



GRADUATE SCHOOL
ISTANBUL MEDENIYET UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL OTTOMAN STUDIES

**From Damascus to Istanbul: Relocating the Damascus
Documents Within the Framework of Late Ottoman
Museum and Archive Policies**

Master's Thesis

Ayşe Hümeyra Demirci

July 2024



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Doç. Dr. M. Talha Çiçek

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THESIS JURY APPROVAL

This Master's thesis titled "From Damascus to Istanbul: Relocating the Damascus Documents Within the Framework of Late Ottoman Museum and Archive Policies" written by Ayşe Hümeyra Demirci at the Department of International Ottoman Studies was accepted by our jury.

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STATEMENTS

Style and Reference Manual Statement

Having reviewed this thesis written under my supervision, I confirm that it has been written in accordance with The Chicago Manual of Style and used its [footnote/in text] reference format consistently throughout the entire text.

Signature

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that all information in this dissertation has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conducts, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Signature

Ayşe Hümeyra Demirci

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ÖZET

Şam'dan İstanbul'a: Geç Dönem Osmanlı Müzecilik ve Arşiv Politikaları Kapsamında Şam Evrakı'nın Yeniden Konumlandırılması

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Danışmanlar: Prof. Dr. Bilgin Aydın, Doç. Dr. M. Talha Çiçek

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Bu tez, Şam Evrakı'nın İstanbul'a taşınması sürecini geç Osmanlı dönemi müzecilik ve arşiv politikaları kapsamında incelemektedir. Proje, Kubbetü'l Hazne yazmaları olarak da adlandırılan koleksiyonun Şam'dan İstanbul'a olan yolculuğunu ve bu süreçteki Osmanlı-Almanya diplomatik ilişkilerini kültürel oryantalizmin yansımaları çerçevesinde ele almaktadır. Söz konusu bu el yazmaları, Şam'daki Emeviye Camii'nin avlusunda bulunan ve "Kubbetü'l Hazne" adı verilen yapıda muhafaza edilmişlerdir. "Hazine" veya kelimenin tam anlamıyla "kubbe şeklindeki hazine" olarak adlandırılan bu yapı, Ortaçağ'dan beri binlerce değerli el yazması, kitap ve belge için bir tür korunaklı arşiv deposu görevi görmüştür. Osmanlı arşiv belgeleri, bu materyali içeriklerine göre "Kütüb-i İslamiye" ve "Kütüb-i Mesihyye" olarak ikiye ayırmaktadır.

Bu tezin odak noktalarından biri, el yazmalarının yolculuğunun geç Osmanlı-Alman diplomatik ilişkilerine ve kültürel oryantalizmin yansımalarına ışık tutmasıdır. Proje, olay örgüsü düzeninde ilk olarak Kütüb-i Mesihyye koleksiyonunun Şam-İstanbul-Berlin arasındaki yolculuğuna; bu yolculuk kararının alınması sürecine, süreçteki bürokratik ve akademik önemli aktörlere odaklanmaktadır. Devamında, Kütüb-i İslamiye'nin Birinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında İstanbul'a taşınmasını ve bu süreci şekillendiren bölgesel dinamikleri incelemektedir. Tüm bu faaliyetler, kararlar ve sonuçlar Osmanlı müzecilik çalışmaları ve arşivcilik girişimleri bağlamında değerlendirilmektedir. Bu süreçte ait resmi yazışmalar, Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri'nde saklanmaktadır ve bu çalışmada kullanılan ana kaynakları oluşturmaktadır.

Koleksiyonun Şam'dan Berlin'e götürülmesi süreci, Alman ilahiyatçı ve oryantalist Hermann von Soden'in öncülüğünde gerçekleşmiş, Berlin Prusya Bilimler Akademisi'nin desteğiyle yürütülmüştür. 1898 yılında Kayzer II. Wilhelm'in Şam ziyareti sırasında Kubbetü'l Hazne'deki el yazmaları üzerine araştırma yapma izni alınmış ve bu iznin ardından 1900 yılında Bruno Violet tarafından Şam'da bir araştırma çalışması başlamıştır. Kütüb-i Mesihîyye'ye odaklanan bu araştırma kapsamında 1558 parça el yazması Berlin'e götürülmüş ve burada detaylı incelemeler yapılmıştır. Koleksiyonun Berlin'deki araştırma süreci planlanandan daha uzun sürmüş ve Osmanlı yetkililerinin baskısı sonucu koleksiyon ancak 1909 yılında İstanbul'a iade edilmiştir. İstanbul'dan Şam'a geri gönderilen koleksiyon, I. Dünya Savaşı'na kadar ana yerinde korunmaya devam etmiştir.

Kütüb-i İslamiye'nin Şam'dan İstanbul'a getiriliş süreci ise, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın sonlarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Suriye üzerindeki hakimiyetinin zayıflamasıyla başlamıştır. 1917 yılında Osmanlı yetkilileri, Şam'daki Kütüb-i İslamiye koleksiyonunun İstanbul'a taşınmasına karar vermiştir. 4. Ordu Komutanı ve Suriye Valisi Cemal Paşa koleksiyonun güvenli bir şekilde İstanbul'a nakledilmesini sağlamıştır. Dönemin Şeyhülislam'ı Musa Kazım Efendi ile Evkaf Nezareti'nin girişimleri ve Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi kurucu üyesi İsmet Bey'in çalışmalarıyla organize edilen nakil, savaş koşullarının zorluğuna rağmen başarıyla gerçekleştirilmiş ve koleksiyon Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi'nde koruma altına alınmıştır.

Projenin son bölümü, çalışmanın yürütüldüğü dönemde Şam Evrakı'nın İstanbul Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi'ndeki mevcut durumuna dair genel bir bilgi sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Şam Evrakı Koleksiyonu'ndan seçilen el yazması örnekleri de projeye eklenmiş, koleksiyonun çeşitliliği ve öneminin vurgulanması amaçlanmıştır. Bu tez, geç Osmanlı döneminin kültürel miras bilincini ve bu bilinç çerçevesinde şekillenen müze ve arşiv politikalarını alternatif bir yaklaşımla değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son döneminde müze ve arşiv faaliyetlerinde rol oynayan bürokratik isimlerin bu süreçteki etkilerini de ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şam Evrakı, Kubbetü'l Hazne, Osmanlı Müzeciliđi, Arşiv Politikaları, Kültürel Oryantalizm



ABSTRACT

From Damascus to Istanbul: Relocating the Damascus Documents Within the Framework of Late Ottoman Museum and Archive Policies

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Master's Thesis, International Ottoman Studies

Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Bilgin Aydın, Doç. Dr. M. Talha Çiçek

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This thesis examines the process of relocating the Damascus Documents to Istanbul within the framework of late Ottoman museum and archive policies. The project addresses the journey of the collection, also known as the Qubbat al-Khazna manuscripts, from Damascus to Istanbul and the Ottoman-German diplomatic relations during this period within the context of cultural orientalism. These manuscripts were preserved in a building called "Qubbat al-Khazna" located in the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. Known as the "vault" or literally "domed treasury," this structure has served as a secure archive repository for thousands of valuable manuscripts, books, and documents since the medieval ages. Ottoman archive documents divide this material into two parts based on their content: *Kütüb-i Islamiye* (books related to Islam) and *Kütüb-i Mesihîyye* (books related to Christianity).

One of the main focuses of this thesis is to shed light on the late Ottoman-German diplomatic relations and the reflections of cultural orientalism through the journey of these manuscripts. The project also considers the relocation of the Damascus Documents during World War I and evaluates this process within the context of late Ottoman museology and archival initiatives. The study chronologically traces the journey of part of the collection from Damascus to Berlin at the beginning of the 20th century, and then to Istanbul in the following period. The official correspondence from this period is preserved in the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye and will be among the main sources used in this study.

The process of transporting the collection from Damascus to Berlin was led by the German theologian and orientalist Hermann von Soden, supported by the Berlin Prussian Academy of Sciences. During the visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II to Damascus in 1898, permission was obtained to conduct research on the manuscripts in Qubbat al-Khazna, and following this permission, Bruno Violet started a research project in Damascus in 1900. This research, focusing on the Kütüb-i Mesihyye, resulted in the transportation of 1558 manuscripts to Berlin, where detailed examinations were conducted. The research process in Berlin took longer than planned, and the manuscripts were only returned to Istanbul in 1909 due to pressure from Ottoman authorities. The collection, once returned to Damascus, continued to be preserved in-situ until World War I.

The process of relocating the Damascus Documents to Istanbul began in the later stages of World War I, as Ottoman control over Syria weakened. In 1917, Ottoman authorities decided to move the Kütüb-i Islamiye collection in Damascus to Istanbul. Cemal Pasha as 4th Army Commander and Governor of Syria, ensured the safe transfer of the collection to Istanbul. The transport, organized by the efforts of the SheikhuIslam Musa Kazım Efendi, the Ministry of Awqaf, and Ismet Bey, a founding member of the Evkaf-ı Islamiye Museum, was successfully completed despite the challenging war conditions. Collection was placed under protection in the Evkaf-ı Islamiye Museum in Istanbul.

The final part of the project aims to provide an overview of the current state of the Damascus Manuscript Collection at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul at the time of the study. A list of selected manuscripts from the collection is also included, emphasizing the diversity and importance of the collection.

This thesis aims to evaluate the cultural heritage consciousness of the late Ottoman period and the museum and archive policies shaped by this consciousness through an alternative approach. It also discusses the influence of bureaucratic figures who played a role in museum and archive activities in the late Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Damascus Documents, Qubbat al-Khazna, Ottoman Museology,
Archive Policies, Cultural Orientalism



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Introduction

All studies on the history and architecture of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus highlight it as one of the most valuable masterpieces of Islamic architecture. Constructed by the Umayyad caliph Walid ibn Abdulmalik (705-715 AH), the mosque holds significant symbolic value in Islamic history. Although the Umayyad Empire lasted only 90 years, it left behind numerous buildings of remarkable aesthetic and historical beauty.¹ The site of a Roman temple in the pre-Islamic period, a Pagan temple later on, and a small mosque during the Umayyad period, the ruins of all these temples were demolished and utilized to build the most magnificent place of worship of the period.² Four walls remained of the church, and the mosque was constructed upon these ruins. Although we lack precise data on the construction process and costs, it can be estimated that it was probably one of the most expensive buildings of its time. The use of Corinthian capitals from the church in various parts of the mosque allows us to observe the blending of architectural cultures from two different civilizations. This integration highlights the mosque's unique historical significance and its role as a symbol of cultural fusion. Alongside its religious, social, and architectural values, the Qubbat al-Khazna, located in the courtyard of the mosque, stands out as one of the most impressive features of the complex. This domed structure, characterized by its eight corners, with no window and has a single door, stands on eight tall Corinthian columns. The structure can only be accessed by stairs. The combination of these architectural elements not only showcases the aesthetic and structural ingenuity of the period but also reflects the cultural and historical layers embedded within the mosque's construction (*figure 20*). In the surviving sources and Ottoman documents, the structure is generally referred to as Kubbetü'l

¹ Ross Burns, *Monuments of Syria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 77.

² Mattia Guidetti, "Sacred Spaces in Early Islam", in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 142.

Hazne, Beyt-al Mal, Kubbetü'l Hazain, Kubbetü'l Hizan, or the library of the Umayyad Mosque. The main reason why this building is referred to as a library, a treasury, or a repository lies in the diverse range of manuscript documents it houses. These documents are written in various languages and forms, encompassing mushafs and, albeit rare, bound books that have been meticulously preserved within the building for centuries. This vast collection not only highlights the multilingual and multifaceted nature of the manuscripts but also underscores the building's role as a significant center for the preservation of historical texts. The maintenance of these documents over the centuries has provided invaluable resources for scholars and researchers, offering deep insights into the historical, religious, and social contexts of the era.³ Having served as a kind of archival repository for centuries, this building has preserved a vast number of Qur'ans, manuscripts, and bindings from various historical periods, including the Umayyad, Abbasid, Mamluk, and Ottoman eras. The collection is incredibly diverse, consisting of parchment fragments of various sizes, the oldest Qur'anic mushafs in Islamic history, and examples of the Bible written in different languages. It includes many religious and social documents written in a multitude of languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Old French, Armenian, and Coptic.⁴ This linguistic diversity highlights the broad scope of the collection and its significance in preserving the religious and cultural heritage of different communities. Notably, one of the earliest examples of Islamic book bindings is also part of this collection. This extensive and varied collection not only provides invaluable insights into the historical development of bookmaking and manuscript preservation but also serves as a testament to the rich cultural and intellectual heritage preserved within this building.⁵ This binding, dating from the 8th century, is bound in light chestnut leather over wood. The bulk of the collection

³ Talib Yazıcı, "Umayyad Mosque", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 11, 109-111 (1995).

⁴ Arianna D'Ottone, "Manuscripts as Mirrors of a Multilingual and Multicultural Society: the Case of the Damascus Find", *Negotiating Co-Existence: Communities, Cultures and Convivencia in Byzantine Society Colloquium* (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2013), 63.

⁵ Ahmet Saim Arıtan, "Kur'an-ı Kerim Cildleri", *Marife* 10, no 3 (2010): 329.

According to Sarıtan, the juz found in ŞE 13895 may also be the first known example of a *mikrepli binding*. This example is covered with brown leather and applied horizontally.

consists of copies of the Koran and Islamic manuscripts, mostly in Kufic style. The other majority are copies of the Bible, along with various Christian and Jewish manuscripts. There were also documents for marriage contracts, pilgrimage letter of attorneys, salaah prayers or food stock records from different centuries from which we can learn new information about social life.⁶ Because of this function, the building has been likened to the Cairo Geniza, which has been the subject of intense academic interest since the late 19th century. The Cairo Geniza is renowned for its extensive collection of Jewish manuscript fragments, and its comparison to the Qubba underscores the significant scholarly value attributed to both repositories. Moreover, akin to the notable examples found in the Geniza, several important manuscripts in the Qubba were reused multiple times. These documents were re-recorded on parchment, creating a palimpsest effect, and preserved in this manner. This practice of reuse not only ensured the survival of these manuscripts but also provided layers of historical context that are invaluable to researchers. In other words, these manuscripts are essential in representing the tradition of reuse and recycling in medieval manuscript culture. The layers of writing and re-writing reflect the dynamic and resourceful approach to manuscript preservation during the medieval period, offering rich insights into the historical and intellectual practices of that era.⁷ As for the documents that have been made possible to be classified in the exhibitions on and related to Kütüb-i İslamiyye, we can see various examples of records on social life or religious values, especially from the Abbasid period.⁸ For instance, the inventory numbered ŞE 13438 from the Abbasid Period is a Waqf Record. Inventories numbered ŞE 13025 and ŞE 13219 are marriage contracts and agreements. Another example of a

⁶ Said Aljoumani and Konrad Hirschler, "Trading Fruits and Legumes on a Medieval Damascene Market: The Documentary and Archival Life Cycle of an Account Book from the Qubbat al-Khazna (Damascus Documents 13327)", in *İlim ve İrfan Yolunda Bir Hazerfen* (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2021), 57-94.

⁷ Konrad Hirschler's project introduced in 2017 treats reuse tradition on medieval documents within their contents that emerged from Damascus including Qubbat al-Khazna materials. See; Konrad Hirschler, "Document Reuse in Medieval Arabic Manuscripts", in *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Bulletin* 3/1 (2017): 33-44.

⁸ The exhibitions in which the collection takes place are described in section 4.

contract text with a different usage is inventory numbered ŞE 12922. Regarding religious practices, there are documents such as noon prayers, Esmâü'l Hüсна manuscripts, a book of Qiraat, and a letter of attorney for Hajj. The inventory numbered ŞE 7886 includes an example of a refutation document from the Abbasid period. Additionally, inventory numbered ŞE 11093, although partially damaged, is mostly legible and is a Medical Text document.⁹ For all these reasons, it is possible to study this corpus and its history in many ways.

In addition to its archival character and its reflections on social history, collection is also important in terms of the orientalist activities that took place around the Qubba and the reflections of late Ottoman political relations on cultural activities. One of the first indications of the Qubba in the Western literature may be the drawing plans of the French architect Jules Borgoin and his plans drawn during his stay in Damascus in 1974-75, refers the Qubba as a "library" so that is one of the first records to draw attention to this function.¹⁰ As can be understood from the surviving written sources, from the late 19th century onwards, the academic importance of the Qubba and its materials was recognized especially by some Western scholars of the period including the theological scholar Baron Herrman von Soden, a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin in the early 20th century. Soden's visit to Damascus in 1898 as part of Kaiser Wilhelm II's entourage, during which he had the opportunity to closely examine the Dome Qubba, was not an accidental opportunity, but a planned goal and an important step for his future work on this historical treasury. In his 1901 article "Ein Weihnachtsgeschenk des Sultans an die deutsche Wissenschaft", Soden reports that Edward Thomas Rogers whose career in the British Consular Service in the Middle East began in 1848 and led to his appointment as British Consul in several Middle Eastern cities, including Damascus, was one of the first western researchers to visit the Qubba in the 19th century. However, according to Liebreuz's article, Rogers' research work on the coins of the Tolunids, published in

⁹ These documents can be found in the *List of Figures* at the end.

¹⁰ François Déroche, "The Quranic Collections Acquired by Wetzstein", in *Manuscripts, Politics and Oriental Studies*, ed. Boris Liebreuz and Christoph Rauch (Brill Leiden, 2019), 97.

1877 under the title *Coins of the Tuluni Dynasty*, does not contain any information on his visit to Damascus. On the contrary, apart from von Soden, the Syrian historian and researcher Habib al-Zayyat also mentions Rogers' visit to Damascus and some manuscripts stolen from the Qubba related with this visit in his book *Khazā'in al-Kutub fi Dimashq wa-Dawāhīhā* dated 1902.¹¹ Albert Bruno Violet, a theological scholar appointed as the principal researcher for the German project on Qubbat al-Khazna in Damascus by von Soden's initiative, published important studies on the Damascus Documents at the beginning of the 20th century.

Although he was only allowed to conduct research on the Kütüb-i Mesihyye, the notebooks and personal records he kept during his stay in Damascus provided additional sources. These materials, along with his published works on the Kütüb-i Mesihyye, are crucial for understanding the social and bureaucratic functioning of the period surrounding the Qubba. Violet also photographed parts of the Kütüb-i Mesihyye, which do not physically exist today and whose exact location is unknown. Currently, 214 of these photographs are available online in the archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Humanities.¹² The online catalog contains both Violet's original research and subsequent studies on these manuscripts. Alongside these references, existing studies on the Qubba reveal that Western scholars have shown interest in the collection preserved in this building since the pre-modern era. However, their recognition of its importance has significantly increased in the modern era. The enhanced and more synchronized flow of information in recent times, coupled with the growing number of trips to the Middle East by Western scholars, has led to a more global shift in the scholarship agenda.

The Qubba case is one of the most important late examples of the transportation of Oriental books, library corpus or archives from Ottoman lands to Europe, or of

¹¹ Boris Liebrecht, "Fire, consuls and scholars: Conflicting views on the discovery of the Qubbat al-Khazna documents", in *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of Qubbat al-Khazna*, Beirut Texts and Studies (Ergon Verlag, 2020), 76.

¹² "Damaszener Handschriften, aufgenommen von Bruno Violet", *Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften*.

<https://bibelexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszener-handschriften/>

requests for such transportation. The earliest examples actually started to become official and widespread in the 17th century. Many Ottoman cities, especially Istanbul, became the richest market for European collectors. The trade in books and manuscripts in the city was meticulously maintained, sometimes by travelers, sometimes by bureaucrats or scholars. For example, Antoine Galland, who was personally commissioned by the French king to collect valuable books, manuscripts and antiquities in Istanbul, stated in his 1685 memoirs that nowhere else in the world could one make such rapid progress in book collecting as in Istanbul.¹³ Independent of the royal mandate, several French Orientalist scholars began to coordinate a collecting program in Istanbul in the same century. In these collecting endeavors, they made use of their network of local scholars in the city.¹⁴ In addition to France, Italy was also making significant efforts for oriental archives. The Ambrosiana Library in Milan, founded in 1649, had its own archive of Arabic collections. In Palazzo Pitti in Florence, the great Tuscan dukes had established the oriental collection brought from Rome by Ferdinand Medici.¹⁵ The oriental archives that began to be established in Germany in the 17th century were also mostly composed of books and manuscripts of Ottoman origin. This was especially the case in German lands, which were closer to Ottoman Europe and less integrated into long-distance maritime trade. Early modern German orientalists usually acquired the relevant collections either as war trophies from Hungary or Southeastern Europe, or from Istanbul and the cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, usually via Amsterdam or Leiden.¹⁶ Likewise, important European cities such as Oxford, London and Leiden were increasing their librarianship efforts, expanding their oriental collection archives with all available conditions, and encouraging manuscript scholarship. From the 17th century onwards, these

¹³ Alexander Bevilacqua, *Şark Kütüphanesi: İslam ve Avrupa Aydınlanması* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2023), 70.

¹⁴ Paul Babinski, "The Formation of German Islamic Manuscript Collections in the Seventeenth Century", in *Sammler-Bibliothekare-Forscher: Zur Geschichte der orientalischen Sammlungen an der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2022), 23.

¹⁵ Bevilacqua, *Şark Kütüphanesi*, 59.

¹⁶ Babinski, "The Formation of German Islamic Manuscript Collections in the Seventeenth Century", 19.

attempts to build oriental archives, the examples of which can be multiplied, gradually increased until the late period of antiquities protectionism and measures mentioned in this study.

Since the 1960s, studies on the Qubbat al-Khazna manuscripts have centered mostly in Europe. The historians of medieval Islam, Dominique Sourdel and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, were particularly interested in manuscripts from the Mamluk and Fatimid periods, drawing attention to the Hajj certificates contained in the collection.¹⁷ In the generation following the Sourdels, studies on the Qubba and new methodological approaches have proliferated. François Deroche, within the scope of his manuscript studies since the 1980s, has also conducted research on the Qubba and produced valuable publications on the subject.¹⁸

Arianna D'Ottone's work began publishing in 2007 should be mentioned among other prominent works on the Qubba. One of her first important works that she prepared with Prof. Paolo Radiciotti is the article titled "I frammenti della Qubba al-Hazna di Damasco. A proposito di una scoperta sottovalutata".¹⁹ Radiciotti's research on traces of Patristic literature from Qubba is also another important contribution to the field.

Konrad Hirschler, who has published extensively in the field of manuscript studies, has also continued his research on the Qubba for many years and has published several articles on different examples from the collection. D'Ottone, Hirschler, and Ronny Vollandt's 2018 conference on *Manuscript Cultures in Medieval Syria* at the Freie Universität Berlin is an important contribution to the

¹⁷ Janine Sourdel-Thomine, Dominique Sourdel, "Nouveaux Documents sur L'histoire Religieuse at Sociale de Damas au Moyen Âge", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 32/1, (1964).

¹⁸ See, François Deroche, "Collections de manuscrits anciens du Coran à Istanbul, Rapport préliminaire", in *Etudes Médiévales et Patrimoine Turc* (Cultures et civilisations médiévales I), ed. J. Sourdel-Thomine (Paris, 1983): 145-165. François Deroche, *Qur'ans of the Umayyads: A First Overview*, (Leyde-Boston, 2014). François Deroche, "In the Beginning: Early Qur'ans from Damascus", in *The Art of the Qur'an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts*, ed. M. Farhad and S. Rettig, (Washington D.C., 2016), 61-75.

¹⁹ P. Radiciotti and A. D'Ottone, "I frammenti della Qubba al-Hazna di Damasco. A proposito di una scoperta sottovalutata", *Nea Rhome*, 5, (2008).

recent history of the Qubbat al-Khazna.²⁰ This conference is the first step towards the first edited book on the Qubba, which will be published in the next years under the editorship of the same names.

Also, one of the recent contributions on Qubbat-al Khazna and its manuscripts in Turkish academia, a collective academic review, has been published in the Journal of Islamic Review – *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi*.²¹

As this partial bibliographical list shows, like most private or public library collections in the Middle East region, the Qubba manuscripts have not been the focus of an adequate corpus study until recent years. Groups of manuscripts belonging to the collection, which have been organized according to criteria such as language, religion, writing style, etc., have mostly been included in the literature under biblical studies, Armenian or Judaic studies. At this point, *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents* published in 2020, is the most comprehensive book on the Qubba in the existing literature by the time of the writing of this thesis.²² Edited by Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, Konrad Hirschler and Rony Volant, this work is valuable both for its new approach to the subject and for making a significant contribution to the literature by filling a valuable gap. The book is a collection of articles evaluating the Qubba and its materials from a variety of perspectives. Another important approach provided by this study is that the biased orientalist approach of early studies is criticized in the context of new research and evaluations. The common emphasis on the role of European actors in the modern "discovery" of the Qubbat al-Khazna is directly related to the centrality of European sources, including

²⁰ *Manuscript Cultures in Medieval Syria*. Conference abstract, 2018.

<https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/islamwiss/forschung/Konferenzen-und-Workshops/Qubbat-al-Khazna/index.html>

²¹ See; Genan, Betül, Şeyma Genan, Elif Behnan Bozdoğan and Nevrin Nur Aslan. "Şam Evrakı Koleksiyonu'nun Teşekkül Ettiği Kadim Bir Arşiv: Kubbetü'l-Hazne ve Tarihi". *İslam Tetkikleri Dergisi-Journal of Islamic Review* 14/1, (March 2024): 89-119.

<https://doi.org/10.26650/iuitd.2024.1385826>

²² Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, Konrad Hirschler, and Ronny Vollandt, *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-Khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, Beirut Textes Und Studien (Ergon Verlag, 2020).

diaries, articles, photographs, letters or official documents in the process of the emergence of these studies. However, the early sources that we can consider so far as the first studies on the subject, often do not sufficiently include the Ottoman side, which on the other hand is clearly visible in official documents, memoirs, letters and photographs. For a better understanding of the process in all its elements, new dimensions should be added to the historical positioning of the Qubba through a comparative approach. While the European sources cited in this framework describe the Qubba as an isolated building left to its own devices, it is certainly much more than a "Middle Easterners forgot about their various manuscripts by putting them in a building and Europeans rescued them from the rubble" discourse.²³

As an alternative connection to Edward Said's concept of cultural orientalism, the representational position of the Qubba can be supported by the idea that this framework critiques how the West treats the Orient and analyzes how Western knowledge and representations of the Orient operate to assert dominance and supremacy.²⁴ Said argues that Western scholars, writers and intellectuals have consistently portrayed the East in a way that reinforces Western supremacy and even exoticizes it. In this context, cultural orientalism is seen as a practice of knowledge production and discourse that is used to reproduce Western spheres of power rather than to understand the East. Said's work reveals that the West's knowledge and representations of the East operate with a colonial logic and that the East is constantly defined as the other side. In this context, cultural orientalism offers a critical analysis of Western-centered knowledge production and representations, opening up concepts such as colonialism, social freedom and cultural superiority to discussion. It questions cultural hegemony approaches. Underneath the problem of discourse that comes to the fore in this questioning lies

²³ Konrad Hirschler and Cüneyd Erbay, "Writing Middle Eastern agency into the history of the Qubbat al-khazna: The late Ottoman state and manuscripts as historical artifacts", in *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-Khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, Beirut Texts and Studies (Ergon Verlag, 2020), 151.

²⁴ Edward Said, *Şarkiyatçılık* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2020).

the alienation of intellectuals from societies. However, cultures are intertwined by surgical interventions in broad and mostly ideological oppositions such as East or West. Their contents and histories are interdependent and hybrid.²⁵

This orientalist discourse appears in modern Western literature with the same approaches of Said in the example of the Qubba case. This discourse is shaped by principles that inherently instill superiority and linguistically create a one-sided power formation. As a result, putting together a portrait of the East, almost like a restored painting, has become an accepted task among Orientalists themselves. This meta-rationalist discourse, which justifies activities that violate ethical boundaries, is also prominent in the first academic studies on the Qubba. In this context, the physical and representational repositioning of the Qubba manuscripts in the triangle of Damascus, Berlin, and Istanbul at the turn of the 20th century is a clear example of the cultural Orientalism that became prevalent in this period. The discourse used by the prominent figures of the German project, such as Violet and Baron von Soden, in the works that emerged from this project is the discourse that Said discusses.²⁶ Nevertheless, new research and new approaches in the modern period have managed to overcome this discourse to a certain extent. As discussed in this study, contrary to the discourse of its early actors, the Qubbat al-Khazna was not an isolated structure in the daily life of Damascus. The hundreds of thousands of artifacts preserved in it still provide a wealth of information and insights into the social, political and religious past of Damascus.

This project will delve into the process of relocating the Damascus Documents to Istanbul, emphasizing the representative significance of decisions made before and after this relocation. Additionally, it will examine the contextual and global implications of this move within the framework of late Ottoman cultural policies, taking into account the representational and physical importance

²⁵ Edward Said, *Entelektüel* (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2020), 12.

²⁶ Violet's first study, referenced in the previous chapters, describes the Qubba in terms such as "misused" and "inadequately protected". Soden also has similar descriptions.

of the collection. One of the primary focuses of the project will be to analyze how the archive and museum activities of that period influenced this transportation process. Methodologically, this study integrates various research methods, including critical analysis of historical documents, museum and archival research, and visual material analysis. These approaches are designed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of museological activities during the Ottoman period as well as cultural heritage conservation projects in the modern era.

The late Ottoman period marked a significant increase in power relations between the Ottoman and German states. The rapidly changing world order, political balance, and new ideologies drew these two states closer. During the reign of Abdülhamid II, the Ottoman Empire faced economic, military, and administrative crises that necessitated political alliances with Western powers. Despite the establishment of many new institutes, implementation of numerous reforms, and various educational arrangements, the economic struggle of the empire was a challenge it could not surmount alone against the West.²⁷ In such an atmosphere, the Germans seemed to be an ideal ally for the Ottoman Empire, both diplomatically and economically, among the great world powers.²⁸ Much of the scholarship on this diplomatic relationship to date has centered on pre-war military policies, administrative influences, economic support, and diplomatic negotiations on the road to war. Inevitably, the consequences of this closeness also impacted the empire's reforms and initiatives in the fields of culture and education. During the process in which the German state developed a strong national and intercultural identity – particularly through institutions such as museums, schools, and academic institutes – they greatly benefited from their relations with the East in many ways. At a time when states were globalizing and expanding their knowledge in many areas, the Middle East region, which was home to many historical civilizations in the past, attracted the interest of many

²⁷ See; Engin Deniz Akarlı, "The Tangled Ends of an Empire: Ottoman Encounters with the West and Problems of Westernization", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2006): 353-366.

²⁸ İlber Ortaylı, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alman Nüfuzu* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), 74-85.

Western states, including the German Empire. The interest in Syria's historical heritage is not unique to this century; however, the recognition of Syria's historical value became more pronounced due to the work of Orientalists in the region, particularly in the late 19th century. During this period, the significance of the Qubba emerged as a "rediscovered" value that was discussed and disseminated within Western academia, including the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin. The Germans, especially during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, gained a privileged position, fostering close diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire.

The visit of Kaiser Wilhelm II to the Holy Land in 1898, one of the key dates representing this diplomatic proximity, was an unmissable opportunity for German scholars, including Hermann von Soden, a scholar of high competence in biblical studies, who was intensely interested in the Qubbat al-Khazna corpus. As expected, they utilized diplomatic channels through Wilhelm II to visit the Qubba and conduct research on the existing manuscripts of the building and, more importantly, to obtain permission for the transfer of the Kütüb-i Mesihyye from Damascus to Berlin, under their own responsibility and supervision. Ottoman documents of the period concerning the authorization initiative, the travel process and the protocol activities for this deal indicate that the Qubba manuscripts were divided into two parts according to their content.²⁹ However, as will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, since the sorting in the current context is based on language rather than content, materials that technically should have been in the other section may have been miscategorized.

The diplomatic correspondence from Damascus to Istanbul and from Istanbul to Berlin during this process, which will be referred to as the "German project" in this study, allows us to learn about the priorities of both sides, the procedures and the important figures who played a role in the process. At the next stage of the German project, after the authorization and planning process, the theologian

²⁹ Mentioned documents are preserved in the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye.

Bruno Violet was appointed as the lead researcher on the initiative of Hermann Von Soden, a German theologian and biblical scholar and member of the University of Berlin, but he was only allowed to work on the Kütüb-i Mesihyye. As we will see in the Ottoman documents included in this study, the interest and effort that the Germans put into this collection would also increase the importance of the Kütüb-i Islamiye in Ottoman side. In particular, the names that come to the fore in this correspondence will play an important role in shaping the developing and expanding awareness of cultural heritage, archival and museological activities in late Ottoman Istanbul as an important and alternative approach regarding this collection. The collection, of which only a small portion is currently on display, is preserved in the library storage of the Istanbul Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art. In recent history, the collection has also been featured in significant exhibitions in the fields of Islamic Art and manuscript studies. This study, with its historical background and contemporary relevance, examines the impact of the Damascus Documents on the cultural activities during late Ottoman-German relations, the museum and archive initiatives in Istanbul during that period, and the influence of German Orientalism on these activities through the collection.

Separation of Kütüb-i Islamiye and Kütüb-i Mesihyye

In the terminology of the Ottoman documents that are the focus of this study, Kütüb-i Islamiye refers to the Islamic manuscripts preserved in the Qubbat al-Khazna. This collection of Islamic manuscripts includes Qur'anic mushafs, the earliest of which date back to the reign of Caliph Hazrat Uthman, as well as Qur'anic pages written in the Kufic style on parchment, primarily from the Abbasid and Umayyad periods. Additionally, it encompasses documents related to both religious and social life, such as foundation notes, prayers, letters of attorney for Hajj, and marriage contracts. Compared to the Kütüb-i Islamiye, the Kütüb-i Mesihyye, which is small in number but of great historical value, contains fragments from the Old and New Testaments, examples of the Gospel of Matthew, Torah manuscripts, and religious documents and books on Christianity, Judaism, and Samaria from different centuries.³⁰ Many manuscripts identified as belonging to the Qubba are now located in various libraries, primarily due to the actions of Orientalists who gained access to the building in the late 19th century. During a period when the materials of the Qubba were not adequately preserved, some documents were taken without authorization. Additionally, according to the sources, these unauthorized activities were conducted by foreign bureaucrats of that era. For example, Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, who served as the Prussian Honorary Consul in Damascus between 1849 and 1861, did a lot of research on manuscripts.³¹ Wetzstein, who served in various official capacities in the Middle East, significantly contributed to German libraries by bringing three important collections. These collections are now preserved in the Berlin National Library, the

³⁰ Said Aljoumani, "The history of the qubbat al-māl or qubbat 'Ā'isha or al-qubba al-gharbiyya or the qubbat al-khazna in the Umayyad Mosque", in *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-Khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, Beirut Texts and Studies (Ergon Verlag, 2020), 53.

³¹ For the most comprehensive study on Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, see; Boris Liebrecht and Christoph Rauch, *Manuscripts, Politics and Oriental Studies: Life and Collections of Johann Gottfried Wetzstein (1815-1905)*, in *Context*. (Brill Leiden, 2019).

Tübingen University Library, and the Leipzig University Library.³² The Berlin collection, in particular, is noteworthy for its inclusion of Qur'anic manuscripts in Kufic calligraphy associated with the Qubba. Among these manuscripts are fragments of the Amajur Mushaf, which highlight the versatile and historical significance of these documents. In a similar way, Edward Thomas Rogers, the British Consul General in Damascus, utilized his political influence to access the Qubba. Through his position, he managed to remove several manuscripts from the site without proper authorization, further exemplifying the period's complex interplay of politics and cultural heritage preservation. The actions of both Wetzstein and Rogers emphasise the broader historical context of how significant manuscripts and artifacts were relocated and sometimes appropriated during this era.³³ Since Rogers did not write a memoir during or after his tenure in Damascus, his own account of his relationship with the Qubba is not available. However, the Syrian historian Habib Al-Zayyat and Hermann von Soden both report that Rogers stole manuscripts from the the site. Al-Zayyat also states that Rogers brought tourists with him to there.³⁴

Bruno Violet also violated the limits of this authorization and took several documents out of the country without permission during the German project.³⁵ It can be assumed that the sources associated with the Qubba today in different libraries outside Germany, such as Cambridge University Library, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Egyptian National Library and Archive, reached these locations through similar processes.

³² Boris Liebrecht and Christoph Rauch, *Manuscripts, Politics and Oriental Studies Life and Collections of Johann Gottfried Wetzstein (1815–1905)*, in *Context* (Brill Leiden, 2019), 3.

³³ Boris Liebrecht, "Fire, Consuls, and Scholars: Conflicting Views on the Discovery of the Qubbat al-Khazna Documents", in *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-Khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, Beirut Texts and Studies (Ergon Verlag, 2020), 76.

³⁴ Habib al-Zayyat, *Damascus: Matabi 'alif ba' lil-adib*, (1982), 3.

³⁵ Cordula Bandt and Arnd Rattmann, "Bruno Violet and the exploration of the Qubbat al-khazna around 1900", in *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-Khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, Beirut Texts and Studies (Ergon Verlag, 2020), 112.

As a reflection of these approaches in the late Ottoman period, the first separation of these manuscripts, which had been preserved under the same dome for centuries, took place ten years after the Ottoman government established the Kütüphane-i Umumi (Damascus Public Library) in Damascus during the governorship of Midhat Pasha. The main reason for the establishment of this library was the increasing and difficult-to-prevent theft of books and documents in Syria's libraries, madrasas and mosques. The decline in the number of existing collections, coupled with occasional agreements between library officials and Orientalists in the region to sell books, compelled government authorities to take decisive measures. It was observed that many important works were not adequately protected in these libraries due to insufficient supervision. To address this issue, Midhat Pasha, as the Governor of Syria at the time, received approval from Istanbul to consolidate all the book collections in Damascus into a single library. This initiative aimed to place these valuable collections under stricter control and better supervision. In fact, this was a rather belated measure, as even by the early eighteenth century, an active European market for oriental manuscripts had already formed, with manuscripts from orientalist collections dispersed at auctions and others brought to Europe through the Dutch and English East India Companies.³⁶

Consequently, many significant books and manuscripts were gathered in the newly established Zahiriyye Library in Damascus, ensuring their preservation and safeguarding them against further neglect and unauthorized sales.³⁷ In the 1890s, a part of the Kütüb-i Islamiye collection was also transferred to the Zahiriyya Library.³⁸ This was a small but important beginning of the separation and journey of the Qubba collections. The remaining artifacts continued to be preserved inside

³⁶ Babinski, "The Formation of German Islamic Manuscript Collections", 39.

³⁷ İsmail E. Erünsal, "Fethedilen Arap Ülkelerindeki Vakıf Kütüphaneleri Osmanlılar Tarafından Yağmalandı mı?", *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, XLIII, 19-66 (2014): 45.

³⁸ In the document BOA, Y.PRK.MF 4/35/01 dated (H 28-11-1317) 30 March 1900, Ali Galib Bey, the Keeper of Archives in the Directory of Education, writes to Mabeyn-i Hümayun that the large part of the Islamic manuscripts in the Qubbat al-Khazna was transferred to the Public Library (Kütüphane-i Umumiye) ten years back ago.

the Dome until conditions, policies and historical consciousness changed in the same period.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the German project on Kütüb-i Mesihyye would be the beginning of a new process for Kütüb-i Islamiye. Although this period is marked by important initiatives based on historical awareness, such as the further reflections of regulation of historical artifacts (*asar-ı atika nizamnamesi*) and the development of museum studies based on this regulation, it is not yet a widespread idea to move the works of Ottoman Islamic art from the Middle Eastern lands to Istanbul.³⁹ In fact, this regulation was initially intended to preserve the existing artifacts in situ and prevent them from being taken out of Ottoman territory by foreign researchers. Osman Hamdi Bey received a great deal of criticism from foreign academia, especially from his own close scholars, for this regulation he had enacted.⁴⁰ The Kaiser's last visit to the Holy Land in 1898 attracted great interest due to its religious, political and cultural symbolism, and this interest was reflected in the media of the period. For example, between 1898 and 1899, *Servet-i Fünun Magazine*, from issue 397 to issue 405, covers the trip step by step with various photographic reports.⁴¹ The delegation's final visit was to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. During this visit, the Kaiser could see the Qubbat al-Khazna located in the courtyard of the mosque, and the significance of the manuscripts housed within was thoroughly explained to him. Notably, there were already diplomats within the team who had a keen interest and extensive knowledge of the corpus. Among them, Hermann von Soden played a pivotal role. The initiatives led by these diplomats, particularly von Soden, transformed the visit into a comprehensive academic research mission, as well as a cultural and

³⁹ Edhem Eldem, "The Genesis of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts", in *The Art of the Qur'an*, ed. Massumeh Farhad and Simon Rettig (Smithsonian Institution, 2016), 123.

⁴⁰ The philosopher, historian and philologist Ernest Renan, in a report published in 1884, described this regulation as a sad sign of the Ottoman government's infantile ideas on scientific matters. He claimed that it would go down in the history of antiquities research as a dark history. Emine Betül Çakırca, "İmparatorluğun Sonunda Müze ve İslam Sanatı", (PhD Diss, Ibn Haldun University, 2023): 183.

⁴¹ Database of *Servet-i Fünun Magazine*, project by Boğaziçi University, 2015. <http://www.servetifunundergisi.com/sayilar/>

political expedition. Following the visit, the German team, under the leadership of von Soden, requested permission to undertake a detailed research project on the manuscripts preserved in the Qubba, highlighting the importance of these historical documents and their potential contributions to scholarly research.⁴² To obtain permission for such a project, diplomatic pressure from the German side was initiated, with Wilhelm II inviting the Ottoman authorities (Bab-ı Ali) to consider the request. In the days that followed, after correspondence with Bab-ı Ali, permission for the project was granted. Given the political climate of the period, this permission was not a voluntary approval but rather a political necessity when we compare the similar political requests were made for other historical artifacts and sites during the same era. According to the German project's plan, a German scholar proficient in Eastern languages and culture would be selected to live in Damascus for approximately a year. The scholar's mission would be to study the manuscripts related to Christianity (Kütüb-i Mesihîyye) within the collection housed in the Qubba. This initiative aimed to ensure a comprehensive examination of these valuable manuscripts and further scholarly understanding of their historical and cultural significance.

On the Ottoman side, the Governor of Syria Hüseyin Nazım Pasha (1897-1906), was also responsible for managing the process. During the Kaiser's visit to the city, Nazım Pasha was one of the most prominent figures among the local population and the Ottoman press. He maintained close contact with the Germans throughout the German project and was accountable for the preservation of the collection. At a time when the Empire was facing economic hardships, the Governor undertook an extensive restoration of the city to prepare for the Kaiser's visit, commissioning costly decorations to enhance the city's appearance. When the Emperor and Empress arrived in Damascus, a special visit was organized at the Pasha's residence, highlighting the importance of this diplomatic engagement. This visit not only showed Nazım Pasha's significant role in the preservation and

⁴² Ronny Vollandt, "A Muslim Genizah in Damascus", *Fragment of the Month: June 2018*, May 25 (2018). <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/taylor-schechter-genizah-research-unit/fragment-month/fotm-2018/fragment>

presentation of cultural representatin but also illustrated the collaborative efforts between the Ottoman and German officials during this period.⁴³ Thus, the Pasha's close interest and benevolence towards the German delegation continued during the German project. As it reflected into official sources, in his letter to the Mabeyn-i Hümayun, Ali Galib Bey states that Nazım Pasha was excited to open the Qubba to researchers.⁴⁴ In fact, Pasha's interest in foreigners and new studies was not exclusive to Germans. Nazım Pasha's public works and political activities during his tenure in Syria are not available in a single source, but we can trace Nazım Pasha's contributions in existing histories of the many institutes in the region.⁴⁵ An important part of the rare sources from which we can learn about Pasha in the most personal terms is the diaries, letters and book of the British orientalist Gertrude Bell from her second trip to the Middle East in 1905.⁴⁶ During her stay in Damascus, Bell spent a significant amount of time with the Governor and his family, providing detailed accounts of Damascus during the his rulership. Her observations offer a unique perspective on the city and its governance of that period. Additionally, in her diary entry dated February 28, 1905, it is noted that the Pasha presented Bell with photographs of several manuscripts from the Qubbat al-Khazna. This gesture highlights the close relationship between Bell and the Governor, as well as the significance of the manuscripts housed in the Qubba. These photographs not only served as a means of preserving the documents' visual details but also symbolized the exchange of cultural and scholarly information between the Ottoman officials and Western visitors.⁴⁷ Bell also uses the expression "now closed forever" for the Qubba. If we assume that she obtained this information from the Governor, Nazım Pasha also thought that the building would never be opened again. In other words, at that time, the Qubba still

⁴³ See; "The Salon in the State Houses of the Governor of Syria Hüseyin Nazım Pasha (Suriye Vali-i Alisi Devletlü Nazım Paşa Hazretlerinin Devlethanelerinde İmparator Hazretlerini Kabul Eyledikleri Salon", *Servet-i Fünun Dergisi*, 405, İstanbul: Aralık 15 (1898): 3.

⁴⁴ BOA, Y.PRK.MF 4/35/01 dated H 28-11-1317 / M 30-03-1900

⁴⁵ See; Dr. Ali Rıza Atasoy, *Şam Türk Tıbbiye Mektebi Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Milli Mecmua Basımevi, 1945).

⁴⁶ *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, ed. Lady Bell (England: Boni and Liveright, 1927).

⁴⁷ Diary Entry by Gertrude Bell <https://gertrudebell.ncl.ac.uk/d/gb-2-9-2-28>

retained its identity as "meticulously preserved". However, approximately nine years after this conversation, the door of the Dome will be reopened with the intention of completely relocating the collection.

There is no information regarding who took the photographs that were in the Pasha's possession. Additionally, the photographs given to Bell are not available in her online photo archive. The most likely possibility is that the photograph in question was one of the images taken by Bruno Violet in Damascus and then presented to the Pasha. Currently, there are 214 sources of photographs taken by Violet in Damascus available online. Besides these photographs, Violet took an additional 50 photographs, which he presented to Hüseyin Nazım Pasha.⁴⁸ However, these 50 photographs have not yet been found in the existing archives. This collection highlights Violet's crucial role in documenting the historical and cultural artifacts of the region during that period. As we understand from the diplomatic correspondence of previous years, the Pasha did not have the authority to have this building opened or photographed, except for the photographs given by Violet.

On the other hand, Nazım Pasha's eager attitude towards the German project does not mean that all bureaucrats of the period had the same attitude. During the negotiations concerning Germany's request, diverse opinions emerged from various offices within Bab-ı Ali. These differing viewpoints reveal that not all Ottoman bureaucrats held the same stance in their relations with the Germans. This phenomenon is also observable within the cultural and bureaucratic policies of the late Ottoman period. Particularly in the realm of cultural studies, it becomes evident that during this era, when academic and archaeological pursuits were gaining prominence in both countries, the acceptance of the German Empire's demands was frequently driven by the desire to avert a "political crisis." For example, when the Kaiser Friedrich Museum (now known as the Bode Museum) was to be established in Berlin, Kaiser Wilhelm II put similar political pressure on

⁴⁸ Bandt and Rattmann, "Bruno Violet and the exploration of the Qubbat al-khazna around 1900", 122.

Abdülhamid II when he demanded that the carved stone façade entrance door of the Mşatta Palace, another Umayyad heritage site located within the borders of the Ottoman Empire at the time, be removed and taken to Berlin. Although Osman Hamdi Bey (1842-1910), the director of the Müze-i Hümayun (Imperial Museum), resisted against this demand, the Sultan, citing the need to avoid a diplomatic crisis, chose to gift the façade to the German Emperor and the door was transferred to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.⁴⁹ Prior to the previously mentioned example, an objection petition with a similar intent was drafted in response to Germany's refusal to permit the Qubba project. Before the manuscripts were transferred to Berlin, the Ministry of Sharia and the Foundations (Şeriyye ve Evkaf Vekaleti) addressed a letter to the Ministry of Education (Maarif Vekaleti), stressing that these manuscripts were historical artifacts (asar-ı atika). They advocated for the formation of an expert commission to be sent to Damascus to conduct research on the manuscripts. Furthermore, they emphasized that this research should be conducted in Damascus rather than transferring the manuscripts to Berlin. It was also noted that the manuscripts should be checked and recorded by experts, and if this proved impossible, they should be sent to Berlin on a "short-term" loan.⁵⁰ Similarly, the Director of Evkaf within the Ministry of Education Ali Galib Bey, suggested to Bab-ı Ali that a new resolution should be adopted concerning the preservation of these documents, including the possibility of relocating them to Istanbul. He highlighted that these valuable records, especially those pertaining to Islamic artifacts, ought to be moved to Istanbul for a better preservation and to benefit the public.

" Hem umumun enzar-ı istifadesine vaz olunması ve hem de bu yüzden dahi âlem-i irfanın bir kat daha medyun-ı şükran-ı firavan buyurulması fikr-i kasırasında bulunduğumun arzına mücaseret kılındı." ⁵¹

⁴⁹ Stephen Vernoit, "Islamic Art in the West: Categories of Collecting", in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu (Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 1187.

⁵⁰ BOA, I.MF 7/55/01 dated H 29-08-1319 / M 11-12-1901

⁵¹ BOA, Y.PRK.MF 4/35/01 dated H 28-11-1317 / M 30-03-1900

While highlighting the value of these manuscripts, he also underscores the 'possibility' that even more valuable items might be discovered in the Qubba. A significant inference from these comments is that the Ottomans recognized the historical, religious, or cultural significance of this collection, even if this awareness was limited to a select group of authorized individuals. However, there is no exact information regarding the number of manuscripts stored there or their quality.⁵² Additionally, it is noted that although the Qubba was never entirely out of use, it was rarely opened. Despite the lack of academic studies by the Ottomans on the contents of the Qubba, they placed great importance on the preservation of the manuscripts inside and did not permit frequent access to its interior. For instance, when the Germans' request to open the Qubba was approved, Hüseyin Nazım Pasha was not authorized to open it alone as a governor. He was required to be accompanied by trusted officials from the Directorate of Evkaf and the Ministry of Education. Despite this, the transfer of the Kütüb-i İslamiye to Istanbul occurred much later than the transfer of the Kütüb-i Mesihyye.

Despite the different voices raised in Bab-ı Ali, the Germans were able to obtain the first approval for this project and started working actively in 1900. The main interlocutor of the Ottoman side for this research project was the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin. The scientific delegation led by Hermann von Soden decided to send the Orientalist theologian Bruno Violet to Damascus for this task. Violet appears to have been an ideal candidate for this assignment due to his academic background and proficiency in Oriental languages. His initial task was to separate the Christian manuscripts and books (Kütüb-i Mesihyye) from the Islamic sources (Kütüb-i İslamiyye) in the Qubba collection. The Ottoman authorities permitted this research to be conducted solely on the Kütüb-i Mesihyye. Today, fragments of Bibles in Arabic script can be found among the Kütüb-i İslamiyye.⁵³ It can be inferred from this that Violet made a distinction based on language in general and overlooked some Arabic-lettered Gospels. Or, in

⁵² BOA, Y.PRK.MF 4/35/01 dated H 28-11-1317 / M 30-03-1900

⁵³ TIEM, ŞE 12547

order to avoid problems with official authorization, he prioritized language over content and deliberately excluded Arabic-lettered Gospels from the Kütüb-i Mesihyye.

After these studies in Damascus, Violet prepared his first important publication in 1901.⁵⁴ On the other hand, throughout his work, he recorded his experiences in Damascus in his diary. As the completion of approximately one year in Damascus approached, the mosque commission began to pressure Violet to finish the work. Realizing that he could not complete the entire project alone, Violet persisted in insisting that the collection be loaned to Berlin. He obtained official permission to photograph the manuscripts, got help from locals and photographed as many manuscripts as he could under the available conditions.⁵⁵ This photography collection consists of 214 photographs, some of which included more than one manuscript page. These 214 photographs represent only a small portion of the original collection, yet they reveal the nature of the documents within the Kütüb-i Mesihyye manuscripts, the variety of scripts and languages they encompassed, and the extent of damage the manuscripts had suffered. The collection, available online, includes fragments of codices, sermons by the monk Isaac Syrus, liturgical texts, word lists, Torah manuscripts, calendar entries, Theodor of Mopsuestia's commentaries on Kohelet, Psalm fragments with Arabic and Greek numbers and titles, a letter of protection from Baldwin IV of Jerusalem, notated lyrics, medical texts, prayers, and hymns.⁵⁶ After his work in Damascus, Violet prepared the first major publication and published it in 1901.⁵⁷ Some 50 extra photographs were presented to the Governor of Damascus, Hüseyin Nazım Pasha. Thus, a year was completed in Damascus, but it became clear that this time and the manpower of a

⁵⁴ Bruno Violet, "Ein Zweisprachiges Psalm Fragment aus Damaskus", *Orientalistische Litteratur Zeitung*, 4 (1901).

⁵⁵ Bandt and Rattmann, "Bruno Violet and the exploration of the Qubbat al-khazna around 1900", 121.

⁵⁶ "Damaszener Handschriften, aufgenommen von Bruno Violet", Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. <https://biblexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszener-handschriften/>

⁵⁷ Bruno Violet, "Ein Zweisprachiges Psalm Fragment aus Damaskus", *Orientalistische Litteratur Zeitung*, 4 (1901).

single person was not enough to sort and research this huge collection. As a result, Violet compiled 1558 fragments written in Arabic, Greek, Samaritan, Old French, Hebrew, Georgian and Latin. In response to this collection, the Germans began a new process of correspondence for permission to conduct a more comprehensive study in Berlin. After the correspondence, permission for this second research process was approved. As the relevant documents show, the Ottomans were very careful about the control and security of these manuscripts. According to the agreement between the two empires, the manuscripts would be loaned to Berlin for one year to be copied and analyzed. The process would be monitored mainly by the German Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Before being sent to Berlin, the documents were transferred to Istanbul, where considerable precautions were taken. In a document dated December 15, 1901, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed the Governor of Damascus that all manuscripts should be recorded in a book and sealed before being sent and then sent under the control of a trusted delegation.⁵⁸ According to this directive, the delegation in Damascus divided the manuscripts into packages according to language and placed them in a box. The report of this packing process states that a total of 1558 manuscripts and one book were prepared for shipment, divided into twenty-five packages.⁵⁹ This preparation process in Damascus appears to have taken longer than planned, as the correspondence includes a reminder letter from the German Embassy to the Mabeyn in late December to speed up the process.⁶⁰ After the preparations were completed, the collection was delivered to Bab-ı Ali in January 1902 under the responsibility of Commissioner Zahid Efendi.⁶¹ After the documents arrived in Istanbul, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered another "trustworthy" committee to check the manuscripts and record the current number in a notebook. It was specifically stated that the committee to be assigned for this recording

⁵⁸ BOA, BEO 1762/132122/1/01 H 04-09-1319 / M 15-12-1901

⁵⁹ BOA, Y.MTV 230/174/2/01 dated H 28-02-1320 / M 06-06-1902

⁶⁰ BOA, BEO 1768/132555/3/01 dated H 13-09-1319 / M 24-12-1901

⁶¹ BOA, BEO 1792/134330/3/01 dated H 02-11-1319 / M 10-02-1902

phases should be proficient in the languages in which the manuscripts were written.⁶² The German Embassy was also asked to sign and seal the register as a kind of "promise" that the manuscripts would be returned within the specified one-year period. However, this seal apparently did not have much validity, as the collection could only be returned in 1909.⁶³

In addition to previous measures such as registration and stamping, the Ottoman administrators decided to photograph each manuscript. Although it was a costly process compared to other measures, all manuscripts were photographed at the Bahriye Fotoğrafhanesi in Istanbul by Ali Sami Bey who was the lead photographer of the Ministry of Navy and one of the court photographers of the time.⁶⁴ All these new records created in Istanbul would be utilized by the committee to inspect the manuscripts and determine whether they were missing or damaged during the transfer of the collection to Istanbul before being returned to Damascus. At this point, it is evident that photographic technology, which had become widespread in social, political, and various other fields during the reign of Abdülhamid II, now served a new purpose. In the future, precautionary photography is expected to become particularly widespread in the archaeological studies of the empire.⁶⁵ Besides that, although the use of photographic technology for this purpose was very rare, it was not the only example at the time. It is known that Egyptian writer and historian Ahmed Taymour also used this method to preserve the manuscripts in his library. This preservation method was particularly driven by the efforts of Western scholars in the 19th century to acquire Arabic

⁶² "a committee consisting of people who are fluent in the aforementioned languages" BOA, BEO 1792/134330/3/01 dated H 02-11-1319 / M 10-02-1902

⁶³ BOA, BEO 1792/134330/1/01 dated H 02-11-1319 / M 10-02-1902

⁶⁴ BOA, BEO 1795/134611/1/01 dated H 11-11-1319 / M 19-02-1902

⁶⁵ For example, another responsibility of the inspection team sent from the Imperial Museum (Müze-i Hümayun) to archaeological excavations would be to photograph the process. It is known that the photographs taken by Ottoman photographers in these areas were intended not only to record archaeological finds and historical sites, but also to closely monitor and supervise foreign archaeologists. See; Zeynep Çelik and Edhem Eldem. *Camera Ottomana: Photography and Modernity in the Ottoman Empire, 1840-1914* (Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015). Also, see; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

manuscripts. Taymour utilized photographic technology to effectively rescue manuscripts that were in danger of being lost. Thus, photography made it possible to replicate manuscripts with complete accuracy and in a short time, which was a much faster method than copying the texts by hand. In fact, a significant portion of Taymour's manuscript collection consisted of these photographic copies, which originated from European libraries, including those in the Vatican and Istanbul.⁶⁶

Although it was a very costly measure under the current circumstances, this precaution was not abandoned, and the photographing process was completed by Ali Sami Bey at his studio. After Violet's photographing process in Damascus, this work in Istanbul is the second photographing operation of the collection. By then, Ali Sami Bey had become a well-known name in the palace thanks to his photographic work, especially at official state events. He received the title of "Bahriye Nezareti Celilesi Serfotoğrafi" under the Mekteb-i Bahriye-i Şahane.⁶⁷ According to document reports on the process of photographing the Qubba manuscripts under the supervision of Tevfik Pasha, Ali Sami Bey took 3,116 photographs at the Bahriye Fotoğrafhanesi and a copy of each photograph was made into an album to be presented to the Sultan. The documents indicate that this catalog was sent to the Kütüphane-i Hümayun in Yıldız Palace.⁶⁸ While one of the catalogs was sent to the palace library, the other was delivered to the Nezaret. Also, the stated number of these photographs points to two possibilities: Either Ali Sami Bey photographed the same side of each copy twice, or he photographed the front and back sides of each copy once. It is not possible to reach a definitive answer about these possibilities for the time being, because neither the catalog from the palace library nor the court copy has yet been found in the existing archives. Nevertheless, these two incomplete catalogs seem to have served two purposes. When the Germans returned the collection to Istanbul, the delegation in charge had sufficient material to check the manuscripts. In addition, a new photo

⁶⁶ Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics* (Princeton University Press, 2020), 111.

⁶⁷ Bahattin Öztuncay, *Dersaadet'in Fotoğrafçıları, Photography in 19th Century Istanbul: Pioneers, Studios, Artists* (Istanbul: Aygaz A.Ş., 2003), 338.

⁶⁸ BOA, BEO 1795/134611/03 dated H 11-11-1319 / M 19-02-1902

album was added to the Sultan's collection of photographs in the Kütüphane-i Hümayun. However, it seems that the total cost of photographing the collection was much higher than expected. Ali Sami Bey reported the total cost of 3,116 photographs and additional binding costs to the Ministry of Finance as 46,760 kurus.⁶⁹ The Grand Vizier stated that this cost was excessive and that existing measures would be sufficient. Even though the Grand Vizier had ordered the manuscripts to be handed over to the German embassy against signature, the photographing process was insisted upon, especially by Ahmed Tevfik Pasha. The payment of the invoice to Sami Bey was also realized with the pressure of Tevfik Pasha, and this amount, which was more than Tevfik Pasha's monthly salary at the time, was paid to Sami Bey by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷⁰ In addition, Sami Bey's work during this process was deemed worthy of being rewarded by Tevfik Pasha's initiatives and he was promoted as commander.⁷¹ There is also information that the second album prepared by Sami Bey was last sent to the Kütüphane-i Hümayun in Yıldız Palace. At that time, the library had a collection of 911 albums containing approximately 36,000 photographs⁷² and the Damascus Documents photo album was placed among these collections. After the dethronement of Sultan Abdülhamid II, his library in the palace was also looted. The photo albums, on the other hand, were not easily recovered. The collection was first moved to the Ministry of Education,⁷³ and then transferred to the library of Istanbul University. It is known that the collection was transferred to the university library in 1925 and has been kept there ever since.⁷⁴ However, no photographs of the Damascus Documents were found in the library's digitized photography archive. In this case, two possibilities can be considered; either the

⁶⁹ BOA, I.HUS 94/88/1 H 22-11-1319 / M 27-02-1902

⁷⁰ Carter Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 223. "The Foreign Ministers 'salaries for 1896-1908 (with data sources): 40,000 (Har., SA429, Ahmed Tevfik Pasha, I 8 CA 1313/November 1895) per month.

⁷¹ BOA, Y.MTV 231/76 01 dated H 13-09-1320 / M 14-12-1902

⁷² Nurhan Atasoy, *Yıldız Sarayı Fotoğraf Albümlerinden Yedigâr-ı İstanbul* (Istanbul: Akkök Yayınları, 2010), 7.

⁷³ BOA, MV, 178/34 dated H 19-07-1331 / M 24-06-1913

⁷⁴ Atasoy, *Yıldız Sarayı Fotoğraf Albümlerinden Yedigâr-ı İstanbul*, 11.

album was lost during the looting of the library or during the period when it was kept in the Evkaf Nezareti.

In June 1902, the collection was handed over to the German Embassy and then on its way to Berlin.⁷⁵ After the collection was sent to Berlin, correspondence between the two states ceased for a while. While the collection was in Berlin, von Soden presented his paper "Bericht über die in der Kubbet in Damaskus Gefundenen Handschriftenfragmente" in 1903, which served as an introduction to further work on the Qubba at the Academy.⁷⁶ Although the loan period was initially set for one year, the Germans were able to extend it until 1909. The first request for an extension came from Berlin in 1904. The Germans asked for an extension of the agreed period, stating that one year was not enough for scholars to complete their research and that the manuscripts were too worn out, which made it difficult to examine them.⁷⁷ In the following years, the loan period was extended once more and the documents remained in Berlin until 1909. However, after the Ottomans refused to allow another extension and insisted that the documents be returned as soon as possible, the Germans handed over the collection to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the German Embassy in 1909.⁷⁸ This insistence can be attributed to the possibility that the complicated situation in Istanbul following the dethronement of Sultan Abdülhamid II did not give the Germans any more leverage in this deal. The collection was lastly photographed in Berlin in 1909 before being returned to Istanbul. By then, authorized scholars, including Hermann von Soden, had photographed some of the works while studying them at the Berlin Museumbibliothek (now the Berlin State Library/Staatsbibliothek).⁷⁹ This third photographing process remained 100 photographs, which are now available online through the Berlin Staatsbibliothek

⁷⁵ BOA, Y.MTV 230/174/2/02 dated H 28-02-1320 / M 06-06-1902

⁷⁶ Hermann Von Soden, "Bericht über die in der Kubbet in Damaskus Gefundenen Handschriftenfragmente", *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1903.

⁷⁷ BOA, Y.MTV 260/01 dated H 15-03-1322 / M 30-05-1904

⁷⁸ BOA, HR.ID 2033/109/01/01 dated H 23-01-1322 / M 09-04-1904

⁷⁹ D'Ottone, "Manuscripts as Mirrors of a Multilingual and Multicultural Society", 68.

database.⁸⁰ These photographs were thought to have disappeared after the devastation of Berlin during World War II, but in 1999 it was discovered that some of the photographs had survived and were preserved in the same library.⁸¹ Of the 1,558 manuscript fragments, it is not known how many could have been photographed, but only 100 survived from the chaos of World War II. Another possibility is that the Germans only had the opportunity to take 100 photographs before returning the manuscripts to Istanbul. A document dated July 21, 1909 states that the manuscripts were delivered in full by the embassy and that a copy of the ten-volume Arabic catalogue in the Berlin Library was also presented with the manuscripts as a gift to be sent to the Damascus Library.⁸² According to the latest available records of this transfer, once the controls in Istanbul were in place, the documents were sent to Damascus, their main location.

⁸⁰ Mss Simulata Orientalia 5 & Mss Simulata Orientalia 6, *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin/Oriental Department*, Preußischer Kulturbesitz Collection. http://orient-digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/receive/SBBMSBook_islamhs_00012087

⁸¹ Ronny Vollandt, "Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources", *Biblia Arabica*, Volume: 2 (2015): 56.

⁸² BOA, BEO 3618/271288 dated H 25-07-1327 / M 12-08-1909

Damascus Documents within the Mission of Late Ottoman Museology

If the Ottoman Empire had not faced the possibility of losing its Arab territories due to World War I, would the Damascus Documents still have been moved to Istanbul? The potential answers to this question are a significant topic of discussion in terms of late Ottoman museum and archival activities. In this study, when evaluating the question within the framework of İsmail Erünsal's comprehensive work on the looting of books in the Middle East, I believe it is more accurate to consider the purpose of relocating the Qubba manuscripts to Istanbul as 'protection' rather than 'plunder.' As Erünsal noted, the Ottomans were extremely meticulous about preserving waqf libraries in the countries they conquered. This sensitivity towards waqf documents continued until the final period of the Ottoman Empire.⁸³ As mentioned in the first chapter of this project, new measures and decisions have been taken recently as a result of the great loss of books in Middle Eastern libraries and the attempts of Orientalists to create library collections in their own countries with the collections they took from there. When we evaluate the Qubba deal in this context, we can guess that the Ottomans were faced with a dilemma between "keeping the waqf property in its place" and "protecting the waqf property in the center". On the other hand, the recommendations and ideas of Ali Galib Bey and Tevfik Pasha in the pre-war period, such as the transfer of the manuscripts to Istanbul or their delivery to the Müze-i Hümayun when they were sent back from Berlin, were not approved. After being sent back from Berlin, the Kütüb-i Mesihyye were returned to their original location in Damascus. However, with the outbreak of the war, both the actors in the region changed and the future governance of the region became uncertain. Political and geographical changes in the empire also led to ideological shifts. Consequently, the concept of protecting waqf property in the center gained

⁸³ İsmail E. Erünsal, "Fethedilen Arap Ülkelerindeki Vakıf Kütüphaneleri Osmanlılar Tarafından Yağmalandı mı?", *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, XLIII, 19-66 (2014): 24.

prominence. Due to the security issues in the region under wartime conditions, it was decided to transfer the Kütüb-i Islamiye to Istanbul. Despite the challenging circumstances, this transfer was successfully organized. As a result, museum activities in late Ottoman Istanbul gained momentum, and cultural policies began to be reshaped. Ahmed Süreyya Bey argues that the museum, although a Western concept and institution, is not unique to the West in terms of its function of preserving the "asar-ı kadim". Tombs, libraries and temples were also such institutions that served same purposes.⁸⁴ In the early period of Ottoman museology and archival activities, artifacts of high historical value were preserved within their own regions. However, the increasing smuggling of historical artifacts and the inadequate protection of existing ones heightened the conservation role of museums. Items such as carpets, chests, and books were stolen from religious sites such as mosques and tombs. Additionally, physical damage began to occur in places where tiles were being removed.⁸⁵ Initially, warning letters were written to the officials in the areas where this situation was noticed, but these warnings were not enough. This is precisely one of the purposes for which the Evkaf-ı Islamiye Museum (now known as the Istanbul Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art) was established, and in this respect, it represents one of the most tangible results of the cultural heritage approach developed in the late Ottoman period. Since, according to the ideological approaches of the period, religious affinity was considered a more national element than racial affinity, this museum and its collections were regarded as a more national institution compared to the existing museums of the time. In 1869, the first Asar-ı Atika regulation came into force, and the Müze-i Hümayun was officially named and opened.⁸⁶ In 1872, German scientist Anton

⁸⁴ Mustafa Göleç, "Evkaf-ı İslamiye'den Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesine: Osmanlı-Türk Müzeciliğinin Siyasal Anlamı", in *Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi'nin Kuruluşunun 100. Yılı ve Vakıf Müzeleri*, Panel 27 Mayıs 2014, (Ankara: Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 2014), 18.

⁸⁵ Seracettin Şahin, "Yüzüncü Yılında Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi'nin Gelişimi ve Koleksiyonları", in *Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi'nin Kuruluşunun 100. Yılı ve Vakıf Müzeleri*, Panel 27 Mayıs 2014, (Ankara: Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 2014), 51.

⁸⁶ Edhem Eldem, "The (Still) Birth of the Ottoman 'Museum': A Critical Reassessment", in *Collecting and Empires: An Historical and Global Perspective*, ed. Maia Wellington Gahtan and Eva-Maria Troelsenberg (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2018), 259.

Philip Dethier was appointed as the director of the Müze-i Hümayun. One of the first records of Islamic artifacts in Ottoman museology was made during Dethier's tenure as director of the museum. The inventory book dated 1870 contains a 3-page list of the Islamic artifacts included in the museum collection in 1885.⁸⁷ This list can be seen as one of the first building blocks of the efforts to establish a museum of Islamic artifacts within the Ottoman Empire. Besides that, one of Dethier's first actions after being appointed to this position was to issue the second regulation of the *Asar-ı Atika Nizamnamesi*. This regulation, issued in 1874, aimed to regulate and protect the traffic of historical artifacts. According to Shaw, although at first glance this regulation seems to protect the Ottomans, it actually legalizes the taking of historical artifacts out of the country, which had been prevented for many years through haphazard practices and only occasionally.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Osman Hamdi Bey, who succeeded Dethier as director, succeeded in expanding the existing collection with great efforts and elevated the museum to a more prestigious position throughout the empire. Osman Hamdi Bey's appointment to this position was not only a national decision but considering his academic background and his interest and talent in art, he was an ideal choice for the position. He also had an important family background in the Ottoman bureaucracy.⁸⁹ During this period, cultural relations with Europe expanded and participation in exhibitions increased. The inadequacies of the 1874 regulation led to legal struggles, and the need for new regulations in 1884 and 1906 arose following the expansion of archaeological studies and the search for artifacts. Nevertheless, legal measures against the orientalist archaeologists of the period were often insufficient. Additionally, the smuggling of artifacts was not confined to archaeological studies but was also carried out by scholars who had been granted privileges in public works projects, such as railway construction. Whether repositioned as political gifts, facilitated by inadequate laws, or smuggled, the

⁸⁷ Eldem, *Genesis Of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts*, 129.

⁸⁸ Wendy Shaw, *Osmanlı Müzeciliği: Müzeler, Arkeoloji ve Tarihin Görseleştirilmesi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2020), 109.

⁸⁹ Shaw, *Osmanlı Müzeciliği*, 123.

most valuable artifacts often ended up in Germany.⁹⁰ Especially in cases like the Damascus Documents, the relocation of artifacts from different regions of the empire, where their safety was not guaranteed, to museums in Bab-ı Ali often became a necessity. In the period of 1906, when the new regulation was implemented, historical artifact smuggling was carried out not only by foreigners but also with the help of the local population in Arab lands. Again, during the governorship of Hüseyin Nazım Pasha, when the Hijaz Railway project was being carried out with the technical support of the Germans, smuggling activities involving locals and tribesmen took place.⁹¹

With the expansion of museum activities in Istanbul and the increase in the number of artifacts collected, the existing museum capacity became insufficient after a while. The first artifacts collected from different parts of the Empire were exhibited at the Çinili Köşk between 1910 and 1914.⁹² After these activities, the idea of collecting historical artifacts from Turkish and Islamic history in a separate museum began to gain physical and ideological acceptance. As a result of the initiatives and long efforts of Osman Hamdi Bey and Şeyhülislam Hayri Efendi, the Evkaf-ı İslamiye Museum was officially established on April 27, 1914.⁹³ Another institution that played an important role in this process was the Evkaf Nezareti. Both in relation to the Müze-i Hümayun and independently, efforts were made to preserve Islamic artifacts. Evkaf Nezareti played an important role in the idea of preserving Islamic artifacts under a separate institution during the Abdülhamid II period, when institutionalization increased.⁹⁴ From its

⁹⁰ See; Can Bilsel, "Marbles Lost and Found: Carl Humann, Pergamon and the Making of an Imperial Subject", in *Centropa* 7/2 (2007): 121-135. *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753-1914*, ed. Zainab Bahrani, Zeynep Çelik, and Edhem Eldem (Istanbul: SALT, 2011).

⁹¹ Alev Koçak, *The Ottoman Empire and Archaeological Excavations: Ottoman Policy From 1840-1906* (Isis Press, 2011).

⁹² Şahin, "Yüzüncü Yılında Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi'nin Gelişimi ve Koleksiyonları", 52.

⁹³ Adnan Tüzen, "Arşiv Belgelerinde Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi", in *Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi'nin Kuruluşunun 100. Yılı ve Vakıf Müzeleri*, Panel 27 Mayıs 2014, (Ankara: Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 2014), 26.

⁹⁴ Çakırca, "İmparatorluğun Sonunda Müze ve İslam", 209.

establishment, the preservation of waqf artifacts throughout the empire was under the responsibility of this institution. In the late Ottoman period, when waqf artifacts began to acquire the status of historical monuments and new ways of preservation became necessary, the Evkaf Nezareti, both in conjunction with the Müze-i Hümayun and independently, had to use all its means to ensure that the artifacts under its control remained within the borders of the empire and were protected. It is also understood that this obligatory cooperation between the two institutions has sometimes turned into conflict.⁹⁵

The first artifacts of the museum were mostly pieces of Islamic history and art taken from mosques, tombs, madrasas and other places under the Nezaret of Evkaf.⁹⁶ The Islamic collections of the Müze-i Hümayun were moved to the soup kitchen section of the Süleymaniye Complex, which had previously served as an imaret until this date.⁹⁷ The founding committee of the museum was formed by Hayri Efendi. The committee includes Keçecizade Reşad Fuad, a retired member of the Council of State, Armenak Bey, the second chairman of the Divan-ı Muhasebat, Ibn'ül Emin Mahmud Kemal, a member of the Vilayet-i Mümteza and Translation Department, Ahmet Hakkı Bey, Ali Baş Hempa Bey, the chairman of the Inspection Committee of the Ministry of Justice, and İsmet Bey, the former Şehremini and Deputy of Istanbul.⁹⁸ İsmet Bey was the prominent figure in the transportation of the Damascus Documents to Istanbul. He was also a member of the Board for the Protection of Historical Artifacts (Muhafaza-i Asar-ı Atika Encümeni) established in May 1917 on the initiative of Halil Edhem (Eldem), the President of the Müze-i Hümayun.⁹⁹ Another purpose for Hayri Efendi to convene this committee was to collect historical artifacts related to the museum and to conduct research for new inventories. Yücel states that this commission conducted

⁹⁵ Çakırca, "İmparatorluğun Sonunda Müze ve İslam", 219.

⁹⁶ Eldem, "Genesis Of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts", 120.

⁹⁷ Wendy Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archaeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (University of California Press, 2003), 211.

⁹⁸ Tüzen, "Arşiv Belgelerinde Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi", 35.

⁹⁹ Halil Edhem, *Müzecilik Yazıları: Modern Sanat Müzesinin Tasarımı* (İletişim Yayınları, 2019).

explorations in different parts of the empire between 1911 and 1914.¹⁰⁰ Historical artifacts in structures such as mosques, masjids and tombs were examined one by one and connections were established with even the most remote corners of the empire. The fact that İsmet Bey made the first examinations of the Damascus Documents during this exploration process and that he was able to obtain permission to bring some of the documents to Istanbul within the scope of this study is the most accurate inference from the available sources. The close interest of the bureaucrats of the period in museum activities must have facilitated this permission. Ottoman rulers also showed great interest in the opening of the museum and Şehzade Yusuf İzzeddin Efendi was the guest of honor at the opening. Important figures such as Osman Hamdi Bey, Sait Halim Pasha, Besim Ömer Pasha and SheikhuIslam Hayri Efendi attended the opening along with the Şehzade.¹⁰¹ Thus, it is understood that even if the risk of losing the Arab lands with the outbreak of the war had not occurred, the collection had already attracted the interest of the museum committee and would have been brought to Istanbul as soon as favorable conditions were met. On the other hand, some archives in Ottoman lands were sent to Istanbul with political agreements after the region was removed from Ottoman rule. Considering the interest in the Qubba collection in Istanbul, the possibility of such a scenario is not very low. Another late period example, the Crete Archives, was transferred from Crete to Istanbul with the exchange between Turkey and Greece after the Treaty of Lausanne. In the 1924 exchange, the Turks wanted to take their archives with them, but this attempt was unsuccessful at first. However, during the next exchange process, the commission formed in Athens approved the sending of all official records and archives within the scope of the exchange region to Turkey. Thus, the Crete archive was placed in safes and chests, transported to Turkey by sea and delivered to the General Directorate of Evkaf. Unfortunately, unlike the Damascus Documents collection or other historical collections, this archive was not placed in a museum but was

¹⁰⁰ Erdem Yücel, "Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi'nin Kuruluş Talimatnamesi", *Türk Kültürü*, cilt: XVI, sayı: 191, 51-58 (1978): 691.

¹⁰¹ Yücel, "Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi'nin Kuruluş Talimatnamesi", 692.

placed in the Nur-u Osmaniye Mosque depot and was subjected to great damage for many years.¹⁰²

Moreover, it is clear from the activities carried out in the region during the early years of the war that this risk was not only on the agenda during the final stages of the war. The loss of Syria, which became a certainty towards the end of the war, was in fact a possibility that had been expected since the early years and efforts had been made to the contrary. Cemal Pasha, who was sent to Syria at the beginning of the war as the Commander of the 4th Army, continued to implement public works, media propaganda, and educational institutions, thereby maintaining Ottoman rule in Syria both de facto and representationally. One of his first initiatives in the field of education was to establish a university (*Salahaddin-i Ayyubi Kulliyesi*) in order to raise the political consciousness of the Syrian people and keep their social loyalty high.¹⁰³ As for propaganda activities in the media, the newspaper al-Sharq was founded and close relations were established with the leading journalists and intellectuals of the period in order to promote pan-Islamist ideology in Syria. According to Cemal Pasha, the establishment of al-Sharq was an important step in the fight against the internal and external 'enemies' of Islam, as it provided an outlet for the expression of pan-Islamist ideology.¹⁰⁴ Many of these figures would be utilized not only to strengthen the dominance in Syria, but also to keep the troops on the other fronts of the empire, especially those of Arab origin, in good spirits during the war. In 1915, under the command of Cemal Pasha, a delegation of scholars selected from Syria and Palestine was formed.¹⁰⁵ The purpose of this group, which is referred to in the sources as the Arap İlim

¹⁰² Elif Yılmaz, "Archive of Crete / Girit Arşivi", *Bilgi Dünyası Dergisi*, 15-1, 217-223 (2014): 220-221.

¹⁰³ M. Talha Çiçek, "Visions of Islamic Unity: A Comparison of Djemal Pasha's al-Sharq and Sharif Hısayn's al-Qibla Periodicals", in *Die Welt des Islams* 54, 3-4 (2014): 461.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/15700607-05434P07>

¹⁰⁴ Çiçek, "Visions of Islamic Unity", 465.

¹⁰⁵ See; about this delegation: Lokman Erdemir, "Suriye İlmi (Edebi) Heyeti'nin İstanbul ve Çanakkale Seyahati", *TYB Akademi Dil Edebiyat ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, Mayıs 2015, cilt: 14 sayı: 14 (2015): 147-162. Muhammed Kürd Ali, Muhammed el-Bakır, Hüseyin el-Habbal, Abdülbasit el-Ünsi. *Türklerle Omuz Omuz: Arap İlim Heyeti Darülhilafe ve Çanakkale'de*, çev. Ali Benli. (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2017).

Heyeti or Arap Heyet-i İlmiyesi (Arab Scientific Delegation), was to providing the morale of the Arab soldiers on the Gallipoli front and to reduce the impact of the rumors that the war would end in defeat both in the Arab geography and at the front. At the same time, it would also serve to legitimize the methods used by Cemal Pasha to suppress opposition movements in Syria and to defend his position against possible criticism from Istanbul. One of the most striking features of the remained reports from this trip is the use of language as a means of national identity formation and, by extension, the use of bilingualism (Arabic and Turkish) in Anatolian, Rumelia and Syrian schools to strengthen Ottoman citizenship across the empire. The reports clearly emphasize that Arabs and Turks are the key elements of the Ottomanist ideology.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the members of the delegation, including journalists, especially those who held an important position in the media of the time, would be shown the splendor of the empire. The members of the delegation were expected to tell the people of the region about what they had seen in order to strengthen Turkish-Arab unity. On the other hand, Pasha's violent policies to silence dissenting voices in Syria and keep the Arab elite under control were changing the Ottoman figure among Arab subjects.¹⁰⁷

Another reason why the collection was not fully transferred to Istanbul and the museum until after the war may be similar to the reasons for the museum's other early collections. When the Islamic artifacts were first opened, the process of moving these collected artifacts was not easy. The idea of removing religious symbols from their spiritual places of origin and placing them in a modern museum sometimes provoked strong reactions from both the local population and religious authorities. This resistance was often rooted in the belief that these artifacts should remain in their original, sacred locations to preserve their spiritual significance. Some sources report that the artifacts collected in the Çinili Köşk (Tiled Pavilion), including the Damascus Documents, eventually outgrew the space available and no longer fit there, necessitating the search for a new location

¹⁰⁶ Salim Tamari, "M. Kürd Ali ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı", in *Birinci Dünya Savaşında Suriye*, ed. M. Talha Çiçek, (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2020), 58-59.

¹⁰⁷ Fatih Rıfıkı Atay, *Zeytindağı* (Istanbul: Pozitif Yayınevi, 2017).

that could adequately house them. This logistical challenge added another layer of complexity to the preservation and display of these artifacts. Despite these difficulties, efforts were made to gradually transfer the Damascus Documents to Istanbul over the following years. By the time the transfer was more systematically undertaken, the museum's location had already changed to the Süleymaniye Complex, which offered more space and better facilities for the preservation and exhibition of such valuable collections. The move to the Süleymaniye Complex marked a significant development in the Ottoman approach to museology, reflecting an evolving understanding of the importance of centralized and well-organized conservation efforts for historical and cultural artifacts.

In the first *Esas Defteri* of the museum, although there is a record of the Chandeliers brought from the vault of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, there is no record of the manuscripts and Mushafs.¹⁰⁸ In the 1922 dated (3 Kanun-ı Evvel 1338) registration book copied from the museum's main book, the number of the existing inventory is recorded as 4206. It is known that the collection was present in the museum at the time, but it is not known why they were not included in the census.

In 1917, the Ottomans began to send some of the Kütüb-i İslamiye from Damascus to Istanbul. At the time, the Ottoman Empire was at war as an ally of Germany, and governors and commanders in Damascus were being reassigned. Cemal Pasha, the commander of the Fourth Army and Governor of Syria, served in Damascus from 1914 until the end of 1917 and became one of the most important figures in the region.¹⁰⁹ Despite the chaotic conditions in the city, Cemal Pasha was the authority who made it possible to bring the Damascus Documents to Istanbul. The first proposal for this transfer came from the Ministry of Evkaf in January 1917. In the letter sent by the Ministry to Damascus, it was stated that these manuscripts, some of which İsmet Bey had brought to Istanbul after his previous visit to Damascus, were rare works and that all of them should be moved

¹⁰⁸ Evkaf-ı İslamiye Esas Defteri Sureti, Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi, Defter no. 2213.

¹⁰⁹ Cemal Paşa, *Anıları* (1913-1922), ed. Fahri Parin (İstanbul: Paraf Yayınları, 2010): 163-170.

to Istanbul.¹¹⁰ The difficulty of examining these manuscripts under the current conditions in Damascus was emphasized as an important reason for this transfer.¹¹¹ However, even though this was the main reason stated in the official correspondence, the reason behind the current situation in Medina and the measures taken against the holy relics at the same time should have also been valid for the Damascus Documents. Two months after this telegram sent to Cemal Pasha for the transfer of the Damascus Document to Istanbul, Cemal Pasha sent a telegram to Palestine on March 4, 1917.

After the rebels captured important cities during Sharif Hussein's rebellion, the Ottoman government had decided to evacuate Medina and transfer the holy relics to Istanbul. The concern behind this decision was that the precious historical artifacts in the region would fall into enemy hands or be destroyed. The task of relocating the artifacts was assigned to Fahreddin Pasha by Cemal Pasha. In his telegram dated March 4, 1917, Cemal Pasha informed them to evacuate the city of Medina and bring the holy relics with them to Damascus. In another telegram dated March 5, 1917 to Basri Pasha, he also requested that the book collections of important libraries in the region be brought along with the holy relics.¹¹² The contents of the boxes sent from Medina to Damascus were mostly books and manuscripts. The collection, selected from important libraries in Medina, was planned to be listed in Damascus and then transferred to Istanbul but, only a small portion was sent to Istanbul.¹¹³ When the boxes arrived in Istanbul, they were first placed in Topkapı Palace by order of the Sultan, and this process strengthens the inference that a similar procedure may have been followed for the Damascus Documents and that the collection was first transferred to Topkapı Palace. A commission was formed in Istanbul for the Medina collection and this commission reported that an expert committee should be assigned to check and repair the

¹¹⁰ Mayor İsmet Bey, one of the founders of the Evkaf-ı İslamiye Museum.

¹¹¹ BOA, DH. ŞFR 72/03/01 "The fact that the pieces sent with İsmet Bey are among the rarities..." dated H 20-03-1335 / M 14-01-1917.

¹¹² Abdülmecid Şentürk, *Medine'nin Son Emanetleri: Fahreddin Paşa'nın Yağmadan Kurtardığı Teberrukat Eşyası* (Istanbul: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2017), 165.

¹¹³ Şentürk, *Medine'nin Son Emanetleri*, 182.

artifacts. İsmet Bey, who had examined the Damascus Documents in Damascus and played an important role in the decision to bring them to Istanbul, was among this expert committee.¹¹⁴ When the rebels captured Medina two years after this transfer, they plundered houses and historical sites for a long time, as the Ottoman authorities concerned. Many artifacts captured by the rebels were sold, confiscated, or vandalized in the process.¹¹⁵ The fact that both the current Medina collection and the Damascus Documents are largely intact today is a valuable result of these decisions.

The looting of books and destruction of historical artifacts in the lost territories, not only seen in the Middle East, but also experienced in the Balkans in late Ottoman period, provide a justification for such protectionism over manuscript archives. Bogdan Filov, bureaucrat and director of the National Museum in Sofia, in his diaries of his archaeological and research trips during the Balkan Wars and in his telegrams to the Ministry of Education, states that soldiers entering Macedonia looted many historical artifacts. Many historical carpets or objects continue to be used inappropriately in different institutions. The same was the case in many Balkan cities that had removed from the Ottoman rule.¹¹⁶ Along with that, during his trips to the occupied Ottoman cities, Filov was charged for transportation of many manuscripts and Koran collections from mosques and city libraries, private archives and historical sites to Sofia. Traditional carpets and furniture from sacred places that were in use or damaged were also moved to the museum with bureaucratic permissions. A complete list of the manuscripts was drawn up and a courier was sent from the governor's office to Sofia to ensure that they were removed from the city without any damage. During the war, the

¹¹⁴ Şentürk, 215.

¹¹⁵ Şentürk, 163.

¹¹⁶ For Bogdan Filov's diaries he kept during his travels in 1912, 1913 and 1915, as well as his petitions to the political authorities regarding measures for the protection of historical artifacts and official permissions for the relocation of archives, see; Bogdan Filov, *Balkan Savaşları Günlüğü*, ed. Hüseyin Mevsim, (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2014).

artifacts were collected in a special office set up by the governor's office until the best time was found for their transportation.¹¹⁷

The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art also states that the collection they exhibit today under the name "Damascus Documents" was brought to Istanbul during World War I with the initiatives of İsmet Bey.¹¹⁸ In response to the first document sent from Istanbul for the transfer, it was reported that the large number of documents in the collection would make this process even more difficult under wartime conditions. Later, however, as a solution to this problem, they were asked to send the collection in pieces at short intervals. In the continuation of the correspondence, a document written directly to Cemal Pasha by SheikhuIslam Musa Kazım Efendi shows that the Pasha's support was clearly expected at this point.¹¹⁹

The expected support followed, and the documents reached Istanbul in the following months through a well-organized transportation effort. The correspondence between Damascus and Istanbul in 1917 does not contain any information about the transfer of the Kütüb-i Mesihyye, which raises questions and various interpretations regarding why only the Kütüb-i Islamiye was transferred. According to the approach in my assessment, the photographs of the Kütüb-i Mesihyyi in Istanbul at that time may have been deemed sufficient for the examination of these manuscripts, negating the need for their physical transfer. Another possibility is that the organization of this transfer, managed by the initiatives of the Museum of Evkaf-ı Islamiye, aimed to minimize logistical challenges and therefore focused solely on the Islamic collection. Additionally, the interruption in correspondence after this date leaves us without clear information on whether any transfer was ever organized for the remaining collection in Damascus. This lack of documentation fuels further speculation and underscores the complexities involved in the management and preservation of these valuable

¹¹⁷ Bogdan Filov, *Balkan Savaşları Günlüğü* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2014), 67.

¹¹⁸ The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, "Museum Founders Collection".

<http://www.tiem.gov.tr/museum-founders-section>

¹¹⁹ BOA, DH.ŞFR 73/70 dated H 20-03-1335 / M 14-01-1917

artifacts during a turbulent period. The decisions made regarding these transfers reflect the priorities and constraints faced by the Ottoman authorities, highlighting their efforts to balance the preservation of cultural heritage with the practicalities of wartime logistics.

In addition to these considerations, the Ottomans' close interest in the Umayyad Mosque is another approach, especially after the fire of 1893. Nazim Pasha procured materials for the restoration from Istanbul, a fire commission was formed from Ottoman bureaucrats and local religious leaders of Damascus, and the Müze-i Hümayun carefully supervised the restoration project.¹²⁰ In parallel, many sources indicate that the collection was sent to Istanbul after the fire of 1893, or that it was first transferred to the Topkapı Palace Museum in 1911, and then to the Evkaf-ı İslamiye Museum. However, according to the archival documents used in this study, the collection was in Damascus on both dates. On the other hand, François Deroche states that within the scope of his studies at Topkapı Palace, he identified the Qubba manuscripts in the museum.¹²¹ Accordingly, when the collection was brought to Istanbul in 1917, it may have been kept in Topkapı Palace for a while and some of it may have been left there afterwards. Or, after the collection was moved to the Evkaf-ı İslamiye Museum, some of it may have been taken to be placed in the Topkapı Museum archive. Apart from these possibilities, there is no archival record of manuscripts being brought from Damascus to Topkapı Palace in previous years. There is also no record of manuscripts that were removed from the Qubba without authorization and then returned to the museum.

Moreover, the Damascus Document sample is not unique in terms of artifacts moved from areas at risk of being lost during wartime. However, artifacts were transferred to the museum not only from regions at risk of being lost, but also from allied regions. For example, archival records show that artifacts were also

¹²⁰ BOA, Y.PRK.DH 7/35/01 dated H 08-08-1311 / M 14-02-1894

¹²¹ Deroche, 100.

transferred from libraries and museums in Bucharest.¹²² The transformation of the waqf consciousness, which had been preserved for centuries in the Ottoman Empire, among the bureaucrats of the early twentieth century, is evident in this process as well. This transformation reflects how globalizing concepts and evolving administrative priorities reshaped traditional values. The increasing awareness of cultural history, which became widespread in many countries around the world during the 19th century, had a significant reflection on the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, the current values of many of the world's major museums were shaped by the globalization opportunities of the same period.

¹²² BOA, MV 205/44 dated H 09-03-1335 / M 03-01-1917

Physical and Representative Position of the Collection in the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum

In 1925, with the reforms implemented by the new regime, the name of the museum was changed to reflect the new era's ideological and cultural shifts. The decision to close down tekkes and zawiya, which were centers of Islamic learning and spirituality, necessitated the transfer and preservation of the valuable Islamic artifacts housed in these places to the museum.¹²³ This strategic move was aimed at not only safeguarding these important cultural and religious items but also at increasing the museum's physical capacity to house a more extensive collection. Following these changes, the museum was closed for an extended period to facilitate the necessary modifications and expansions. It was finally reopened in 1949, marking a new chapter in its history. The museum remained in the Süleymaniye Complex until 1983, serving as a significant cultural institution and a repository of Islamic heritage during this time. In 1983, the İbrahim Pasha Palace, which had undergone extensive restoration, was allocated to the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum. This relocation provided the museum with a more suitable and prestigious venue, allowing it to better display its extensive and valuable collection. The move to the İbrahim Pasha Palace marked another significant development in the museum's history, reflecting the ongoing efforts to preserve and promote Islamic art and culture in the modern era.¹²⁴

Based on the information I have received from the museum's library officials and Sevda Dönmez Geçkalan, the head of the Damascus Documents collection, the digitization project for the collection was fully completed in 2020. Project was completed in partnership with the Yazma Eserler Kurumu, yet the

¹²³ Seracettin Şahin, *Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi Emevilerden Osmanlılara 13 Asırlık İhtişam* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2009).

¹²⁴ Sinem Sunter and Mehmet Nuhoglu, "Tarihi Bir Yapının Müze Olarak İşlevlendirilmesi İbrahim Paşa Sarayı-Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi Örneği", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, cilt 5, sayı 8 (2016): 2425.

collection and usage rights remain exclusively with the museum library. Turkish citizen Master's and PhD students conducting related research are permitted to use the collection materials. For foreign students and researchers, a permission procedure is required, which necessitates ministerial approval. Access to and research on the collection are only possible through the library's computers.

The digital archive of the library includes two folders under the name "Damascus Documents." The first folder contains 9,800 subfolders, while the second folder holds 4,103 subfolders along with a ledger record. Each subfolder comprises a varying number of files, all marked with the same code. For instance, within a single subfolder, there may be 416 files that share the same code. The Marriage Contract manuscript used in the exhibition was selected from these 416 files. Inventory numbers sometimes represent a package and sometimes a manuscript within a package.

The photographing of the collection was conducted prior to its restoration. Except for a very small portion that was classified for exhibition purposes, the entire collection has not been comprehensively cataloged. It is unknown who first created the ledger inventory found within the collection or when it was established. The ledger consists of 509 pages, and on page 245, the date "13/12/2011" and the phrase "approved by the ministry with decree number 4975" are noted. This indicates that the inventories were reviewed and reapproved by the ministry on different dates. Incorrectly recorded entries about previous information beside some inventories have been corrected. This ledger might be the first inventory record because it contains three different signatures and dates of record. Inventory entries from different years have not been made into a new ledger but rather added over previous entries in the same ledger.

The first signature and date appear as 22.7.1954, the second as 5.8.1955, and the third as 7.5.1956. There are 13882 inventory entries and the number of pages of each inventory is written next to it. Only the type of Koran manuscripts is indicated. Information on the physical characteristics of the inventory, material (such as leather), type of writing, number of lines are partially written. The period

and date are mostly indicated "variously". The description is mostly written as "torn", "hole", "stained". In the first quarter of the book, the periods and dates of the Qurans are mostly recorded as the 1st-4th (H) centuries. The book was sorted in 2011 by the collection officers of the Damascus Documents, but only a count was made, not an inventory. There is no current catalog and the use of images of this ledger is not permitted. The boxes in which the collection was transported from Damascus to Istanbul are still kept in the museum's warehouse today.

The collection has been exhibited in some important exhibitions in the last 10 years. In 2016, the Islamic Culture and Art Platform (IKSP) organized the exhibition "The Magnificent Line of the Miracle Book: Kufic" exhibition at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, which featured manuscripts from the Damascus Documents collection written in Kufic calligraphy.¹²⁵ In October of the same year, an exhibition titled "The Art of the Qur'an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts" opened at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. in cooperation with the Freer-Sackler Museum of the Smithsonian Institution. A number of manuscripts and Qur'ans from the Damascus Documents collection were included in this exhibition, the first comprehensive exhibition of the Qur'an in the United States.¹²⁶ A significant number of manuscripts that had not been exhibited before were exhibited under the subtitle *Evrak-ı Dımaşk / Damascus Documents* in the exhibition "Faith and Art" in the temporary exhibition hall of the Istanbul Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts between April 16 and July 25, 2021. Nevrin Nur Aslan (Istanbul University), Elif Behnan Bozdoğan (Marmara University), Betül Genan (Marmara University), Şeyma Genan (Marmara University) conducted the research and classification of the exhibition. In addition to the exhibition of manuscripts that have never been exhibited before, another importance of this exhibition is that visitors and interested researchers had the opportunity to closely examine the originals of the manuscripts after restoration.

¹²⁵ <https://istanbul.ktb.gov.tr/TR-166106/diyanet-isleri-baskani-mehmet-gormezin-katilimi-ile-muc-.html>

¹²⁶ <https://kvmgm.ktb.gov.tr/TR-164536/the-art-of-the-quran-treasures-from-the-museum-of-turkish-and-islamic-arts-sergisi.html>

Importantly, an example of a Bible from the collection written in Arabic script was also on display in this exhibition.¹²⁷ (*figure 15*) When evaluated based on this example, separating the Kütüb-i Mesihyye from the Kütüb-i İslamiyye with a language-focused approach, as Violet largely did, is a flawed method considering the existing population of Arab Christians at the time. Compared to other religious documents, the examples of Bibles in Arabic script, which are rarer, are among the interesting aspects of the collection. Lastly, in 2022, a part of the collection was temporarily moved to the Museum of Islamic Civilizations at the Büyük Çamlıca Mosque Complex for exhibition and preservation purposes.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ ŞE 12547, *Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum*

¹²⁸ <https://basin.ktb.gov.tr/TR-317448/islam-medeniyetleri-muzesi-acildi.html>

Conclusion

When we go back to the beginning of the journeys of these two manuscript collections that would end in separate places within the framework of all the diplomatic relations and project plans mentioned in this study, the rarely opened door of the Qubba was opened this time for the German project in the late Ottoman period. The journey of the *Kütüb-i Mesihyye*, which began in Damascus, first to Istanbul and then from Istanbul to Berlin, continued with a longer stay there than planned. After a period of warning and urgent correspondence, the Germans sent the collection to Istanbul in 1909, before they could examine and photograph the entire collection. Some of the collection was later returned to Damascus and is now in Syria, while the rest is known to be missing. At the time of this research, this information has not changed. Some of Violet's manuscript photographs taken while in Damascus (214 photographs) and others taken while the collection was in Berlin (147 photographs) are available in the photographic archive of the Berlin State Library.¹²⁹ Photographs taken in Istanbul have not yet been found in any archive. The *Kütüb-i Islamiye* collection was brought to Istanbul from Damascus, despite the prevailing conditions, after telegrams were sent from Istanbul to Cemal Pasha in Damascus with the initiatives of the *Evkaf-ı Islamiye* Museum and the then Sheikhulislam Musa Kazım Efendi, while World War I was still ongoing and the region was still under Ottoman control. Along with the changing physical and ideological identity of the *Evkaf-ı Islamiye* Museum in line with the museological activities of the period, the position of the collection also changed. As the last museum established during the Ottoman period, TIEM preserves many collections that are as important for their contents as for the processes by which they reached the museum. Among these collections, the Damascus Documents collection is very valuable and is suitable for many new studies. On the other hand, the journey of the Damascus Documents between two states and three cities at the turn of the 20th offers us an alternative reading of

¹²⁹ "Damaszener Handschriften, aufgenommen von Bruno Violet", Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
<https://bibelexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszener-handschriften/>

cultural orientalism in the late Ottoman period. Through the different voices in the bureaucracy and the changing administrative decisions along the way, we see how Ottoman-German relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were reflected not only in the military and political affairs of the two countries, but also in cultural and historical studies based on this privileged journey. Considering both the Müze-i Hümayun's interest in the Umayyad Mosque and the Evkaf-ı İslamiye Museum, the last museum of the empire established to preserve Islamic historical artifacts, it is likely that even if the Ottomans had retained control of Damascus, these manuscripts would have been brought to Istanbul anyway to be preserved and studied under better conditions. Among bureaucrats in the early twentieth century, one can see how the centuries-old consciousness of waqf in the Ottoman Empire was reshaped by globalizing concepts and evolving shifting administrative priorities. It is quite possible to see this as an important reflection of the Ottoman awareness of cultural history, which became increasingly widespread in many countries of the world in the 19th century. As a result, the current values of many of the world's most important museums have been shaped by the globalization opportunities of these periods. Another impression provided by the intercity correspondence analyzed in this project is that the late Ottoman Arab lands were not patronized in isolation from the center of the Empire, as some Orientalist thinkers of the period implied. Institutionalization and public works activities carried out in the center soon spilled over to the other territories. According to Weber, the experience of modernization and modernity came to Damascus predominantly through Istanbul and the 'modern Damascus mind' was oriented in this direction.¹³⁰ As seen in the case of the German project, although archival activities have been present in Arab lands for a very long time, the preservation of these archives and their repositioning in modern forms of institutionalization developed with the Ottoman reforms. In other words, the city's unique history and traditions were enhanced by Ottoman initiatives to articulate new identities.

¹³⁰ *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jens Hanssen; Thomas Philip; Stefan Weber. Orient Institute Beirut, 2002: 168.

The relocation of the Damascus Documents to Istanbul within the framework of late Ottoman museum and archive policies offers a multifaceted exploration into the political, cultural, and diplomatic dynamics of the late Ottoman period. This thesis has delved into the intricate journey of these manuscripts, highlighting their significance and the broader implications for Ottoman-German relations, cultural orientalism, and archival practices. The collaboration between the Ottoman Empire and Germany during this period was not merely a cultural exchange but a strategic alliance influenced by the broader geopolitical landscape. The Ottoman Empire, facing internal and external pressures, saw an opportunity to bolster its cultural institutions through German expertise. Conversely, Germany leveraged this relationship to enhance its academic and cultural hegemony.

The late Ottoman period marked a significant transformation in museological and archival practices, driven by a growing awareness of cultural heritage and the need for preservation amidst political turmoil. The establishment of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts and the proactive measures to safeguard the Damascus Documents exemplify this shift. The efforts of Ottoman bureaucrats, such as Hüseyin Nazım Pasha, Tevfik Pasha, Musa Kazım Efendi and İsmet Bey, highlight a burgeoning recognition of the importance of centralized conservation efforts. That was also not merely an act of preservation but a reflection of the evolving Ottoman identity and its relationship with its heritage. The meticulous documentation, photography, and cataloging of these manuscripts addresses a methodological approach that sought to balance traditional values with modern archival practices.

Preservation and eventual exhibition of these manuscripts in modern times attest to the resilience and dedication of the individuals involved. The digitization efforts and recent exhibitions have ensured that the Damascus Documents remain accessible to scholars and the public, bridging the historical gap and fostering a deeper understanding of their significance.

In reassessing the cultural heritage awareness in late Ottoman Istanbul, this thesis tries to provide an alternative approach and the dynamic interplay between preservation and political pragmatism. The relocation of the Damascus Documents serves as a case study in the broader narrative of Ottoman modernization, where cultural heritage became a tool for both national identity formation and modern policies. The critical examination of the journey of these manuscripts invites a reevaluation of the historical narratives surrounding cultural heritage and archival practices. It challenges the simplistic dichotomy of East and West, highlighting the nuanced realities of cultural exchange and the contested nature of historical preservation.



Manuscript Selection from the Collection

This study does not elaborate on the content or physical importance of the documents in the Damascus Documents manuscript collection. However, in order to provide readers and researchers who may benefit from this study with more information about the different types of manuscripts that were partially mentioned in the introduction, some manuscript examples from the collection are given below. These examples were selected as a result of research conducted in the library of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts. In some of the documents, the name of the person who endowed them and where they were endowed can be found on the first page or in the marginal notes. In some of them there is an example of a hilye. Some documents have colored ornaments and seals. Others contain information about the endowment and pages of Qur'an written in different styles of kufic script.



Figure 1

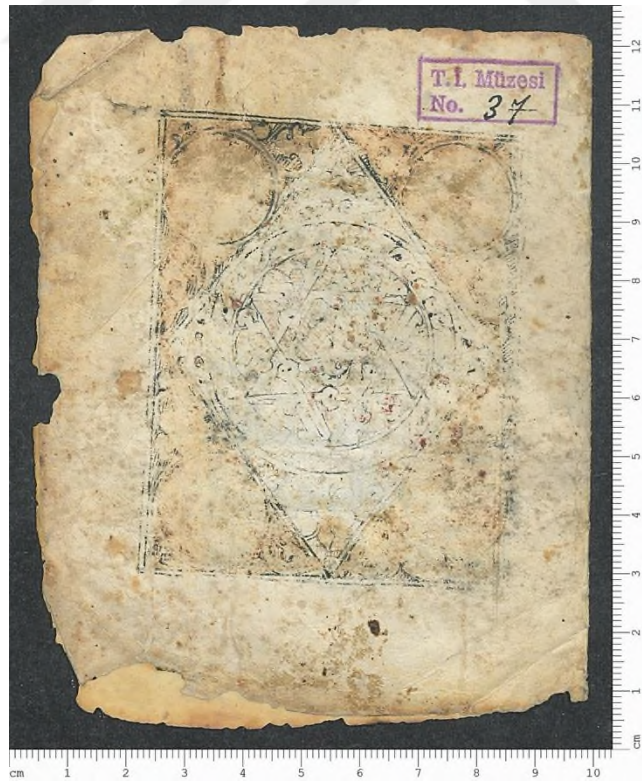


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

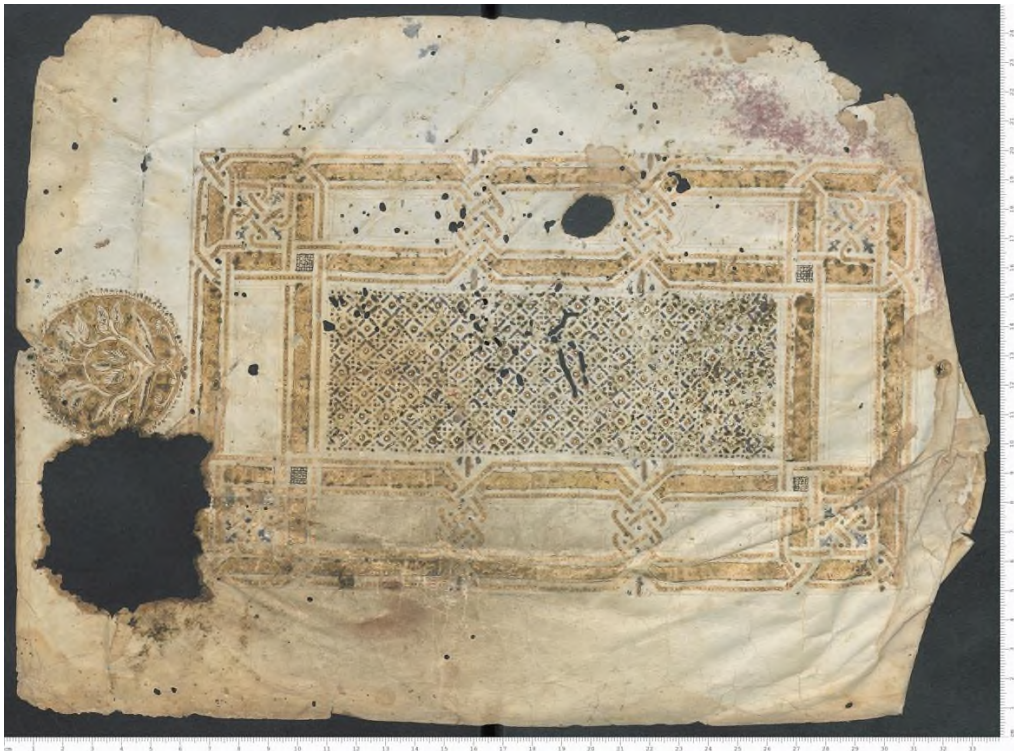


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

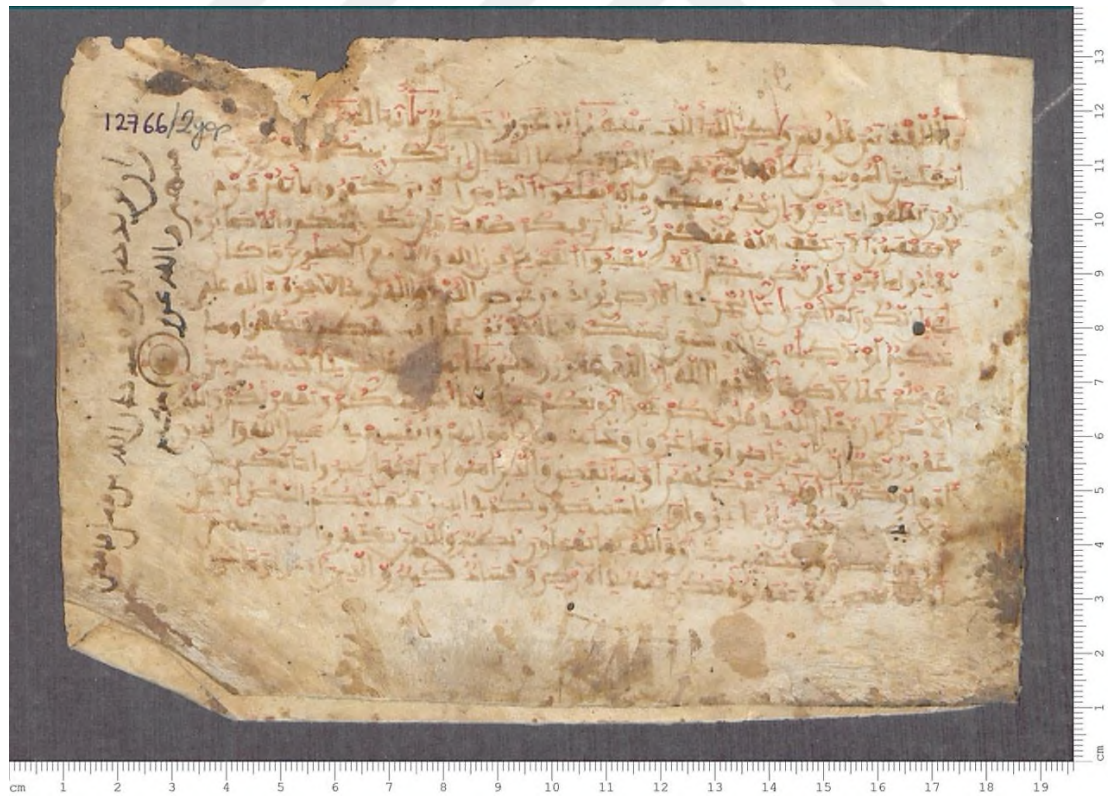


Figure 10



Figure 13

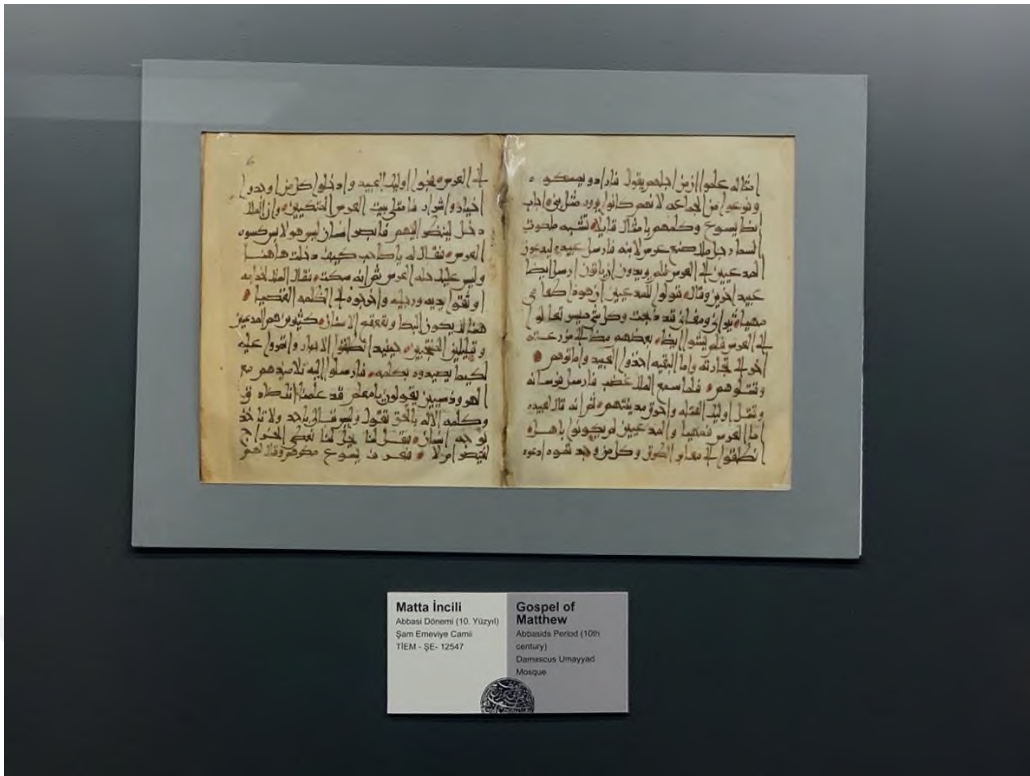


Figure 14

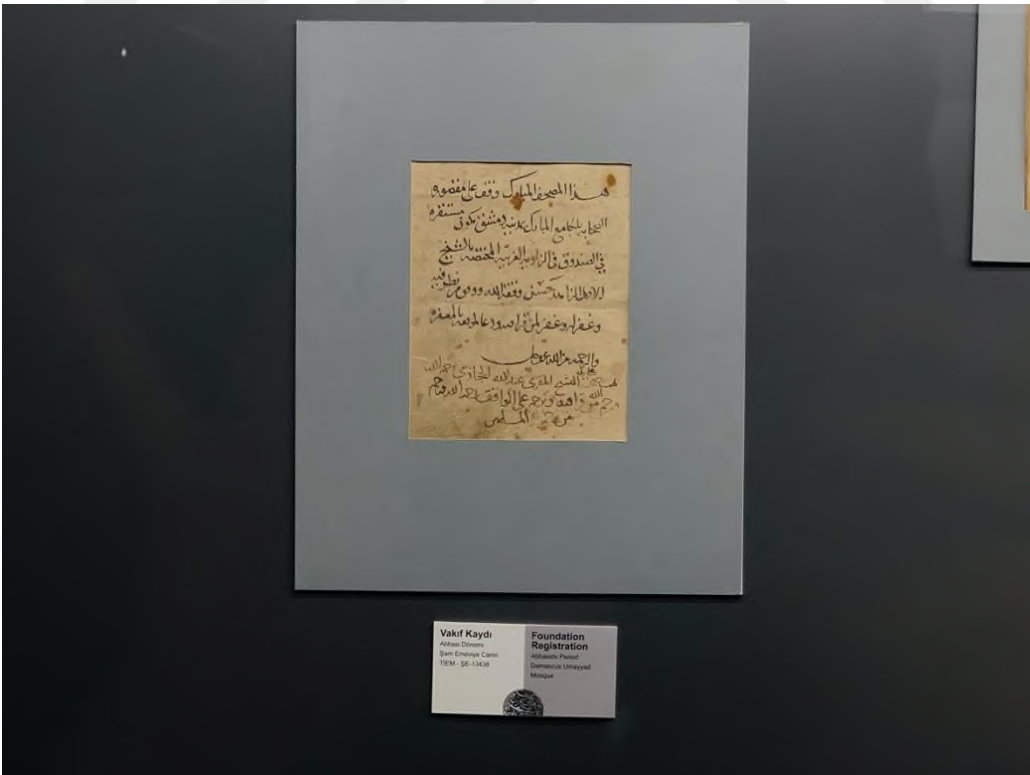


Figure 15

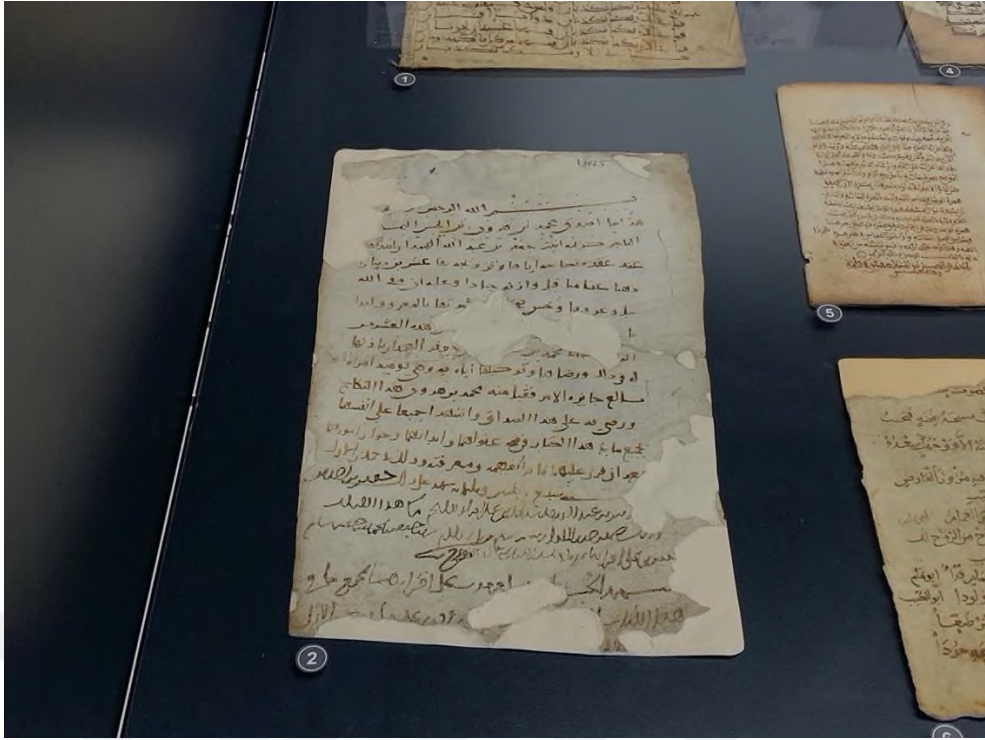


Figure 16

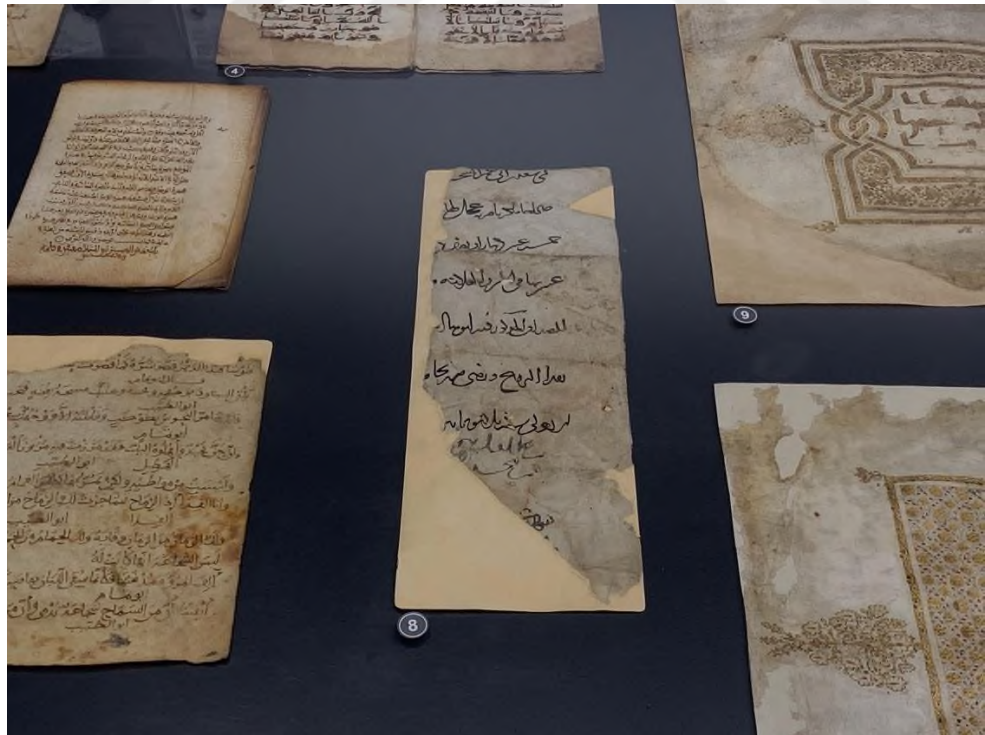


Figure 17

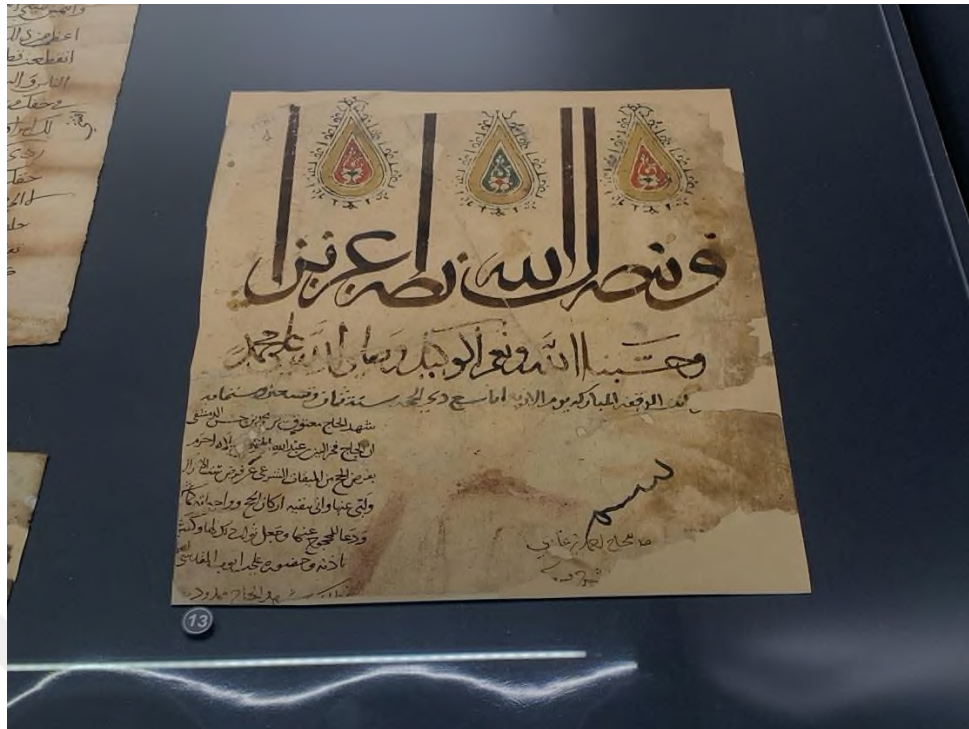


Figure 18



Figure 19

List of Figures



Figure 20

"Şam Emeviyye Camii avlusunda yer alan Kubbetü'l Hazne" SALT Araştırma, TASUH2602



Figure 21

Qubbat al-Khazna in restoration period.

İstanbul Üniversitesi Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi, FAY 22.17.08

“Emir el-mu’minin el-Sultan el-Gazi Abdulhamid Han Sani efendimiz hazretlerinin cümle-i measer-i mukaddese-i hazreti hilafet penahilerinden olarak müceddeden bina ve inşa edilmiş Şam’daki camii-yi kebirde vaki ve hulut-u kufiyle mektub Kütüb-ü İslamiyye-i kadimenin hıfzına mahzuz Kubbet el-Hazine nam mahaliyle camii-şerif için haricden celb edilen direklerin nakli için mehere-i sanatkararı tarafından tertib ve icad edilen arabanın görünüşünü havi resmidir.”

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BOA, DH. ŞFR 72/03/01 dated H 20-03-1335 / M 14-01-1917

BOA, İ.MF 7/55/01 dated H 29-08-1319 / M 11-12-1901

BOA, HR. İD 2033/109/1/01 dated H 23-01-1322 / M 09-04-1904

BOA, Y.MTV 230/174/2/01 dated H 28-02-1320 / M 06-06-1902

BOA, Y.MTV 230/174/2/02 dated H 28-02-1320 / M 06-06-1902

BOA, Y.MTV 231/76/01 dated H 13-09-1320 / M 14-12-1902

BOA, Y.MTV 260/01 dated H 15-03-1322 / M 30-05-1904

BOA, BEO 1795/134611/01 dated H 11-11-1319 / M 19-02-1902

BOA, BEO 1795/134611/03 dated H 11-11-1319 / M 19-02-1902

BOA, BEO 1768/132555/3/01 dated H 13-09-1319 / M 24-12-1901

BOA, BEO 1762/132122/1/01 dated H 04-09-1319 / M 15-12-1901

BOA, BEO 1792/134330/3/01 dated H 02-11-1319 / M 10-02-1902

BOA, BEO 1792/134330/1/01 dated H 02-11-1319 / M 10-02-1902

BOA, BEO 3618/2712888 dated H 25-07-1327 / M 12-08-1909

BOA, MV, 205/44 dated H 09-03-1335 / M 03-01-1917

BOA, MV, 178/34 dated H 19-07-1331 / M 24-06-1913

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