

# Introduction to the Special Issue: Orientalist Libraries and Orientalism

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## Introduction

The idea for the workshop arose out of work first presented to the Round Table on Library History at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Conference in Sydney in 1988. This took the form of a contribution on the history of the National Library of Indonesia (and was itself published in *Libraries & Culture* in 1990). I had been involved in consultancy work in Jakarta for the British Council in 1987 in connection with the move of the old museum library (dating back, in principle, to the eighteenth century) into the new building, where a modern national library of very recent creation was in the process of establishing itself. The old library was the creation of the Batavian Society for the Arts and Sciences, the first orientalist society set up by the European powers and the first western intellectual establishment in the East. Its continuity and activities through periods of French, British, and Dutch supremacy throughout the nineteenth century and the period of the two world wars (when under the Japanese time seemed to stand still and when in 1946 the Dutch librarian returning to his office found things unchanged there) was impressive. The society dwindled away during the first years of Indonesian statehood, but the continuity of both the library and its staff (as of the State Archive, which enjoyed a similar history) was sustained through the intervening years until a modern UNESCO-style national library service was proposed, implemented, and crowned with the opening of a new building, all within a decade.

The establishment of the Batavian Society was quickly followed by the establishment in 1784 of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta under the presidency of Sir William Jones, whose London avatar is the subject of one of the papers included here (and some investigations of the early collections of the Royal Asiatic Society in London were the subject of an interim paper that I presented to the Round Table's session

at the IFLA conference in Delhi in 1992). French, Russian, and Italian interest in orientalist collections quickly followed that of Britain and Holland, and a conference drawing threads of these developments, rivalries, correspondences, and achievements would still be a desirable project.

Publicity about the workshop announced broadly a seminar on orientalist societies, their libraries, and orientalism, that approach to the study of the cultures of the East which Europeans have been pursuing alongside and in the wake of economic and military hegemony and for which they have been criticized, as if they have merely the wish to dominate those cultures and not the desire to learn from them. What was intended was a survey of selected libraries of a rather specialist kind, the libraries of those societies dedicated to and involved with the collection and study of languages, traditions, sources, and materials of the cultures of the East, showing an endeavor to explicate and to learn about and from these cultures.

What we have is perhaps somewhat different, for the contributors offer a range of topics loosely arranged around a theme of East-West relations and have achieved, in effect, a set of studies of libraries of one culture maintained or developed in another—in the process bringing together a rich mix for the illumination of the study of library history and exemplars of that discipline which naturally underscores the aims of the Round Table.

A preponderance of papers on Ottoman and Turkish themes was perhaps to be expected and, in fact, also included the draft of a local paper dealing with that rather rare subject, “occidentalism,” concerned with the first western library in Ottoman Istanbul during the last century, and the intentions and attempts made by Turkish reformers trying to open the country to new influences, so it is regrettable that this has not been followed up for inclusion in a fuller form here. Dr. Roper’s paper on Ahmad Faris’s sojourn among libraries in Britain and on the Continent show him studying and promulgating interaction of collections between East and West.

Topics on London and Great Britain feature heavily in the contributions, but there is diversity among them: in addition to Michael Pollock’s paper on the Royal Asiatic Society and its Southeast Asian holdings (the only Orientalist Society proper featured in these proceedings), there is Peter Colvin’s paper on the origins of some of the holdings of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), which brought into perspective Mohammad Ali and his modernization of Egypt, and the Great Exhibition of 1851, another of the landmarks of European imperialism, it may be said, and provided a focus, more importantly, on the means by which cultures interpenetrate each other. Graham Jefcoate’s study of oriental-

ism at Göttingen University Library (during Britain's Hanoverian phase) shows an aspect of the beginnings of formal study of the East in the West in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through an analysis of acquisition practices and collection development in a model library of the time. Jefcoate's paper also covers aspects of the history of the book, an inevitable shadow of such proceedings as these.

The remaining papers are all concerned with areas of Ottoman and Turkish influence. Dov Schidorsky makes connections both with the topic of the Armenian diaspora, also the subject of draft papers not brought forward for inclusion in these proceedings, and with the Egyptian theme, touching on the limits of Mohammad Ali's power (since it was the crucial outcome of the battle at St. Jean d'Acre in 1841, which decided the fate of Palestine when it re-entered the world stage under Ottoman rather than Egyptian control) and Christian and Jewish libraries developed in this setting. It includes an interesting study of libraries among the stirrings of Jewish revival in Palestine late in the last century which have fed into the great collections of Jerusalem, where the diaspora brought back to an ancient homeland part of its culture that had become thoroughly Europeanized over the centuries. In the West Hebraica and Judaica collections are as much part of the great libraries as the native collections, and in a strict sense they are at the root of European and not Oriental topics.

The two final papers are about war and its impact on libraries or librarians. At the IFLA conference in Moscow, a Russian speaker in the Round Table's program was scheduled to talk about landmarks of Soviet librarianship, and even as he spoke Soviet librarianship itself ended with the abortive coup of that weekend in August 1991. Dr. Stipčević brought current affairs to the proceedings, reviewing the fate of the libraries of Bosnia during the civil war that raged in new dimensions even for twentieth-century history, when the assault on archives and the published record became an additional vehicle of cultural genocide.

The most unexpected topic (but no less interesting from the historian's point of view) is Dr. Müller's paper on German and Austrian scholars in exile in Turkey during the Nazi period, respected predecessors of those now in charge of the Department of Library Science at the University of Istanbul. Müller's paper offers a new dimension of the theme of displaced librarians and their contributions in "another culture." It reflects, by the way, Turkish hospitality to émigrés from persecution, shown dramatically at the end of the fifteenth century following upon the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal after 1492, when, among other things, printing was first brought from Iberia to Constantinople and depopulated Greek cities were resettled by Jewish refugees.

It is a task of some magnitude to convene an international workshop and to maintain the interest of the organizers and the participating speakers through to the publication of the proceedings. In this case, planning between the officers of the IFLA Round Table on Library History and the director of the Department of Library Science at the University of Istanbul started in 1994, and publication of the workshop papers in their revised form through the agency of *Libraries & Culture* has taken nearly four years, which is no mean achievement. I have been assisted by many people in bringing these papers to light. Thanks are also due to the contributors who agreed to make revisions to their original papers and to the those who gave permission to reproduce illustrations.

Because of the individualistic style exhibited by the range of scholars contributing to this special issue and difficulties in communication, readers will note the absence of abstracts for some papers and a variation in citation styles—departures from this journal's usual practice.