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**The Cooperation of G.A. Deissmann and H.E. Eldem in the Classification of the Non-Islamic Manuscripts in the Topkapı Sarayi Museum**

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Founded by Mehmed II as the New Imperial Palace, and inhabited by him from the 1470s onwards, the Topkapı Sarayi is situated on the ancient acropolis of Byzantium. Until 1853, when it was abandoned for the Dolmabahçe Palace on the Bosphorus, the Topkapı Sarayi was the residence of many Ottoman sultans. It was symbolically the heart of the Ottoman Empire as well as its Treasury for nearly four centuries. After it became a museum in 1924, a programme of careful restoration has made it accessible to the public so that by 1934 a large part of the Palace could be visited.

Among the rich collections of the Palace, manuscripts are one of the most famous. Formerly kept in the libraries of the Palace, they were united into a single collection and are housed in the Mosque of the White Eunuchs (Agalar Camii) which was restored in 1925–28. In 1966 the books and manuscripts, including the Islamic ones kept in the library of

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2 On the transformation of the Topkapı Sarayi into a museum, see Erdem Yöcel, Tarih'ide Müzeçület (Istanbul, 1999), p. 72–76.

Ahmed III, were transported into the Topkapi Sarayi Museum Library. As a whole, the collection can be gathered into two main groups—Islamic and non-Islamic manuscripts, numbering 13405. The catalogues of the Persian, Arabic, and Turkish manuscripts were published by Fehmi Ethem Karatay in the 1960s, whereas the list of the non-Islamic manuscripts by Gustav Adolf Deissmann was published in 1933. The latter, entitled Forschungen und Funde im Serai, was and remains the only book that explored the entire collection in order and gave a classification and registration of it. This work, considered by Deissmann to be a list rather than a scientific catalogue, awakened the interest of scholars and made a great deal of research possible.

Forschungen und Funde im Serai resulted from studies conducted by Prof. Dr. Deissmann (1866–1937) during three periods between 1927 and 1929 in the Topkapi Sarayi, following the invitation of Halil Ethem Eldem (1861–1938), the General Director of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums. Before dealing with Deissmann’s work in the Topkapi Sarayi Library, and the book he dedicated to Halil E. Eldem, it will be appropriate to give some information about Deissmann’s academic career and his relation with Turkey, especially with Halil E. Eldem.

Prof. Dr. Deissmann, a well known evangelical theologian and an expert in ancient Christian manuscripts, was a professor at Heidelberg University between 1897 and 1908, and at Berlin University between 1908 and 1934. Deissmann, who was appointed to the post of rectorate from 1930 to 1931, traveled many times to the East. He tried to understand the Bible and the theology of the Apostle Paul in the context of the historical environment. In his writings, he demonstrated the mystical piety in the theology of Paul and wrote two books that made him world famous: Licht vom Osten (Light from the East), published in 1908, followed by Paulus, published in 1911. Between 1926 and 1928, he took part as an expert in ancient Christian material in the excavations at Ephesus, organized by the Austrian Institute of Archaeology. However, a letter dated July 1906 sent to Theodor Wiegand, the German director of excavations in Milet from 1899 until the World War I, shows that Deissmann’s interest in the excavations in Turkey had begun earlier. It is mentioned in his Forschungen und Funde im Serai that during the project of Ephesus, he received considerable aid from Halil E. Eldem, who was a member of a Western-oriented family well integrated into the imperial bureaucracy.

Halil E. Eldem had studied in Berlin, Zurich, Vienna, and Bern, and was educated in biology and chemistry. After assisting his brother Osman Hamdi, the director of the Ottoman Imperial Ancient Arts Museum (Âsâr-ı Ârif Muzesi), he succeeded him in 1910 when his brother died. Eldem became the director of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, as it was renamed afterwards, until the date he was elected to the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1931. He was also the director of the School of Fine Arts in Istanbul until 1917. He contributed to the foundation of the Ancient Eastern Arts Museum (Eski Şark Eserleri Müzesi, 1917), the Topkapi Sarayi Museum (1924), and Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum (1927). It is also noteworthy that he was one of the initiators of the Turkish History Society, of which he became the president in 1938, the year he died.

Based on these facts, it can be deduced that he served the new government after the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923, adapting its philosophy of secularization and Westernization in state and society, including culture. The first years of the Republic witnessed important developments, such as the unification of national education in 1924; the Turkish language reform and the adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928; the beginning of library science, and the foundation and organization of many libraries and museums by the Turkish State, taking

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6 Gustav Adolf Deissmann, Licht vom Osten: das Neue Testament und die neuendechten Texte der hellenistisch-erömischen Welt (Tübingen, 1908); Paulus: eine kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Studie (Tübingen, 1911).


8 This letter is preserved at the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin. I am grateful to the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin and Istanbul for their help in reading this letter. My request for permission to work in the archive of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum was unfortunately rejected by the administration of the museum, on the grounds that they were too busy and that there was no official available to help me.


Western institutions as a model. In 1927, the first commission to catalogue the manuscripts was established in Istanbul, but it was able to function for only six months. The second commission was headed by Prof. Dr. Helmut Ritter in 1935, the result of which was the publication of *The Catalogues of the Turkish Manuscripts of History and Geography in the Libraries of Istanbul* between 1943 and 1962.

However, the greatest handicap both to Turkish libraries and museums was the lack of trained professionals. Therefore, it was necessary to invite foreign experts to Turkey, who were asked for the classification and catalogue of the collections at these institutions. For example, when H.E. Eldem managed the transformation of Topkapı Sarayı into a state museum, he requested the aid of foreign experts like Prof. Dr. Stöckleins, Prof. Dr. Zimmermann, and Dr. Bienbaum for the arrangement, classification, and, on some occasions, the repair of the collections of weapons, porcelain, and paintings. Prof. Dr. Zimmermann’s catalogue of the Ancient Chinese porcelains in Topkapı Sarayı was published in 1930. And finally, for the collection of non-Islamic manuscripts in the Topkapı Sarayı, in urgent need of conservation and cataloging, H.E. Eldem could not think of a better candidate than Deissmann, with whom he was well acquainted.

The story of the collaborative work in the Topkapı Sarayı is retold in the first part of Deissmann’s *Forschungen und Funde im Serai* (pp. 1-13). It is written that in 25 October 1927, when the German professor returned to Istanbul from the second Ephesos excavation, he visited the Eclipse of the Library by H.E. Eldem to see the Topkapı Sarayı under his guidance, together with the poet Abdullah Hamid Tarhan. At the end of the tour they visited the Mosque of the White Eunuchs, west of the library of Ahmed III in the third court of the Palace, where loose and large parchments decorated with maps, parchment and paper codices, and parchment rolls written mostly in Latin and Greek were spread out on long tables. Actually, H.E. Eldem had arranged for all these codices to be brought out from a cellar in the Treasury, and it was obvious that they were part of the legendary


Palace Library. Some of the manuscripts were damaged and showed the harmful effects of moisture and other factors as a result of unfavourable storage conditions. Eldem offered to show the collection to Deissmann again, when he came to Turkey for the following Ephesos excavation, and preserved the material in the library of the Ahmed III until then.

Eventually, in October 1928, Deissmann had the opportunity to see all the non-Islamic manuscripts in the Topkapı Sarayı. In the library of Ahmed III, he was able to explore both the codices that were in good condition and the damaged ones that were first stored in chests in the Treasury and then taken out in pieces in the 19th and 20th centuries. The manuscripts that shown rarely and only in parts had been described by scholars like Blass, Ouspensky, Gasee, and Ebersolt. Since the 17th century, through both the generosity of the sultans and through more obscure ways, many works of the Palace Library had been taken to the West. At the end of the 19th century a significant number of damaged manuscripts in large size were rebound in heavy Victorian-style leather. Before they were transported by the order of Abdülmehid II from the Topkapı Sarayı to the Yıldız Palace in 1897, some were sent to Budapest as a gift from the sultan. Following the Revolution, part of the collection of the Yıldız Library was returned to the Topkapı Sarayı, and the remainder were taken to the library of Istanbul University.

Previously, foreign scholars had only been able to study a small part of the non-Islamic manuscripts, whereas Deissmann had the chance to examine them all. He began to make a list of them and was mostly impressed by the large sized, but damaged Greek codes of Geography of Ptolemy (GI 27). By the end of this more accurate study, Deissmann was convinced that there existed an urgent need for the conservation and scientific registration of the collection. Consequently, he needed the help of a conservator and some specialists that would help him with the classification and examination of texts written in many languages such as Latin, Greek, Armenian, Serbian, Hebrew, and Syriac.


18 Deissmann, Forschungen und Funde im Serai, pp. 20-23.

So he promised H.E. Eldem that he would find colleagues to accomplish the work. Accordingly, the director officially commissioned him and kept the collection from the public until Deissmann's book about the Palace Library was published. Eldem also arranged for several black and white photographs to be taken by the firm Sébah and Joallier in Pera, so that Deissmann could enlist the support of specialists for the necessary identification.\(^{18}\)

The four weeks between the end of September and the end of October 1929 was the last phase of the expedition, during which Deissmann, together with Dr. Hugo Bscher, a specialist in conservation from the Berlin Museum, worked side by side at the Topkapi Sarayı Museum Library. The necessary means were made available to them by

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\(^{18}\) Prof. Dr. Kahlé and Prof. Dr. Hellmut Ritter were two of the scholars who helped Deissmann in Istanbul; others are mentioned in connection with the classification of the non-Islamic manuscripts. See Deissmann, *Forschungen und Funde im Serai*, pp. 12, 42ff.

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the administration of Berlin Museum.\(^{19}\) Deissmann and Bscher worked on large tables in the northern room of the White Eunuchs Mosque, surrounded with wall-chests. The manuscripts were carried from the library of Ahmed III to the Mosque for examination and the photographer Iskender Bey from the firm Sébah and Joallier took many photographs of the works in the glass veranda of the library.\(^{20}\) While Bscher spent most of his time cleaning and preserving the parchments of codices—especially the Greek codex of Ptolemy—from further damage, Deissmann was occupied with the classification and registration of the collection. For the ancient manuscripts that were already known, Deissmann took the studies of scholars like Blass, Ouspensky, and Ebersol, and also an old French list in the Palace into consideration.

Four years later, in 1933, the results of Deissmann's investigations were published in Berlin. As mentioned earlier, it was the first book written on the basis of in-depth investigations on the spot, and presenting an exact list of the non-Islamic manuscripts in the Topkapi Sarayı at the time. It was divided into two main parts: in the first, Deissmann told in detail the story of his work in the Palace; his investigations in various parts of the building complex; Domenico Hierosolomito (1552–1622) and his description of the codices in the Palace before 1592; the works that were taken to the West; the character of the Palace Library; and his analysis of Mehmed II as an emperor who actively tried to bridge the cultural values of East and West.

The second part of the book contained the list of the non-Islamic manuscripts in the Topkapi Saray grouped under two headings: “The Reminders of the Old Library of Mehmed II and the Additions to it” (GI 1–87), and “The Works that Came from the Ancient Museum in Istanbul to the Palace in 1929” (GI 101–135). The last part of codices and scrolls were collected here and there during the Turkish campaign against Greece after the World War I and were transferred to the Istanbul Museum by military and civilian authorities. Considering the possibility that other manuscripts belonging to the sultans' library might be found, Deissmann ended the first group with No. 87, and started the next section with No.101. Deissmann stated in many parts of his book that Prof. Dr. Emil Jacobs, the Chief Director of the Preussischen Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, supported him by solving the problems of the Palace Library. As
mentioned in the preface, he thought that his work was complementary to Jacobs’ study Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Bibliothek im Serai zu Konstantinopel. While the latter had examined all the information from various periods about the collection and the depositories and libraries in the Palace, Deissmann’s aim was to describe the non-Islamic books and manuscripts that were extant in the Palace.

For Deissmann, Jacobs’ book was an important source of information about the former rooms of the library in the Harem. Jacobs had taken into consideration the report Relazione di Constantinopoli written in 1611 (and published in 1621) of Domenico Hierosolimitano, the Jewish physician of Murat III between 1574 and 1593, who subsequently fled to Italy. This was the earliest report about the libraries and manuscripts in the Palace. Deissmann agreed with Jacobs that Domenico’s informations were reliable, because he was the first westerner who saw and could confirm the existance of libraries in the Topkapı Sarayı at the end of the 16th century. Based on his observations in 1929, Deissmann tried to specify the rooms that Domenico mentioned as the location of small and large libraries in Harem. But at the end of this survey he thought that in order to identify these rooms exactly, one would have to know the history of the building. This remains the topic of speculation to this day.

Another subject that preoccupied Deissmann was the quantity of non-Islamic manuscripts from the time of Constantine the Great (fourth century AD), in the Palace at the end of the 16th century. He agreed with what Domenico claimed in his report Relazione di Constantinopoli, that there were 120 codices in jewelled bindings. He added that the number could be increased, when some other books mentioned by Domenico are also taken into account. In all probability, however, the famous Octateuch from 12th century (GI 8) is the only manuscript from the Byzantine Imperial Library preserved in the Palace Library today.

Finally, Deissmann explored the works acquired for Mehmed II, the true founder of the collection. In light of those works, he demonstrated the scientific and cultural interests of the sultan. In regard to the works in Sultan Mehmed’s collection, Deissmann determined that the sultan had many interests including the history of Alexander the Great, military science and history, geography, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy and poetry, the New and the Old Testaments. But the sultan was mostly interested in geography, especially in the works of Ptolemy, possibly because of the political and strategic conditions of his time. Moreover, curious about the Western tradition, the sultan invited scholars like Kritoboulos of Imbros and Georgios Amirotzus of Trebizond to the Palace, with them he was interested, and received advice about the acquisition of books and manuscripts. As Deissmann indicated in his book, the summer of 1465 was very fruitful. During this time, Mehmed II ordered the preparation of many works; for example, Amirotzus was commissioned to compile a wall-map from the separate maps in

21 Emil Jacobs, Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Bibliothek im Serai zu Konstantinopel (Heidelberg, 1919).
23 On Domenico’s report about the location of the libraries in the Harem, see Jacobs, Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Bibliothek im Serai zu Konstantinopel, pp. 63–74 and also Deissmann, Forschungen und Funde im Serai, pp. 8–10.
24 Deissmann, Forschungen und Funde im Serai, p. 10.
25 Ibid., pp. 15, 17.
26 Çağman and Tunand, The Topkapı Saray Museum, p. 11.
Ptolemy's Geography. With the help of his son, Amirouzés marked the place names in Arabic, and they collaborated on a translation of Ptolemy's text for the sultan.20

Emphasizing Sultan Mehmed's fondness for books and manuscripts, and bringing the collection into light, Deissmann's Forschungen und Funde im Serai paved the way for important investigations. In particular, Julian Raby states that sixteen Greek manuscripts were produced at the court of Mehmed II.21 Fourteen are still in the Palace Library, one is in the Vatican City, and the other is in Paris. These manuscripts are dated by Raby to Sultan Mehmed's reign on internal evidence, such as colophons and watermarks. Among them are The History of Mehmed II the Conqueror by Kritoboulos, and a copy of Arrian's standard life of Alexander, The Anabasis, prepared by the same author as a companion volume (CIL 3,16).22 It is obvious that Kritoboulos pointed to Mehmed's resemblance to Alexander the Great, probably in order "to enable the sultan to appreciate for himself the validity of his neo-Alexander image."23

At the year of the publication of his book, Deissmann was charged with the investigation of another group of manuscripts that came from various parts of Turkey and were collected in the Ethnographical Museum in Ankara, together with some manuscripts found in İzmit. They were transported to Istanbul in order to be examined by him. But as Deissmann could not come to Turkey in 1933, he prepared a list with the help of photographs sent to him by Halil Edhem and his successor Aziq Oğan. His purpose, just as during his work in the Palace, was to render a service to scholarship and to enable the experts to perform detailed studies.24

G.A. Deissmann passed away in 1937, one year after the publication of his study; H.E. Eldem passed away one year later, in 1938. The fruits of their collaboration, however, continue to stimulate scholars. And Forschungen und Funde im Serai, as the first detailed work that contains a list of the non-Islamic manuscripts in the Topkapı Sarayı

20 Ibid., p. 302.
22 Ibid., p. 18.
23 Ibid. Although Deissmann made some mistakes, subsequently corrected by other scholars, his work served as one of the important sources in the field of ancient Christian literature. For example he mistakenly argued that the seal that appears in the Arabic codex in the Ayasofya Museum (AS 2610) is that of Prince of Mustafa, whereas in fact it is the seal of Bayezid II. See Deissmann, Forschungen und Funde im Serai, p. 33, note 2, and Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror's Greek Scriptorium," p. 24, note 46.
24 Adolf Deissmann, Handschriften aus Anatolien in Ankara und İzmit (Berlin, 1936).