

**Presentation of a Project: Catalogue of the Illuminated Manuscripts and Binding
Collection in the Cyprus Turkish National Archive**

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Abstract

This paper is to present a current project in progress for the publication of a “Catalogue of the Illuminated Manuscripts and Ornamented Bindings in the Collection of Cyprus Turkish National Archive” which is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

The aim of this project is to assess and therefore prepare an official catalogue of the manuscripts which bear artistic values so that they could be listed as the country’s historical heritage. However, besides the aim to prepare a detailed catalogue of each single manuscript which included any ornamental element, mainly illuminated pages or ornamented bindings, our objective is to open paths to further studies which would shed light on the scholarly and artistic activities of the Islamic society living in Cyprus which will be explained in the details of the presentation and the intended catalogue publication.

During the presentation, brief information about the history of the concerned collection will be given. However, to say briefly in this short abstract, the origin of the collection nowadays located in the new manuscript library in the National Archive and Research Centre were the manuscripts located in Selimiye Mosque, [Aya Sophia Mosque, previously the Latin Cathedral], Laleli Mosque, Arap Ahmet Mosque, and the Library of Sultan Mahmud II, a noteworthy Ottoman monument built in 1828 next to the Büyük Medrese (also known as Sultan Medrese), all of which are located in the northern part of Nicosia, the divided capital city of Cyprus, an island in Eastern Mediterranean. Most of these manuscripts were bequeaths by the Ottoman Sultans and dignitary officers as well as the wealthy citizens to the mosques, *medreses* or *tekkes* since the beginning of the Ottoman Rule in Cyprus in 1570.

The project started in August 2006 is funded and supported by the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of Turkish Government of Cyprus in the northern part of the island in collaboration with the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia and Eastern Mediterranean University (Famagusta). The budget limit was 6500 YTL (approximately 3000.00 British pounds) and it was used with utmost care mainly to purchase some technical equipments as well as minimum travel expenses of one of the researchers who is located in Istanbul. During the early phase of the study, assessment of the manuscripts was carried on by Dr. Yıldız to determine them. She first attempted to trace out the manuscripts through the little information existing in the unpublished list of the National Archive, a short catalogue prepared in 1964 by İsmet Parkasızoğlu,¹ and the union catalogue published by IRCICA in 1995² which revealed only 50 manuscripts worth to study. Realising the fact that these records are not adequate for the aim of the project, all manuscripts then were inspected one by one in the storeroom with the help of the archive staff. Each manuscript containing artistic value was then ordered for further study and

¹ İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, “Kıbrıs Sultan II. Mahmud Kütüphanesi”, 1964, Ankara.

² Ramazan Şeşen, Mustafa Haşim Altan, Cevat İzgi, (1415/1995). *Kıbrıs İslam Yazmaları Kataloğu*, İstanbul: ISAR (IRCICA). Unfortunately this catalogue lacks any information regarding the art values, decoration details or physical conditions of the manuscripts.

inspection in the reading room of the archive. All details about the manuscripts were then recorded on standard inventory tables and each illuminated page is photographed with digital camera. The second phase of the study is to analyse each manuscript through pictures as well as on original manuscript with the second researcher (Prof. Dr. Banu Mahir) who is mainly expertise on Islamic book art. The third phase of the study is to bring more light to these manuscripts by solving the colophon or vakf inscriptions available in the manuscripts with the assistance of other experts. This process is underway. Finally we intend to publish the study as an illustrated catalogue in both Turkish and English languages, for which we are looking for further funding.

Furthermore, we could say that in the realisation of our study, we expect to bring forward their importance as the legacy of the Turkish Islamic society in Cyprus as well as to assure their protection and preservation as valuable items of historical heritage under the care of national as well international cultural heritage laws and protocols. Since the National Archive is underway to digitalise its collections currently, this assessment project is also supplying information to the archive staff for the priority to be given to these manuscripts and bindings.

Literary search prior to our project already show the curiosity of the institution such as Furqan Foundation or IRCICA, or scholars like İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, Eleazar Birnbaum³ or Beria Remzi Özorcan and Ahmet Haşim Altan for this collection. However, there are few studies concerning the ones bearing artistic value, which is performed by one of the readers of this paper.⁴

Although our survey for the preparation of this catalogue did not reveal a great number of manuscripts of extraordinary artistic value, there are some interesting examples ranging from 14th to 19th centuries. It is the aim of this paper to present some of these manuscripts which are important in view of their calligraphy, illumination or bindings. A Koran dated H. 717 (1317 AD.) originally bequeathed to Omeriye Mosque, a *vakf* of Lala Mustafa Pasha, the oldest item of the collection, a group of manuscripts bequeathed by Murad III, two copies of *Kitab-ı Delail-i Hayrat* bearing crudely made miniature paintings and some Mamluk style bindings will be presented as a case study during the reading of the paper.

³ E. Birnbaum (1984). "Turkish Manuscripts: Cataloguing Since 1960 and Manuscripts Still Uncatalogued. Part 5: Turkey and Cyprus", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 104, 1984, pp. 465-503.

⁴ Netice Yıldız (1991), "Lala Mustafa Paşa Kur'anı/ Kur'an-ı Kerim of Lala Mustafa Paşa", *Yeni Kıbrıs /New Cyprus*, June-July, pp. 22-25

• Netice Yıldız (2005). "Kıbrıs İslam Yazmalar Koleksiyonları İçinde Tezhipli Eserler ve Dört Önemli Eser", *İzzet Gündoğ Kayaoğlu Hatıra Kitabı, Makaleler*, ed. O Belli, Y. Dağlı & S. Genim, TAÇ vakfı, İstanbul.