

Call for papers: Libraries in the Ottoman World

Conference, Trinity Long Room Hub Arts & Humanities Research Institute, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

In association with the Trinity Centre for the Book

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Convened by: Moya Carey (Chester Beatty, Dublin), Boris Liebrez (Bibliotheca Arabica, Sächsische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Leipzig), Murat Şiviloğlu (Department of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Trinity College Dublin)

Keynote speakers: Prof. Tülay Artan (Sabancı University), Prof. Konrad Hirschler (Hamburg University)



The Ottoman empire spanned three continents and a vast urban network, inhabited by a cosmopolitan civilian population as well as a political and military elite long steeped in book culture as part of practices of learning, entertainment, and status-making. Both cultural diversity and intellectual engagement are neatly evidenced by reading habits, as told in the material history of book collections across the Ottoman world. Whether private, imperial or institutional in nature, libraries existed in every city, each a potential nexus of academic enquiry and thought, sometimes with a distinct architectural identity of enclosed space for reading, debate, reflection, and competitive self-projection. Books were written in all the languages spoken across this multi-ethnic and multi-faith realm: Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Kurdish, Coptic, Latin, Hungarian, Serbian, and more. As Ottoman power and territory expanded (and later contracted), the political transition impacted libraries and intellectual culture all over the Arab world as well as the Ottoman heartland and Ottoman Europe.

The longer history of libraries is one of flux, with books forever moving in and out as new purchases, respectful gifts, personal loans, political confiscations and military loot. Whole collections can mobilise at critical transition-points such as the owner's death or a significant handover of political power, potentially resulting in complete dispersal into the book market or wholesale absorption into another library, either circulating locally or

exporting abroad. In more granular terms, the dynamic and mobile biography of individual books is also told through their evolving materiality, with successive owner interventions confirmed by replacement bindings, re-margined folios, new campaigns of illumination, and phases of inserted paratext. Today, the collective evidence of “past lives” remains documented in the notes added into books, by owners, borrowers, auditors, dealers and above all readers. The systematic cataloguing of this invaluable resource, central to new methodological approaches of book history, has also been taken up with increasing urgency. Data-driven projects such as *Bibliotheca Arabica* are currently facilitating access to a growing corpus of such material and thus allow for the connection of books with their past owners and readers across modern collections on a global scale.

With this in mind, we invite scholars to submit proposals that critically engage with the historical and intellectual significance of libraries from the Ottoman world. Papers might address, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- The organisation, growth, and transformation of libraries across the Ottoman empire
- Libraries as instruments of imperial, political, and cultural authority or identity
- Libraries as social environments: salon culture, intellectual activity, self-projection
- The impact of political transition on personal libraries and their owners
- The role of waqf (endowment) libraries in sustaining intellectual life
- Case studies of particular collections, their patrons, and their afterlives
- The material culture of libraries: architectural space, book production, urban context
- The materiality of the book over successive centuries of ownership and reader access: physical damage and loss, later repairs, re-binding, re-margining, other interventions
- The book economy: the production, sale and re-circulation of books, the accumulation and dissolution of book collections within and beyond Ottoman borders
- The mobility of knowledge within and beyond Ottoman borders
- The shift from manuscript culture to print and its implications for the library as an institution

Submissions that incorporate fresh archival research, new theoretical approaches, or comparative perspectives are particularly encouraged.

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words, along with a brief biography, to Boris Liebrez (liebrez@saw-leipzig.de) by 28 February 2025.



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Bliain i gCaisleán
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Years at Dublin Castle