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Archiving Turkology: Sources, Networks, and Knowledge Production[1]

From the personal archives of European Turkologists and Turkish writers and intellectuals to the collections of cultural institutions, this special issue examines a diverse range of lesser-known and underexplored sources for the study of the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. In recent years, the discovery and reassessment of such archives, both in Europe and in Turkey, have opened new research trajectories on topics as varied as the development of Turkology as a discipline and the evolution of political and cultural relations between Turkey and Europe.

The critical approach that has led scholars to question, from an epistemological perspective, the origins and formation of Turkology[2] has increasingly drawn attention to the transnational processes through which the field emerged. Recent research has, moreover, traced the emergence of Turkology itself through the circulation of people, manuscripts, books, objects, and knowledge across Europe and Asia.[3] This reassessment has stimulated research in archives documenting European interest in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, including university archives, library inventories, and the personal papers of scholars, intellectuals, and diplomats.[4]

Recent work has demonstrated in particular how the combined examination of personal papers, correspondence, institutional records, and manuscript collections can provide new perspectives on the formation of Turkology and Oriental Studies as scholarly fields. At the same time, interdisciplinary approaches, combined with intellectual curiosity, the desire to move beyond established disciplinary narratives, and the growth of this field of study, as evidenced by regular conferences such as the Turkologentag, have encouraged the search for and valorisation of diverse sources. It is now evident that such materials make a significant contribution to both Ottoman Studies and Turkish Studies.[5]

The search for, discovery of, and engagement with new sources has also prompted reflection on archives themselves. Investigating institutional and private archives and collections that may prove valuable for Ottoman and Turkish studies invites broader

1 This special issue originates from the workshop Turkology in the Archives, held at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" on 11 April 2025. The workshop was organised within the framework of the research project 'ReDigiOr: Recovering and Digitalising the UniOr Cultural Heritage and its Entangled Histories. The Bonelli Archive' (2023–2026), coordinated by Lea Nocera and funded by the University of Naples "L'Orientale."

2 Bossaert and Szurek 2017; Neumann 2017.

3 Magkanari 2026.

4 Altın 2023; Altun 2025; Becker et al. 2024; Çelik et al. 2025; Doğan 2025.

5 Aymes and Markiewicz 2025, 13–26; Massicard, Toumarkine and Boucly 2022.

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reflections on archivality, on the histories of archives that encompass a wide variety of sources, from official documents and correspondence to grey literature, newspapers and periodicals, as well as visual materials. This perspective shifts attention from archives as mere repositories of sources to their own histories of formation, transmission, dispersal, and preservation.[6] Above all, it means exploring the possibilities that emerge when one looks beyond the walls of central institutional archives and crosses national boundaries, retracing relationships forged through communication, mobility, and exchange, whether of letters, information, printed materials, books, or commentary. As becomes particularly evident in the study of the personal papers of figures such as Bonelli and Mordtmann, and indeed of many other Turkologists, close connections emerge, revealing fruitful archival entanglements.

This special issue brings together four contributions that seek to open a space for discussion on these themes. The contributions follow two distinct trajectories. The articles by Yavuz Köse and Lea Nocera focus on the personal archives of two key figures in the development of Ottoman and Turkish studies between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By contrast, Valentina Marcella's article and Timour Muhidine's archival survey draw attention to less obvious and often overlooked archival repositories: the archive of the Turkish Cartoonists' Association and the various archives that may serve the study of Turkish literature.

In 'Between Diplomacy and Scholarship: Johannes Heinrich Mordtmann (1852–1932) and the Formation of Ottoman Studies,' Köse focuses on the figure of Johannes Heinrich Mordtmann, a diplomat-scholar whose contribution to the formation of Turkology remains relatively unexplored and insufficiently acknowledged. Drawing on his personal papers, which include scholarly manuscripts, correspondence, and private documents, the article reconstructs the profile of a respected and highly regarded scholar who nevertheless remained marginal in accounts of the field, partly because of his multifaceted character as a figure operating in between different worlds. As Köse argues, Mordtmann's papers highlight the extent to which the development of Turkology emerged from interactions between scholarly, diplomatic, and transnational milieus rather than from academic institutions alone. They therefore demonstrate that the history of Ottoman studies cannot be reconstructed solely through an institutional narrative centered on university chairs, institutes, journals, and monographs.

The potential of a scholar's personal archive is also explored by Nocera in 'Exploring Luigi Bonelli's (1865–1947) Personal Archive: The Turkologist's Workshop and Transnational Networks'. Through the personal papers of Luigi Bonelli, the first Italian professor of Turkish and a foundational figure in Italian Turkology, the article uncovers a world of dense and far-reaching exchanges that reveal a complex map of relationships spanning Europe, the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, and beyond. These networks involved not only scholars but also a range of intermediary actors, diplomats, military officers, priests, students, and journalists, who actively participated in the production and circulation of knowledge. The archive also reveals a new geography of interaction, suggesting the need

6 Burak et al. 2022, 541–75; Burton 2005; Çelik and Petrolini 2021, 175–231.

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to investigate lesser-known issues, such as the presence and mobility of former Ottoman subjects in Italy, and particularly in Naples.

Both Köse and Nocera, starting from two personal collections, further emphasise the importance of investigating the histories of archives themselves for the study of Turkology. The ways in which archives have been preserved and transmitted, and the locations in which they are currently held, offer revealing clues that open new lines of inquiry into the history of the discipline. As Köse notes, Mordtmann's archive, although now separated, was incorporated into Franz Babinger's estate. This connection was not accidental but rather reflects a relationship of esteem and admiration, drawing attention to Mordtmann's significance within Turkology. Similarly, tracing the history of Bonelli's personal archive brings to light the pivotal role of Paul Mulla, a largely overlooked figure in the history of Turkology. Far more than a marginal intermediary, Mulla acted as a key mediator linking the Ottoman Empire, Italy, and France, facilitating not only the circulation of ideas and information but also the mobility of scholars, intellectuals, and former Ottoman subjects across these interconnected spaces.

Archives also occupy a central place in Marcella's contribution. In 'A Displaced Archive: Cartoons, Heritage, and Urban Change in Istanbul,' she focuses on Turkey's largest cartoon archive, namely the collection held by the Association of Cartoonists (*Karikatürcüler Derneği*) in Istanbul. The article proposes studying cartoons and Turkey's rich tradition of political satire not only as sources in themselves but also through the spaces where they are displayed, preserved, and made visible. By reconstructing the history of the Association's archive, a history closely intertwined with political developments and shifts in Turkish cultural policies, Marcella demonstrates how the archive constitutes a socially produced space. At the same time, the case highlights the fragility and precariousness of archival collections belonging to cultural associations operating in politically contested environments and representing cultural forms, such as satire, whose value has not always been widely acknowledged.

Just as the archive of the Cartoonists' Association encourages scholars to explore collections and documents for the study of Turkey's cultural history, Muhidine's contribution suggests new research avenues grounded in a wide range of sources preserved in France that relate to contemporary Turkish literature. Muhidine's contribution, however, differs from the preceding articles in form and purpose. Conceived as an archival survey rather than a conventional research article, it offers a preliminary mapping of dispersed and often little-known holdings in France relevant to Turkish literary and intellectual history. Its purpose is exploratory: to identify repositories, collections, and possible lines of inquiry, thereby providing a starting point for more systematic research. In 'France: A Treasure Trove of French-Turkish Literary Archives: An Archival Survey,' Muhidine offers a first attempt to map a diverse range of archives and collections located in publishing houses and libraries, repositories that prove to be veritable treasure chests for Turkish studies. Such is the case of IMEC (Institut Mémoires de l'édition Contemporaine), a French institution specialising in contemporary literature and the social sciences, which might not immediately attract the attention of a Turkologist but nonetheless preserves parts of the archives of Nâzım Hikmet and his partner and translator, Münevver Andaç. The institution also holds material related to Abidine and Güzin Dino, two extraordinary

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figures in the Turkish cultural and intellectual milieu in France who played central roles in the dense network of cultural relations linking Turkey and France throughout the twentieth century.

The effort to locate these documents reveals the existence of a dispersed archive, scattered across collections and libraries, fragmentary in nature, yet one in which meaningful connections can gradually be established. Such connections frequently uncover networks of relationships and intellectual affinities. In the French case, they reveal an intellectual and artistic world operating within the diaspora, sharing political commitments while maintaining strong ties with Turkey. This observation opens another avenue of reflection concerning both the scale and significance of archival documentation produced by authors, intellectuals, and, one may add, scholars from Turkey whose personal and political trajectories have resulted in their presence elsewhere in Europe, often as a consequence of exile, whether voluntary or forced. It thus becomes clear that documentation relevant to Turkish and Ottoman studies must once again be sought in Europe, and beyond institutional repositories, within the rich holdings preserved in archives that are unexpected, scattered, displaced, or simply overlooked. It is precisely in such spaces that one may find traces and interpretive keys for moving beyond institutionalised narratives of Turkology and for re-examining conventional institutional and diplomatic sources in innovative ways.

The world that emerges from these archives is one shaped by dense and continuous exchanges, by relationships that transcend borders, and by forms of knowledge production that develop within a transnational space. It is by navigating this landscape of distant yet entangled archives that it becomes possible to reconstruct intellectual histories, histories of exchange, and cartographies of relationships.

This special issue probes how underused archives, ranging from personal papers to museum and association collections in Turkey and Europe, can reconfigure the history of Turkology, the nexus between state and knowledge production, and the transnational intellectual networks that have shaped the field.

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