue. When the library reopened in 1784, instructions once more prohibited the practice of lending in the strongest terms possible.⁴³

In Medina, Beşir Ağa built a medrese with a library attached to it.⁴⁴ We do not know how many books he donated to the library, but he evidently expanded the collection throughout his life. An example of this process is recorded in a document which notes that he dispatched seventy-two books to the library in September of 1739.⁴⁵ A hundred years later, the judge of Medina, İşki Mustafa Efendi wrote a history of this city, in which he noted that bookbinders were sent by the sultan to repair the books in all the libraries of Medina. In Beşir Ağa's library the binder repaired 961 books.⁴⁶ This gives us some indication of the extent of the collection. When the orientalist Richard Burton wrote his account of his travels to the city in the mid-1800s, he noted that Beşir Ağa Library was known for its large collection.⁴⁷

In the Balkan town of Sistova (Svishtov), Beşir Ağa built a school and library in response to a request for books on the religious sciences to be available for both students and the people at large. As Sistova was a relatively small town, the collection consisted of a mere ninety-eight books.⁴⁸

Beşir Ağa collected and donated books throughout his life. Already existing libraries received quantities of books from time to time. It is recorded, for example in a document dated 1734, that Beşir Ağa donated a quantity of books to a library attached to the mausoleum of the Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanefi school of law, in Baghdad.⁴⁹ He also allocated to the librarian in al-Azhar school, in Cairo, an amount of money in one of his foundation deeds.⁵⁰ The sultan also received books as a gift from Beşir Ağa. We may presume that these were particularly fine copies or rare books.⁵¹ However, some of the finest and rarest he kept for himself. On his death (1746) in one of his several residences 150 valuable and rare books were found including the autograph copy of the *Cihannüma*, a renowned Ottoman geographical work.⁵²

29 According to the Cairo foundation deed, which is dated 1754 (VGMA, 639, 29), provision was made for the building of a school, public fountain, and a library, which was to be housed in this institution, for which a librarian and a binder were to be appointed. I am grateful to Mathilde Pinon for providing me with the reference to this foundation deed.

30 VGMA, No. 638, 190; Mihaila Stajnova, "Ottoman Libraries in Vidin," *Études Balkaniques*, no. 2 (1979): 57.

31 BOA, Cevdet-Maarif 7730; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Tarihi* 4a (Ankara: TTK Basımevi, 1978): 328.

32 Zafer Karatay, "Bahçeşaray," *DİA* 4 (1991): 482.

33 VGMA, 639, 57.

34 BOA, Mühimme, No. 152, 136.

35 Examples of these gifts are: a former vizier, Abdullah Pasha presented, in 1750, 186 books, the governor of Sayda, Mehmed Pasha, eleven books. Another official, Hüseyin Bey presented thirty-eight books. The governor of Tripoli, İsmail Pasha, presented 312 books in 1753 and Hacı Ahmed Pasha fifty-eight books. A presentation of 3,252 books was made sometime in Mahmud I's reign. (Günay Kut, "Sultan I. Mahmud Kütüphanesi (Ayasofya Kütüphanesi)," in *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Bilim Kültür ve Kütüphaneler*, ed. Özlem Bayram (Ankara: Türk Kütüphaneciler Derneği, 1999), 99–12. This enormous collection was presented by the chief eunuch, but it is not indicated. There were two famous collectors of books who rose to this position, and both were called Beşir Ağa. This collection certainly belonged to one of them.

36 For several examples, see TKT, 99.

37 Hüseyin Ayyansaraylı, *Hadikatü'l-Cevami'*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: n.p., 1281H), 81–82.

38 VGMA, No. 736, 67–70. Millet Library, Feyzullah Efendi Section No. 2197.

39 VGMA, No. 629, 37–41.

40 VGMA, No. 736, 4.

41 VGMA, No. 638, 187–188.

42 Süleymaniye Library, Hacı Beşir Ağa Section No. 682, 105b–118a.

43 VGMA, No. 639, 128–150.

44 VGMA, No. 638, 141–142.

45 Istanbul Court Registers, Evkaf-ı Hümayun Müfettişliği, No. 130, 267.

46 İşki Mustafa b. Ömer Kilişi, *Ta'tirü Ercai'd-Devleti'l-mecdiyye*, Istanbul University Manuscript Library, T. Y. 1490, 176b.

47 Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to el-Medinah and Meccah*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1855), 289.

48 VGMA, No. 638, 141–142.

49 VGMA, No. 735, 169.

50 Hamza Abd al-Aziz Badr - Daniel Crecelius, "The Awqaf of al-Hajj Bashir Agha in Cairo," *Annales Islamologiques* 27 (1993): 294. When Volney visited Al-Azhar, he noted that there were many old volumes of which a considerable number were still being issued to the students. However, as a Christian, he himself was forbidden to handle the books. *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the Years 1783, 1784 and 1785*, vol. 2 (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1788), 449.

51 Zeren Tanındı, "Bibliophile Aghas (Eunuchs) at Topkapı Sarayı," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 339.

52 TSA, D. 23, 36a–b, 37a. The *Cihannüma* had a number of maps and was so highly esteemed that it was one of the first books to be set in print.



FIGURE 3: Atıf Efendi Library built in 1740 in Vefa, Istanbul. Born and raised opposite the library, Nilgün Hanım tells the visitor where the bell is for the guard to open the door. Photo: T. Tuten.

Another of Sultan Mahmud I's statesmen, Atıf Mustafa Efendi, who was *defterdar*, a post corresponding to minister of finance, also emulated his sovereign by founding a library in the Vefa district of Istanbul. This library is a good example of an independent library not attached to a mosque or a medrese. It seems that Ayasofya served as a model for the organization and activities of Atıf Mustafa's library. As it was established with several foundation deeds, we have a rare insight into how a library was established in this period. The first three of these deeds provide for the future income of the library.⁵³ Another deed from May 1741 makes provision for the books to be donated,⁵⁴ a further deed from September 1741 provides for the building,⁵⁵ and the last deed, later that same month, provides for the organization of the library.⁵⁶ As the collection consisted of more than two thousand books, many of which were rare and valuable, such as autographs or books copied by famous scholars and calligraphers, Atıf Efendi was keen to see that they were properly cared for. To this end he made provision for three librarians, the senior to receive eighty aspers per day, the others seventy aspers each. The stipends were generous enough to allow him to make it conditional that they should not take up other employment and that they should reside in the accommodation provided for them next to the library. When Toderini visited the library some forty years later, he noted that the library had

three resident librarians.⁵⁷ As in Ayasofya, Atıf Efendi envisaged that teaching would be carried out in the library and provided for a teacher with a daily stipend of fifteen aspers to give lessons. As the library was independent, it was not attached to a mosque, so that prayers would have to be performed in the library itself. He therefore provided that the head librarian would lead prayers in the reading room and that

the second librarian would act as *müezzin*. During his lifetime and after his death, Atıf Efendi's family made additional bequests to the library and provided additional income.⁵⁸



FIGURE 4: Atıf Efendi Library.
Photo: T. Tuten

Another of Mahmud I's statesmen, Mustafa Efendi, the director of the Imperial Chancery, founded an independent library in Istanbul. He had originally demanded that his books should be divided between a school he had built in Kastamonu and a mosque he had built in Belgrade.⁵⁹ However, he later made another will (dated 1747) in which he donated all his books to a library to be founded in Istanbul and provided for two librarians and three teachers to work in the Valide and Mahmud Pasha Mosques until the library building was completed,⁶⁰ but he died before the building was completed. His son Aşir Efendi completed the construction of the building (1800) which consisted of a reading room and a classroom. We can see from the disposition of the staff that the teaching function was given more importance in this library. Beside reading and teaching, certain religious activities, such as reciting the *Mevlid*, a Turkish poem about the birth and life of the Prophet, and reading passages of the Koran for the soul of the founder were to be carried out there.⁶¹

Quite apart from the larger independent libraries in Istanbul and the larger towns, and mosques continued to receive books by way of bequests. Almost every medrese could boast a library no matter

53 Atıf Efendi Library, No. 2858, 1b–26b.

54 Fuad Sezgin, "Atıf Efendi Vakfiyesi," *İ. Ü. Edebiyat Fakültesi, Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi* 6 (1955): 136.

55 Atıf Efendi Library, No. 2858, 27b–02b, 103a–104b. For the architectural characteristics of the library building see: Özden Çetinalp, "Atıf Efendi Library in Vefa," *Rölöve* 1 (1968): 31.

56 Atıf Efendi Library, No. 2858, 104b–109a.

57 G. Toderini, *De la littérature des Turcs, traduit de l'Italien en Français par l'Abbe de Cournand*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez Poinçot, 1789), 86.

58 Atıf Efendi Library, No. 2858, 109b–134b.

59 VGMA, No. 736, 205–206.

60 VGMA, No. 738, 142.

61 Süleymaniye Library, Aşir Efendi Section No. 473, 7a–b; Süleymaniye Library, Yazma Bağışlar, No. 2783; VGMA, No. 738, 142; Virginia Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi 1700–1783* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 25–27.

how humble. Many mosques too had libraries, so that it could be said that the Ottoman library system had spread throughout the empire to all the cities and indeed to many small towns.⁶²

However well the Ottoman library system may have been developed by the latter half of the eighteenth century, it is clear that some Ottomans were far from complacent. In 1769, a bureaucrat by the name of Penah Efendi was highly critical of donors who either founded libraries in Istanbul or bequeathed their books to existing institutions therein. According to him, the capital already had enough books and if bequests were to be directed to provincial libraries, science and knowledge would be more evenly spread throughout all the provinces. Furthermore, he argued, concentrating all the schools and libraries in Istanbul would create a tendency for students to study in these institutions, rather than at their local school and this would be one of the causes of overpopulation in the city.⁶³

The reign of Mahmud I (1730–1754) established the independent library as the norm. The reigns of his five successors, Osman III (1754–1757), Mustafa III (1757–1774), Abdülhamid I (1774–1789), Selim III (1789–1807), and Mahmud II 1808–1839) were to see the spread of independent libraries not only in Istanbul, but also in the provinces as well. Apart from the libraries he established, Mahmud I had also begun to build his mosque complex in the well-established tradition of imperial endowments. He chose a site to the south of the Covered Bazaar (Kapalıçarşı) which was close to many of the existing schools. The mosque is quite unusual for its rococo style and shows definite European influences. But it is most notable for the prominence of the library building, which, though part of the complex, was in effect designed to act as an independent library. Many books from the palace and other sources were designated for this library, and the imperial seal and endowment record of Mahmud I was applied to the flyleaf, indicating that the books had been endowed to the library. Unfortunately, Mahmud I did not live to see the completion of his complex or to give his name to the library which was to surpass all other libraries he had established. When he died in 1754, his brother, Osman III, completed the complex and gave his own name to it. Both the mosque and the library are known as the Nuruosmaniye, “the light of Osman.”⁶⁴ Osman III sent the books which his late brother had chosen together with other books he himself selected to the library. Mahmud I’s seal and endowment record were pasted over with paper and Osman III’s own seal was placed on the books.⁶⁵ Osman III did not seem to have shared his brother’s passion for library administration. In the endowment deed, in the section where we would normally expect to find the regulation for running the library, we find a short statement to the effect that the regulations applicable were to be the same as those which his brother had stipulated for the Ayasofya and Fatih Libraries.⁶⁶

Nuruosmaniye Library was opened in December of 1755 with the usual ceremonies attended by the sultan, scholars, and high state officials.⁶⁷ At this point, the library had a collection of 5,031 books, making it the largest collection in Istanbul, the library of Ahmed III being a close runner-up with a collection approaching five thousand books.⁶⁸ The library was to have one general supervisor, six librarians, three doormen, one cleaning person, and one binder. Curiously, a further six member of staff whose actual duties were not defined⁶⁹ were also appointed. Their title *mustahfiz* suggests that they were guardians and probably acted as security staff.

State officials also accumulated rich collections and established various libraries in this period. The grand vizier to Osman III and Mustafa III, Ragıp Pasha, was an ardent collector of books in addition to being a poet and writer. Having built up a large private collection, he made provision for an independent library to be built in the center of Istanbul. Before he endowed his collection, Ragıp Pasha employed a librarian to look after his books. However, this member of his household staff was not called *hafız-ı kütüb*, which means “keeper of books,” but was referred to as a *kitabçı*, a “book specialist.”⁷⁰ This nuance reflects a different role. The primary role of a keeper of books was precisely to preserve the collection with the secondary duty of facilitating public access to it. The book specialist was a private servant whose duties covered everything to do with books, including not only classification, cataloguing, and general maintenance, but also buying them, and so forth. Ragıp Pasha completed his library in 1763.⁷¹ The historian Vasıf Efendi noted:

Ragıp Pasha, having for many years, collected, selected, searched, and had copies made of many books, and to preserve them from harm and loss and to make them available for the use of the people, furthermore, endowed a library in which he placed these books.⁷²

Although these books were inalienably endowed to the library, Ragıp Pasha had reserved to himself the right to borrow books for his own personal use. On his death, twenty-eight of these books were found in his house and were dispatched to the library to rejoin the collection.⁷³ There were apparently more books belonging to Ragıp Pasha, which were in the house belonging to his senior wife. In the Topkapı Palace Archives, there is a letter from Sultan Mustafa III to his grand vizier in which the Sultan gives orders for a certain book to be found and dispatched to him. The style is informal:

My Vizier,

Summon Hatib-zade [presumably one of Ragıp Pasha’s retainers] and his bookman Zihni Efendi and find out why the books on astrology have failed to appear among his books. There are apparently some books in the house of his senior wife. I have no interest in the household furnishings or the other books in the house, but there is a book on astrology from Persia which the late Ragıp Pasha had praised and promised to me. Ask that all the books in the house be taken away and we will search for the book on astrology and return the remainder of the books.⁷⁴

As we would expect of a bibliophile statesman, Ragıp Pasha had definite ideas as to how a library was to be run. His first requirement was that the librarians should be full-time workers, and he allowed them an adequate stipend to ensure this. He also created a post of “*hafız-ı kütüb yamağı*,” an aide to the librarian, whose duties appear to have been retrieving books from and replacing them on the shelves. He required that the librarians should live in residences near the library, which had been built for this purpose, and even provided for the librarians to take turns staying overnight in the library. While other libraries were open five days a week at the most, Ragıp Pasha set down that his library should be open six days a week.⁷⁵

Osman III’s reign (1754–1757) was too short to allow him to do more than complete and open his brother’s library. Mustafa III, on the other hand, reigned from 1757 to 1774, and this allowed him to see the completion of two important libraries. The first of these was the library that he endowed to the school

62 For a list of bequests made to libraries in this period, see *TKT*, 96–98.

63 Aziz Berker, “Mora İhtilali Tarihçesi veya Penah Efendi Mecmuası,” *Tarih Vesikaları* 2, no. 12 (1943): 479.

64 Şemdanîzade *Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Tarihi, Mür’i’t-Tevarih*, vol. 2, no. A, ed. M. Münir Aktepe (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası, 1978), 4–6.

65 For some examples see: Nuruosmaniye Library, nos. 622, 1134, 2697, 3873.

66 VGMA, Dolap 49, 22.

67 *Mür’i’t-Tevarih*, vol. 2, no. A, 5–6.

68 It should be noted that Toderini, usually a reliable informant on the subject of Istanbul libraries, has mistakenly given the number of books in this library as 1,693. G. Toderini, *De la littérature des Turcs, traduit de l’Italien en Français par l’Abbe de Courmand*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez Poinçot, 1789), 97.

69 VGMA, No. 98, 10–12; TSA, D. 3311, 5b.

70 TSA, D. 6090.

71 *Mür’i’t-Tevarih*, vol. 2, no. A, 54.

72 *Vasıf Tarihi*, vol. 1, 129.

73 TSA, D. 6090.

74 İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, “Osmanlı Tarihinde Gizli Kalmış veya Şüphe ile Örtülü Bazı Olaylar ve Bu Hususa Dair Vesikalar,” *Belleten* 41, no. 163 (1977): 531.

75 Istanbul Court Registers, Evkaf-ı Hümayun Müfettişliği, No. 171, 1b–6b; Ahmed İhsan Türek, “Ragıp Paşa Kütüphanesi Vakfiyesi,” *Edebiyat Fakültesi Araştırma Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (1970): 65–78.

situated in the complex of the Laleli Mosque.⁷⁶ Mustafa III also built a library in a section of Topkapı Palace, which is referred to as Bostancılar Ocağı Library.⁷⁷ This library was established for the benefit of the palace staff. It was not permitted to take books out of the library, so it essentially served as a reference library in which classes were given in certain subjects. Three part-time librarians were appointed to the library, and their comparatively low salaries reflects the part-time nature of their employment.⁷⁸

We have additional information about this library from a rather unexpected source. In the retinue of the British ambassador, there arrived a certain Professor Carlyle in Istanbul in 1800. He had come in search of Byzantine manuscripts. Believing that palace library may have held some of these, Carlyle bribed a palace official to show him around the palace library. He described the library as cruciform in shape and stated that the building had been erected in 1767, but the library was no longer operating and was closed by 1800. He was, however, able to see the books on the shelves, but found no Byzantine manuscripts.⁷⁹

He describes the library in a letter to the Bishop of Lincoln:

After waiting some time for intelligence respecting the Bostangeebashi (*Bostancıbaşı*), his deputy arrived, read the letters we had brought, and his principal was engaged in the Seraglio, took upon himself to send for the keeper of the library, and direct him to conduct us thither; we accordingly accompanied him and three other Moulahs to a mosque at a little distance, through which the entrance to the library lies. ... We passed through the mosque as we were directed, without speaking, and upon tiptoe; and at length on the other side of it, arrived at the outward door of the library, which was locked, and a seal fixed upon the lock; above it is a short Arabic inscription, containing the name and titles of Sultan Mustapha, the present Emperor's father, who founded both the mosque and the library in the year 1767. The library is built in the form of a Greek cross, as in the margin; one of the arms of the cross serves as an anti-room, and the three remaining arms, together with the center, constitute the library itself. You proceed through anti-room by a door, over which is written in large Arabic characters, "enter in peace." The library is much smaller than Your Lordship could have any conception of; for from the extremity of one of the arms to the extremity of the opposite one it does not measure twelve yards. Its appearance, however, is elegant and cheerful. The central part of the cross is covered with a dome, which is supported by four handsome marble pillars... The bookcases, four of which stand in each of the three recesses are plain but neat. They are furnished with folding wire-work doors, secured with a padlock and the seal of the librarian. The books are laid upon their sides one above another, with their ends outwards, and having their letters written upon the edges of the leaves. Your Lordship may imagine I lost no time in examining the treasures enclosed in this celebrated repository, and the disposition of the books greatly facilitated my inquiries. I am very certain that there was not one volume which I did not separately examine; but I was prevented by the jealousy of the Moulahs who accompanied me from making out a detailed catalogue of the whole. I continued, however, to take an account of all writers on history and general literature, and I hope by means of a present to procure an accurate list of the remainder. The whole number of MSS, in the library amounts to 1294, much the greatest part of which are Arabic, these are however, most of the

best Persian and Turkish writers, but alas, not a volume in Greek, Hebrew, or Latin.⁸⁰

Unfortunately, what Carlyle is describing as the palace library is in fact Bostancılar Ocağı Library. The palace library had been built earlier that century and was a rectangular building, which was not closed at that period. Carlyle had been duped into thinking that this now redundant staff library was the library of the sultan. But we are fortunate to get this information. In 1831, Mahmud II ordered that the books in this library be moved to Laleli Library.⁸¹ The palace staff clearly had no great need of a special library for themselves, seeing that they had access to the main palace library. The library was closed after some thirty years of operation and after another thirty years the books were transferred elsewhere.

Another important library was built by Veliyüddin Efendi, twice chief mufti in Mustafa III's reign. He had originally endowed 150 books to Atıf Efendi Library in 1761, and at the same time raised the salaries of the librarians to compensate them for the extra work involved in looking after an enlarged collection.⁸² However, this relatively small endowment did not satisfy him and he embarked upon a far more ambitious project; he built a library next to the Beyazıt Mosque and endowed it with 1,690 books, to which were added the 150 books of his original endowment to Atıf Efendi Library.⁸³ Although not very large when compared to the Fatih and Nuruosmaniye Libraries, the collection drew many scholars. Vasıf Efendi, the historian, noted that there were many rare books in the collection so that this library was busier than others in Istanbul. He also noted that Veliyüddin Efendi's son continued to search for rare books to add to his father's collection.⁸⁴ The conditions governing the running of the library were very much the same as those in the Atıf Efendi and Ragıp Pasha Libraries.⁸⁵

Quite apart from the above mentioned large endowments, the foundation of smaller medrese libraries and the endowment of small collections to existing libraries continued during this period.⁸⁶ Libraries were either being founded anew, or existing collections were being enlarged throughout the empire.

The periods of Abdülhamid I (1774–1789) and Selim III (1789–1807) were marked by the growing realization that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse, after the disastrous treaty of Küçük Kaynarca with the Russians in 1774, and that sweeping and radical reforms were necessary to avert the unthinkable. New Western-style institutions were introduced in this period, mainly for the purpose of military training. To establish a new Western-style army and pay for the new expertise, the state became involved in an increasing amount of expenditure. This period is marked by a decrease in imperial endowments, partially compensated by an increase in endowments from prominent statesmen.

80 Ibid., 171–172. Carlyle is merely one of the numerous foreign visitors determined to have access to ancient works inherited from the Byzantine period. In fact, the "Sultan's Library" acquired mythic proportions in the West. It harbored as yet unknown works of the ancients, and the Ottoman attitude of secrecy and suspicion towards foreigners only gave more credence to the myth. See, for instance, Michel Baudier, *Histoire Generale du Serrail et de la Cour du Grand Seigneur Empereur des Turcs* (Paris: Chez Claude Caramois, 1626), 25; P. Ş. İnciciyan, *XVIII. Asırda İstanbul Tarihi*, trans. Hrand D. Andreasyan (İstanbul: İstanbul Fethi Derneği, 1956), 23. There is much evidence that Mehmed II's library contained a substantial number of non-Islamic books, the majority of which were in Greek. However, these books were never been catalogued together with the Islamic works. Succeeding Sultans seem to have taken little interest in these books and most of them gradually disappeared from the palace. (Speros Vryonis, "Byzantine Constantinople and Ottoman Istanbul," in *The Ottoman City and its Parts: Urban Structure and Social Order*, ed. Irene A. Bierman and Rifa'at A. Abou-el-Haj (New York: A.D. Caratzas, 1991), 37–39.

81 VGMA, No. 642, 103–145.

82 Istanbul Court Registers, Evkaf-ı Hümayun Müfettişliği, No. 164, 381b–384b.

83 83 VGMA, No. 745, 79.

84 *Vasıf Tarihi*, vol. 1, 206–207.

85 VGMA, No. 745, 80.

86 For a detailed list of these libraries see: *TKT*, 106–107.

76 VGMA, No. 642, 145.

77 P. Ş. İnciciyan, *XVIII. Asırda İstanbul*, trans. Hrand D. Andreasyan (İstanbul Fethi Derneği, 1956), 23.

78 VGMA, Kasa 187, 350–358; TSA, D. 330

79 Robert Walpole, *Memoirs relating to European and Asiatic Turkey*, Edited from Manuscript Journals by Robert Walpole (London: Longman & Co., 1817), 172.

The decrease in imperial largess can be seen in the library built by Abdülhamid I in a small complex he built at Bahçekapı in Istanbul.⁸⁷ The library only housed 1,552 books and the staff consisted of only four librarians, one binder, one sweeper, and one doorman.⁸⁸ The collection was enlarged by an endowment of 750 books from Lala İsmail Efendi.⁸⁹ As for Selim III's endowments, they too are comparatively meager: he endowed thirty books to a library in Medina,⁹⁰ reorganized Laleli Library, erected a new building there,⁹¹ and repaired Selimiye Library in Edirne and endowed it with some books.⁹²

However, statesmen of this period continued the tradition of either building complete libraries or at least endowing books to existing institutions. While Istanbul benefited from much of the expansion of libraries, there seems to be a growing feeling that the city offered ample access to books with the existing collections, and thus we see a trend towards establishing or enlarging provincial libraries. The statesmen usually chose a provincial town or city that they had some connection with, either their birthplace or somewhere they had been appointed to in the course of their careers. For example Silahdar Seyyit Mehmed Pasha established a library in his birthplace, the village of Arabsun near Nevşehir.⁹³ Halil Hamid Pasha, grand vizier, established two libraries, one in Isparta,⁹⁴ one in Burdur.⁹⁵ Ahmed Ağa founded a library in Rhodes, his birthplace, in 1793, and specified that classes were to be given in it five days a week.⁹⁶ Mehmed Raşid Efendi, the director of the Imperial Chancery, founded a library with a collection of almost one thousand books in Kayseri in 1797, where he had been posted earlier in his career. This library is particularly interesting in that we see a development in the thinking about the operation through a series of added regulations each presumably there to correct some existing deficiency or abuse.⁹⁷ Other libraries were founded in this manner in Antalya by Hacı Mehmed Ağa (1797),⁹⁸ in Keban by Yusuf Ziya Pasha (1798),⁹⁹ in Akhisar by Zeynelzade Hacı Ali Efendi (1804),¹⁰⁰ in Manisa by Karaosmanoğlu Hacı Hüseyin Ağa (1806),¹⁰¹ in Prizren by Mehmed Pasha (1805),¹⁰² in Vidin by Pazvantoglu Osman Pasha,¹⁰³ and in İzmir by Hatice Hanım (1806).¹⁰⁴

Yusuf Ağa, the controller of the mint and holder of several other important positions, founded a library in Konya (1794), neither his birthplace nor a place to which he had been appointed at some time

87 *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Osmaniye, 1309H), 46 and 81; Hüseyin Ayvansarayî, *Hadikatü'l-Cevami'*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1281H), 179. See also Müjgan Cunbur, "I. Abdülhamid'in Vakfiyesi ve Hamidiye Kütüphanesi," *Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 22 (1964): 17–69. See also: Fikret Sarıcaoğlu, *Kendi Kaleminden Bir Padişahın Portresi: Sultan I. Abdülhamid (1774–1789)* (İstanbul: Tatav, Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı, 2001), 27–29.

88 VGMA, No. 86, 1. Abdülhamid'in Hazine Defteri, 31.

89 VGMA, No. 746, 343–345.

90 TSA, No. E. 2885, No. 19.

91 VGMA, No. 93, 125–127.

92 BOA, Hatt-ı Hümayun, No. 16, 161.

93 VGMA, No. 742, 66.

94 VGMA, No. 628, 547, and 554.

95 M. Z. Oral, "Mevcut Vesikalara Göre Burdur Kütüphaneleri ve Kitap Vakfiyeleri," *Belleten*, 24, no. 94 (1960): 235–236.

96 VGMA, No. 743, 93–94, and 156.

97 VGMA, No. 579, 68.

98 S. Fikri Erten, *Tekelioğulları* (İstanbul: Hüsniyatı Basımevi, 1955), 17–26.

99 VGMA, No. 579, 50.

100 Mehmed Emin Müderrisoğlu, *Akhisarlı Türk Büyükleri ve Eserleri* (İzmir: Piyasa Matbaası, 1956), 85–86.

101 Sadık Karaöz, *Manisa İli Kütüphaneleri* (Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1974), 24; İbrahim Gökçen, *Manisa Tarihinde Hayırlar ve Vakıflar* (İstanbul: Marif Basımevi, 1950), 82; İnci Kuyulu, *Kara Osmanoğlu Ailesine Ait Mimari Eserler* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1992), 100–110.

102 İlhan Polat, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Devrinde Yugoslavya'da Kurulan Türk Kütüphaneleri" (Graduation thesis, University of Ankara, 1969), 40–42.

103 Mihaila Stajnova, "Ottoman Libraries in Vidin," *Etudes Balkaniques*, no. 2 (1979): 67.

104 İzmir Vakıflar Müdürlüğü, archive 2. Vakfiye Defteri, 40–45.

in his career. It seems that he wanted to establish a library in a city that needed one. The library he built was large by provincial standards: it had over one thousand books. The regulations for operating the library were the same as those in the Atıf Efendi, Ragıp Pasha and Hamidiye Libraries, save that the salaries were, for reasons unknown, to be paid six-monthly, and that it was stipulated that the librarian was to be from the city of Konya.¹⁰⁵ This stipulation would seem to be addressing a problem that was bothering the founders of libraries. An issue encountered by Raşid Efendi, among others, was that the librarians left to visit their families in other towns at intervals during the year. Locally based librarians would not require this type of leave. The sultan was so gratified by Yusuf Ağa's endowment that he allocated sources of state revenue to pay for the running of the library.¹⁰⁶



FIGURE 5: Koca Ragıp Pasha Library, 1763 Divanyolu.
Photo: T. Tuten

Istanbul also benefited from the expansion of the network of libraries. In 1775, Mehmed Murad Efendi built an independent library in Çarşamba, which was to house his collection of books. They had previously been housed in a Nakşibendi dervish convent in the same district.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, we do not have the endowment deed and therefore we do not know the number of books in the collection when the library was opened. However, a later documents shows that it was staffed with five librarians, a number which would suggest a sizable collection.¹⁰⁸

Another library was founded by Selim Ağa, the controller of the imperial arsenals. He envisaged his independent library as primarily a teaching library and made it a requisite that two of the three librarians should be scholars capable of performing the duties of a teacher. The chief mufti was to choose them and ensure that they were well qualified for the task. We can see the influence of the Ragıp Pasha and Atıf Efendi

105 Istanbul Court Registers, Evkaf-ı Hümayun Müfettişliği, No. 261, 53–54.

106 Istanbul Court Registers, Evkaf-ı Hümayun Müfettişliği, No. 261, 57–58.

107 Muzaffer Gökman, *Murat Molla. Hayatı, Kütüphanesi ve Eserleri* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1943), 12.

108 VGMA, dolap 1628.

libraries on the administration of this library. The librarians were expected to teach, to lead prayers and to reside in houses built for them close to the library.¹⁰⁹



FIGURE 6: Hacı Selim Agha Library, 1782 Üsküdar
Photo: T. Tuten

A third library was built by Said Efendi in Istanbul in the district of Saraçhane, in the precincts of the Dülgeroğlu Mosque. The collection consisted of 697 books, and it had a staff of four through the Rodosî Ha[z Ahmed Agha Manuscripts librarians for whom rooms were provided so that they could reside close by. Unfortunately, the library building no longer exists and we have no record of what happened to the books.¹¹⁰

Another sizable library was founded in Istanbul in 1801 by İbrahim Efendi, who endowed 753 books to the medrese of Kılıç Ali Pasha in Tophane. The collection is interesting in that most of the books were on Koranic exegesis, reflecting İbrahim Efendi's profession of teacher and scholar. The foundation deed is unusual in that he appoints four librarians from his family and mentions them by name. He stipulates that on their death other members of his family were to be the librarians and failing this the librarians would be appointed from people residing in the district of Tophane.¹¹¹ As a scholar he had insufficient capital to endow a building, so to ensure that his books would be available as a distinct collection he housed them in an existing medrese, and employed his family to act as librarians to ensure that the collection was properly looked after. He also seems to have wanted the librarians to reside close to the library. The first librarian was to be paid 40 aspers, the second and third 20 aspers and the fourth 16 aspers per day. This contrasts with large libraries of the period where the salaries were between 80 and 120 aspers.

One small collection is worthy of note, one endowed by Abdülkadir Bey to a court of law in Istanbul, in 1808. The books were mainly on jurisprudence and were most useful to the officers of the court. The collection was to be administered by the staff working there.¹¹²

109 VGMA, No. 579, 122.

110 TSA, No. D. 10, 294; VGMA, No. 743, 501.

111 Süleymaniye Library, Kılıç Ali Paşa Section No. 1049 and 1050; Istanbul Court Reg., İstanbul Kadılığı, No. 79, 6b-8b, 85a, 16b-18b.

112 Istanbul Court Registers, Galata Mahkemesi, No. 584, 63b.



FIGURE 7: Aşir Efendi Library, 1800 Bahçekapı.
Photo: T. Tuten

Of course, we should not forget that throughout this period the existing library collections were growing larger through endowment made by relatives and descendants of the original founders. The salaries of the librarians were also increasing and sometimes the library staff was enlarged to meet the demands of growing collections. We also have examples of sons building libraries to fulfil the wishes of a deceased parent. As we have already noted, Mustafa Efendi, the director of the Imperial Chancery, in the reign of Mahmud I, had intended to found a library in the Bahçekapı district of Istanbul.¹¹³

Unfortunately, he died before his wishes could be realized, and so when his son, Aşir Efendi, becoming the chief mufti in 1799, built the library in Bahçekapı and endowed to it his father's collection together with his own. In the foundation deed, dated 1800, he kept all the conditions stipulated by his father, but increased the salaries by providing new incomes.¹¹⁴ The increase in salaries mirrored the changing economic conditions. Aşir Efendi's son, Hafid Efendi, in his turn, added both to the collection and activities of the library. When he became the military judge of Rumelia, he endowed 466 books which were not to be kept as a distinct collection, but were to be dispersed in the main collection, according to their subject classification. He also invested

1,500 kuruş so as to provide an income which was to pay for the recitation of the *Mevlid* poem on special occasions. Sweets and desserts were to be distributed to the congregation on these occasions.¹¹⁵

Again in 1805, we find Mehmed Asım Bey, a member of the Köprülü family and also the administrator of Köprülü Library, making provision for the expansion of the collection. He noted in an endowment deed that local students were requesting certain popular textbooks which were unavailable in the library. To rectify the situation, he bought 350 of the books most in demand and provided money for the future purchase of necessary books.¹¹⁶ The son of Selim Ağa also increased his father's initial collection.¹¹⁷

It is in this period we see libraries subjected to inspections and occasionally their activities being suspended for a period of time. The libraries would be closed by the inspector of foundations when he discovered irregularities in their operations. We have, for example, noted elsewhere that Hacı Beşir Ağa Library was closed when inspectors discovered that books were going missing as a result of practices contrary to the terms of the foundation deed.¹¹⁸

113 VGMA, No. 736, 205-206.

114 Süleymaniye Library, Aşir Efendi Section No. 473, 7a-b.

115 Süleymaniye Library, Hafid Efendi Section No. 486, 7a-9b.

116 VGMA, No. 580, 13-14.

117 Istanbul Court Registers, Üsküdar Mahkemesi, No. 564, 80.

118 VGMA, No. 639, 129-130.

In 1776, when the first librarian of Nuruosmaniye Library died it was discovered that several books in his house belonged to the library. Immediately, the library's operations were suspended, and an inventory was made. In the words of the inspector:

I, being the inspector of the Nuruosmaniye Library, hereby affirm that Yusuf Efendi, having been head librarian since the foundation of the library, and having died on the 2 Şevval in the year 1190 [14 November 1776], some [library] books were discovered among his belongings and it was further ascertained that he had lent out books, in violation of the conditions of the library and so the books which he had taken home were returned and the books which had been lent were retrieved as much as was possible and the books were checked against the list and a new inventory was prepared.¹¹⁹

In the list of missing books, it is noted that Yusuf Ziya Pasha, a former grandvizier, had borrowed and lost a book and that his receipt for borrowing the book was to be found in a certain box. The inventory was to show that nineteen books had gone missing, but none of these were of great value. However, fifteen valuable books bearing the sultan's seal were found to have been uncatalogued and there were also fourteen valuable pieces of calligraphy unrecorded.¹²⁰

In the medrese of Mahmud Pasha, the librarians seemed to have ceased fulfilling their duties and over a period of fifty years had allowed the 342 books belonging to the school to remain in the cabinets unattended and subject to dust and insects. The students complained to the inspector of trusts and hesitated some of his staff to investigate. He finally ordered the books to be cleaned, repaired, and catalogued and the librarian was instructed to fulfil his duty by allowing the students access to the books.¹²¹

This period, as has been mentioned above, saw the state increasingly involved in reforming the central administration, and particularly the military. New libraries were being opened and these contained Western books. That is not to say that the classical libraries were being neglected. In fact, this period sees great energy expended on inspection, control, and reorganization of libraries whenever necessary. The process of increasing central control over the library system became even more significant in the reign of Mahmud II.

In 1807, the reign of Selim III came to an abrupt and bloody end with his deposition and death at the hand of the Janissaries, the Ottoman troops who were set against any reforms which threatened their status and privileges. When Mahmud II came to the throne in 1809, he realized that the reforms would have to be postponed until he was in a position to neutralize the forces of reaction. Thus, the earlier part of his reign was marked by stealthy preparations for carrying out a broad program of reforms, which would include the education of the future elite. This would inevitably make its impression on the library system.

The classical Ottoman system essentially divided the branches of learning according to the traditional Islamic syllabus, which was taught in the medreses created as religious foundations; these, therefore, were not within the realm of the state, and their administration was generally free from direct state interference. In the reign of Selim III, a new type of library was introduced in the School of Engineering, a library which was to contain books in Western languages and translations of Western books mainly on technical subjects. This new direction was to continue in Mahmud II's reign. We see new institutions of learning with new libraries, again not stocked with the classical texts, but rather with Western studies.¹²² However, in this period the trend towards Western-style institutions was constrained by the small number of people who were involved in the process of reforms. As the century progressed the intellectual elite were increasingly

119 Nuruosmaniye Library, Fihrist, No. 6, 206a.

120 Nuruosmaniye Library, Fihrist, No. 6, 205b–206a.

121 121 VGMA, No. 741, 336, and 340.

122 For this type of library see: R. Tuba Çavdar, “Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Kadar Osmanlı Kütüphanelerinin Gelişimi” (PhD dissertation, Istanbul University, 1995), 29–53.

to look to the West, not only in the sciences, but also in literature and the social sciences. But at this stage, the overwhelming majority of library books were manuscripts dealing with traditional Islamic sciences, and they were to be found in the traditional Ottoman libraries.



FIGURE 8: Murad Molla Library, 1775 Çarşamba.
Photo: T. Tuten

In 1826, with the reform of the whole system of government, new ministries, which had not existed before, were introduced. One of these was to be the Ministry of Endowments (Evkaf Nezareti), which was responsible for the supervision of all trusts. Thus, all medreses, mosques, and other trust institutions, including libraries, were to come under the direct supervision of one single centralized authority.

Shortly after the establishment of the Ministry of Endowments, several libraries underwent inspections and new lists of the collections were drawn up. This suggests that there was a policy decision to take stock of what had recently come under their jurisdiction. We have evidence of inspections of several libraries, and reports of these inspections have survived.

The system of foundation libraries had for many years been expanding, and the trend was to continue throughout the reign of Mahmud II. An anonymous American traveler in Istanbul noticed that in 1833 there were libraries next to or inside almost every mosque and in many dervish convents.¹²³ The fact

123 *Sketches of Turkey in 1831 and 1832 by an American* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), 142.

that Istanbul had become well supplied with libraries meant that the provinces continued to attract foundations, so that almost every city, and indeed many small towns, could boast a library, however small. In this period, the foundation of these libraries is well documented. For example, in 1808 Yılanlıoğlu Şeyh Ali built a library in Eğridir, in the courtyard of his school, and placed 218 of his books in it;¹²⁴ in 1811, Vahid Pasha opened a library in Kütahya; Süleyman Pasha built a library in Çay, near Samsun;¹²⁵ in 1812, Ahmed Ağa donated his books to the Kurşunlu Mosque in Harput, in eastern Anatolia.¹²⁶ Libraries were also endowed in areas further afield. Mehmed Pasha founded a library in the Grand Mosque of Jerusalem;¹²⁷ Hamza Efendi, the mufti of Athens, set aside a room in his house for the purpose of teaching and donated books for the use of students.¹²⁸ In 1813, Mehmed Ali Pasha (the future ruler of Egypt), built a library in his home town, Kavala, now in northern Greece,¹²⁹ and in 1818 Sırrı Selim Bey built a library in the Seyfullah Mosque and Medrese in Salonica.¹³⁰

Vahid Pasha Library in Kütahya provides us with an insight into how provincial towns attracted libraries. Vahid Pasha was exiled to the city and during his residence there he noted that the students complained of a lack of a library.¹³¹ When he had the opportunity, at some later date, in 1811, he donated 210 books to the Yıldırım Beyazıt Mosque in Kütahya.¹³² The books were at first kept in a cabinet in the mosque, and as he added to the collection, a year later (1812), he had a special room built in the courtyard.¹³³ Thereafter, he continued to send books whenever the opportunity arose.¹³⁴

There is also evidence to suggest that provincial libraries were used for other activities besides reading. When Grand Vizier Dervish Mehmed Pasha founded an independent library in the provincial town of Burdur, he stipulated that each day a portion of Buhari's collection of prophetic traditions was to be read aloud by one of the librarians as a spiritual exercise. On Thursdays and Sundays, after the noon and afternoon prayer, and on holy days, after the evening prayer a dervish ritual, according to the rite of the Nakşibendi dervish order, was to be performed. On the birthday of the Prophet, a *Mevlid* poem was to be recited after the evening prayer. After all these rituals, sweets were to be distributed to all attendees.¹³⁵

Of particular note, in Istanbul is the remarkable number of new libraries donated to dervish convents. In the reign of Mahmud II, at least seven new dervish convent libraries were inaugurated.

124 Fehmi Aksu, "Yazma Kitaplar," Ün 3, no. 28 (1936): 394; Süleyman Sükutî Yiğitbaşı, *Eğridir-Felekâbâd Tarihi* (İstanbul: Çeltüt Matbaacılık, 1972), 132; Yücel Özkaya, "Anadoludaki Büyük Hanedanlıklar," *Belleten* 56, no. 217 (1992): 838.

125 VGMA, No. 733, 44.

126 Süleymaniye Library, Harput Section No. 127.

127 Şemim Emsem, "Osmanlı İmp. Devrinde Türkiye Kütüphanelerinin Tarihçesi," *TKDB* 9, no. 1-2 (1960): 35.

128 VGMA, No. 987, 129-132.

129 VGMA, No. 580, 275; Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, *Avrupa'da Osmanlı Mimari Eserleri: Bulgaristan, Yunanistan, Arnavutluk* (İstanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1982), 236-237.

130 VGMA, No. 987, 115-120. These are just some of the libraries opened in this period. We know that following libraries were also opened: Müftü Mosque Library in İzmir (1819); Şeyh Ahmed Gazzi Library in Bursa (1819); Osman Ağa Library in Arapgir (1820); Hayatizade Library in Elbistan (1823); Şeyh Mustafa Efendi Library in Burdur (1824); Halil Ağa Library in Silistra (1823); Necip Paşa Library in Tire (1827); Şakir Efendi Library in Çankırı (1828); Merdiyye and Münire Medrese Libraries in Kastamonu (1828, 1835); Çanşığı Library in Manisa (1832); Saçlı Mahmud Efendi Library in Amasya (1833); Ragıbiyye Library in Diyarbakır (1833); İbrahim Paşa Library in Elazığ (1834); Cennetza-de Abdullah Efendi Library in Erzurum (1834); Abdullah b. Süleyman Paşa Library in Samsun, and Mustafa Ağa Library in Medina.

131 Uzunçarşılıoğlu İsmail Hakkı, *Kütahya Şehri* (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1932), 133.

132 132 VGMA, No. 579, 706.

133 Hamza Güner, *Kütahya Camileri* (Kütahya: n.p., 1964), 21. For the detailed list of expenses entailed in the building and furnishing of the library see: BOA, DBŞM, No. 7965.

134 VGMA, No. 579, 627, 680, 684, 688, 695-699.

135 Istanbul Court Registers, İstanbul Kadılığı, No. 122, 37a-38a.

These collections were of course different from medrese library collections, in that they tended to contain works of a mystical and poetic nature. Of these libraries the Galata Mevlevihane and Said Pertev Pasha's library are of particular interest for the extent of their collections. For the Galata Mevlevihane, Halet Efendi, a statesman, poet and Mevlevi dervish, built a library building within the garden of the convent. In 1820, he donated 266 books¹³⁶ and two years later he donated a further 547 books.¹³⁷ The library reflected the founder's interest in history, literature, and mystical works. Being a dervish convent library, he stipulated that it was not the trust administrator who was to appoint the librarian, as would normally be expected, but the spiritual master of the dervish convent. The first librarian should be a bachelor and be resident in the dervish convent, while the imam should act as second librarian.¹³⁸ Said Pertev Pasha's dervish convent library was set up in the garden of the Çiçekçi Mosque in Üsküdar, where the Nakşibendi convent was situated. The library building was endowed with a large collection and two full-time librarians were appointed, with appropriately adequate salaries.¹³⁹



FIGURE 9: Halet Efendi Library, 1820 Galata.
Photo: T. Tuten

136 Süleymaniye Library, Halet Efendi Section No. 837, No. 1, 1b-21b.

137 Süleymaniye Library, Halet Efendi Section No. 837, No. 1, 22b-38a; Istanbul Court Registers, Evkaf-ı Hümayun Müfettişliği, No. 375, 1b-7b.

138 Süleymaniye Library, Halet Efendi Section No. 837, No. 1, 8a-b.

139 VGMA, No. Kasa 108, 6-9.

As for Sultan Mahmud II himself, he chose to make his imperial foundation not in Istanbul, but in Medina. He built a school and a library and accommodation for the librarians.¹⁴⁰ Although we do not know how many books were initially donated by Mahmud II, we know that in 1839 he sent a bookbinder from Istanbul to the library and that the binder repaired 646 books.¹⁴¹ Sixty years later a yearbook for the province noted that there were 4,569 books in the library.¹⁴² A document from 1835 notes that the sultan intended to build a similar library in Mecca:

As there is no independent library in Mecca, books having been donated by worthy benefactors, but with the death of their keepers books having gone missing, it is my intention to build a library in Mecca, just as I did in Medina.¹⁴³

The sultan went on to say that he had ordered that all books in existing collections should be brought together and a list drawn up. He would then make up any deficiency in the collection. We do not know whether his wish was realized or not, but his successor Abdülmecid (1839–1861) would found a library in the city¹⁴⁴ and it is likely that the books which Mahmud II had ordered to be collected became the nucleus of Mecidiye Library, Abdülmecid’s own foundation.

Increasingly, library collections were inspected during Mahmud II’s reign. Even before the institution of the Ministry of Endowments, noted above, the process of inspecting collections had got underway. With the coming of the ministry, the process gained momentum. As a result of these inspections, new catalogues were frequently prepared, deficiencies in collections made good, and when deemed appropriate the location of the library would be changed. One of the most important functions of the inspection was to establish that the trusts’ administrators were carrying out their duties in accordance with the wishes of the founder, as laid down in the endowment deed.¹⁴⁵

In 1815, Çorlulu Ali Pasha’s collection in his Darü’l-Hadis in Istanbul was checked and a new list of books was prepared.¹⁴⁶ In 1816, certain collections which had been endowed to the Fatih Mosque were removed to the independent library at Beyazıt, which had been built some fifty years previously by Veliyüddin Efendi. A new catalogue was prepared for these books.¹⁴⁷ In 1820, both Damad İbrahim Pasha’s and the Nuruosmaniye collections, which had been in existence for some one hundred and seventy years, respectively, were inspected “because for a considerable time their condition was unknown,” and new catalogues were drawn up.¹⁴⁸ In 1827, the library of the Valide Sultan Mosque in Bahçekapı was inspected and a new catalogue prepared.¹⁴⁹ The books which Chief Mufti Damadzade Ahmed Efendi had endowed to the mosque of Selim I were inspected in May 1828 and transferred to a dervish convent in the same district, and most importantly, a librarian was appointed to look after the books.¹⁵⁰

In Cyprus, there were several collections which had been endowed over the centuries to the Ayasofya Mosque (not to be confused with the Ayasofya in Istanbul; there were several churches named after the Holy Wisdom which were converted to mosques). In the courtyard of the mosque, Mahmud II erected a building to house these collections, to which he added other collections which had been endowed to other institutions; he

also provided for the future running of the library.¹⁵¹

In a memorandum written by Mahmud II to his vizier, Mehmed Emin Rauf Pasha, in November 1830, we see the sultan providing for the repair of the library built by his father, Abdülhamid I, in Medina. He ordered the five hundred books, which were scattered in various locations, to be brought together and placed in newly built cabinets in the school.¹⁵² In the following year, it was stipulated that books were not to be lent out, but to be read within the confines of the school.¹⁵³

In January 1831, Mahmud II had a collection of books removed from the palace and placed in Laleli Medrese Library, which had been built by Mustafa III. These books were not from the endowed collection of Ahmed III, but were a collection of books established by Mustafa III and placed in Bostancılar Ocağı Library, which had fallen into disuse. Mahmud II gave the reason for moving the collection: Firstly, he noted that the collection had ceased to be used, especially with the opening of Ahmed III’s library at the Topkapı Palace and, consequently, the books were not being cared for and might fall into disrepair. Furthermore, Mustafa III’s library at Laleli Medrese had gaps in its collection, which would be made good by the transfer.¹⁵⁴ Finally, he wanted the books to be used by those people who could benefit from them.

Several other collections were inspected at this time: Ayasofya Library in 1831,¹⁵⁵ while in 1833 inspections were carried out at Merzifonlu Mustafa Pasha Medrese Library, Veliyüddin Library and Abdülhamid I’s library in Medina.¹⁵⁶ In 1837, the Galatasaray Library collection, which had been transferred to Ayasofya Library, was inspected by a commission who drew up a list of the works and split the collection into two, one part going to Fatih Library and the other remaining at Ayasofya,¹⁵⁷ both libraries and the Galata Palace collection having been endowed by Mahmud I.

With the abolition of the Janissary corps in 1826, the Bektashi convents, closely associated with the corps, were also shut down. When they were closed, lists were made of the books in the convents, two of which have survived, that of books at the Elmalı and the Demirci Baba convents.¹⁵⁸

In 1838, Mahmud II sent binders to Medina to repair and rebind the books in various locations in this city. The judge of Medina at the time noted in his history of Medina that the binders had rebound and repaired 521 books in the Prophet’s Mosque, 646 in the Mahmudiye Medrese, 432 in Hamidiye Library, 922 in the Karabaş Medrese, twenty in the Özbek Medrese, and 961 in the Beşir Ağa Medrese.¹⁵⁹

Mahmud II’s reign is characterized by the rationalizing of all trusts and religious foundations under the jurisdiction of one ministry. Whenever the opportunity arose, collections were split up, brought together, or transferred to strengthen existing collections. At the same time as Mahmud II organized and surveyed the classical Ottoman libraries, changes were coming about which would bring with them a new type of library. By Mahmud II’s death three institutions had libraries which contained printed books in European languages dealing with medicine, science, and technology. Soon, these works were to be translated into Turkish and printed. These were to become the bases of the new Ottoman library collections. The new libraries were set up by the government to serve the needs of the reforms. While the classical Ottoman libraries would continue to exist until the coming of the Republic in 1920s, the new, European-style libraries eventually made the classical library obsolete in the educational system.

140 BOA, Hatt-ı Hümayun 26, 913. See also O. Spies, “Die Bibliotheken des Hidschas,” *ZDMG* 40 (1936): 96–98 and Hammadi Ali Muhammed et-Tunisi, “el-Mektebatü’l-amme bi’l- Medineti’l-Münevver, madiha ve haziriha” (MA thesis, King Abdülaziz University, Jiddah, 1981): 1–7.

141 Işkı Mustafa b. Ömer Kilişi, *Ta’tirü Ercai’d-Devleti’l-Mecdiyye*, Istanbul University Library, T.Y. 1490, 166a–b.

142 *Hicaz Vilayeti Salnamesi* (Mekke-i Mükerrerme: [Vilayet Matbaası?], 1309H), 307.

143 BOA, Mühimme-i Mısır, No. 13, 82.

144 BOA, Mühimme-i Mısır, No. 13, 168.

145 Nazif Öztürk, *Türk Yenileşme Tarihi* Çerçevesinde *Vakıf Müessesesi* (Ankara: Türkiye DiyanetVakfı, 1995), 393.

146 BOA, Bab-ı Defteri, Baş Muhallefat Halifesi, No. 13 242.

147 Beyazıt Umumi Library, Veliyüddin Section No. 3291, 4b.

148 Nuruosmaniye Library, Fihrist, No. 3, 1b.

149 University Library, İbnülemin Section No. 2485.

150 BOA, Cevdet-Maarif, No. 2821.

151 Beria Remzi Özoran, “Kıbrıs’ta Sultan Mahmut Kütüphanesi,” *Türk Kültürü* 8, no. 92 (1970): 513–515; Mustafa Haşım Altan, “Die Bibliotheken im türkisch-zypriotischen Bundesstaat,” *Biblos* 28 (1979): 306–309.

152 BOA, Mühimme-i Mısır, No. 13, 41–42.

153 BOA, Mühimme-i Mısır, No. 13, 54.

154 VGMA, No. 642, 103–104.

155 Süleymaniye Library, Fihrist, No. 3.

156 Beyazıt Umumi Library, No. 21, 346; Beyazıt Umumi Library, Veliyüddin Efendi Section No. 3290; BOA, Cevdet-Maarif, 8613, Cevdet-Maarif, No. 1870 and İbrahim Ateş, “Mescid-iNebevî’nin Yapıldığı Günden Bu Yana Geçirdiği Genişletme Girişimleri,” *VD* 24 (1994): 14, respectively.

157 Süleymaniye Library, Ayasofya, Fihrist, No. 6, 1b–11b.

158 BOA, MAD. 9771, 10, and 56.

159 Işkı Mustafa b. Ömer Kilişi, *Ta’tirü Ercai’d-Devleti’l-Mecdiyye*, Istanbul University Library, T. Y. 1490, 177a.