Some years ago I made up my mind to ascertain how many manuscripts there are in the libraries of Istanbul. I walked from library to library and bade the librarians to give me the exact official numbers of the manuscripts entrusted to their care. They did, and after I had finished with all the libraries, I added up the figures given to by the librarians. The total sum was about 124,000. This is an enormous figure. No capital in the East nor the West can boast to preserve such an amount of manuscripts. Istanbul is the first center of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts in the world, and it is one of the incontestable merits of the Turkish conquerors of Constantinople to have saved these rich treasures of Islamic Culture in their new capital from destruction and dispersion. The history of the individual libraries of Stambul remains to be written. Most of them are pious foundations of the sultans, of vezirs, secretaries of state, shaikhulislams and others. The selection made by these great collectors proves in many cases that they were possessed of a remarkably high standard of connoisseurship and scholarship.

One of the higly learned collectors of manuscripts in modern Turkey was our late friend Hoja Ismail, librarian of the Umumi Library at Bayezid Square. He was the best Arabic scholar of Turkey, and I also often would ask him questions on learned subjects and profit very much from his vast erudition. Unfortunately, it was not always easy to approach him, for he would always be surrounded by a flock of cats, which he loved tenderly. They would be sitting on his lap, his shoulders, his arms, on the heaps of manuscripts around him, shortly everywhere, and their presence was to him of vital importance in the same degree as books, scholarship and everything else. We used to call him “the Abū Huraira of his time”. He was one of the original types who are more and more dying out, both in Europe and in the East. He never allowed himself to be photographed. Once, however, I succeeded to get a snap-shot of him, while he had plunged into an Arabic manuscript. (As a matter of

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* A paper read to a group of Orientalists at Oxford and Cambridge in May 1950.
fact, he would very rarely condescend to read printed stuff. He would say: "If a book is printed, there remains no flavour in it any more.")

After his death, the photograph I had made was enlarged and put into the introduction to the new edition of Ḥājī Khalīfa’s Kashf az-Zunūn. Hoja Ismail never wrote a book. But he would dictate whole books to other scholars, and so many books are said to have been published under the pretended authors’ names, the actual author being Hoja Ismail Efendi. Now, this man had been collecting books and manuscripts for about forty years. This was rather easy for him, for everybody, who had inherited Arabic or Persian books from his fathers and did not know, what to do with them, would carry the books to the Umumi-Library and show them to the learned hoja of the cats. Thus he had been able to accumulate tremendous treasures of books, which he would very seldom show to other people. In his lifetime, I saw perhaps five or six specimens of his collection. Most of his books were stored in an unused old oven. After his death, the Government purchased his library and asked a committee of scholars and librarians to make something like a handlist of it. The books were taken out of the oven, registered and counted. Their number amounted to 28,000, among them about 13,000 manuscripts. They are now kept in the Library of the Faculty of Languages, History and Geography in Ankara. I succeeded in taking photographs of some of them. Sometimes, before putting a manuscript beneath the lense, I had to shake out the flour, which had got into it during its stay in the oven.

Outside Istanbul, in Anatoly, there are also precious libraries. The most important ones are perhaps those of Brussa, the old capital of the Ottoman Empire, and Konia. There is the library of the Mausoleum of Mawlānā Ḥalīlīddīn Rūmī and that of Yusuf Agha, where many manuscripts of the library of the famous mystic Șadraddin Qonawl are preserved.

A list of the libraries of Istanbul with details about the numbers of their printed books and manuscripts was published by the Director of the Umumi Library, M. Gökman: İstanbul Kütüphaneleri Rehberi. Guide to the Libraries of Istanbul, 3rd edition, Istanbul 1951. During the XXII. International Congress of Orientalists, held in Istanbul September 15-22, 1951, catalogues of the manuscripts exhibited on this occasion were distributed. These are: İstanbul Umumi Kütüphaneleri Yasaamlari Sergisi 15.-22. XI. 1951. Bu sergi XXII. Milletlerarası Müsteşirler Kongresi için tertip edilmistir, İstanbul 1951, 38. p.; Une liste des manuscrits choisis parmi les bibliothèques de Bursa, Publié à l’occasion du XXII Congrès International des Orientalistes. İstanbul 1951, 80 p.; Une liste des manuscrits choisis parmi les bibliothèques de Konya, Ist. 1951, 37 p.; Une liste des manuscrits choisis parmi les bibliothèques de Manisa, Akhisar, Ist. 1951, 31 p.; XXII. Milletlerarası Müsteşirler Kongresi mınasebetiyle Başbakanlık Arşivinde tertiplenen Tarihi Vesikalar Sergisi Kataloğu, Ist. 1951, 48 p. Under the leadership of the Director General of the Libraries of Turkey, Bay Aziz Berker, a series of new catalogues of the Istanbul manuscripts is being published.