

Problems of Supply and Acquisitions in the World of Turkish Publishing

In this paper I will attempt both to give a general assessment of the Turkish publishing market and to describe the existing difficulties that a vendor faces in supplying libraries with books and periodicals. First of all a few words on the general situation of the Turkish publishing sector.

Ideological Divisions and Distribution Difficulties

Turkey's intellectual and political spheres are beset by sharp ideological divisions. There are currently six main ideological streams:

- Nationalism
- Neo-nationalism
- Islamism
- Kemalism
- Liberalism
- Socialism

These divisions, however, are not limited to fields of intellectual discourse and politics, but extend into many if not all areas of Turkish society, including the field of publishing. Those publishing houses that publish works from the social sciences, for instance, generally prefer to work with authors possessing similar ideological positions to their own. The same situation is encountered in the distribution field. Very often distribution companies distribute books of publishers whose ideology is similar to their own. This situation results in the fact that the big mainstream distributors often do not distribute Islamist, pro Kurdish and ultra leftist publishing houses' books and thus such books are much more difficult to find on the market place.

Sales

In our days the works of internationally-known Turkish novelists such as Orhan Pamuk, Elif Şafak, Yaşar Kemal, Selim İleri, Ahmet Ümit, and Ayşe Kulin, to name a few, will sell upwards of 50,000, sometimes 100,000 copies or more. But this success is hardly the rule and does not reflect the generally meager sales that Turkish authors experience. The works of minor or lesser known Turkish authors of novels, short stories

or essayists will have initial printings of perhaps one or a few thousand at best—and even then have difficulty selling them all.

If the situation of fiction writers may sound bad, the one of non-fiction authors is assuredly much worse. Initial printings rarely exceed 1,000 copies. In fact, sales have tended to be so paltry, around 300 to 500 copies, that some publishing houses have begun to use print-on-demand or digital printing technology instead of off-set printing in order to reduce inventory. In view of the limited readership of scholarly monographies more and more publishers are shifting from offset to digital printing technology.

Book and Serial Publications: Publishing and Sales Figures

The Turkish publishing market is a small one, although in recent years there has been a sizeable increase in the number of publishers and publishing houses. I would like to give you some ideas of the numbers involved: Turkey's ISBN Agency registered 1,461 new publishers in 2007 and another 1,184 for the first 6 months of 2008. Likewise, in 2007 the agency allotted 29,312 new ISBN numbers and 805 new ISSN numbers, while in 2008 these figures were 31.783 ISBNs and 725 ISSNs, respectively.

It is extremely difficult to know which subject fields were covered by these 31.783 new titles to which ISBNs were allocated in 2008. The reason is that the Turkish ISBN Agency's subjects classification is too general and vague. For example the Agency states that 40% of all new titles published in 2008 were in the field of social sciences. This gives us a figure of 12.500 new titles, which I estimate is enormous and totally misleading. My estimate is that original first editions published in 2008 in the field of social sciences, arts and literature is utmost around 2.500 to 3.000 titles. This estimate concurs also with the cumulative number of selected original first editions that we have catalogued in 2008 which was around 2.200. Regarding the first six months of this year we have selectively catalogued 900 original titles. A few words on my selection criteria when cataloging first editions. In the field of social sciences I am cataloging only scholarly works not popular ones and not text books. In the field of arts and literature I am cataloging only first editions of established artists and authors with a good track record. That's why there is gap on my estimate of the total number of 2.500 to 3.000 first editions for 2008 versus my own catalogued number of 2.200.

The Problem of Distribution

I would now like to touch on the problem of distribution in Turkey. In an age in which bookstores and booksellers are already fully engaged in international on-line commerce, both Turkish and foreign librarians are continually confronted with the challenge of acquiring books from Turkey. Regarding this question I will deal with the issues of monographs and serial publications separately.

Let's begin with monographs. Plainly put, it is not very difficult to secure monographs from Turkey. However there are certain classes of works which are extremely difficult to acquire. The main difficulty tends to be with the following types of publications:

- a- Works published by municipalities
- b- Works published by provincial governments
- c- Certain works published by the Ministry of Culture
- d- Publications by non governmental organizations
- e- Publications by private companies and banks
- f- University publications
- g- Privately published works
- h- Works published by small publishers established outside the three big cities of İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir.
- i- Official government publications

What these works have in common is that none of them are sold via normal channels of distribution, they are printed in limited—often small—number of copies and they are often incredibly difficult to acquire. According to the Turkish ISBN Agency statistics for 2008 the total figure of such publications were 7454.

Works Published by Municipal and Provincial Governments

In Turkey the municipal and provincial governments often publish works beyond just quarterly reports on their finances, activities and services. In recent years these institutions have also published numerous popular and academic research works related to their respective jurisdictions on subjects as varied as history, folklore, art, architecture, literature and music. Here the greatest procurement problem lies in identifying which municipality and/or province has published what sort of works and in

which date. If we bear in mind that Turkey is administratively divided into 81 provinces within which there are 2,941 separate municipalities it becomes easier to understand the scale of difficulty, not merely in procuring such works, but even in becoming aware of their existence.

At present the only way to keep abreast of such publications is to follow them in the press and frequent visits to the institutions' websites. Yet sometimes it is not sufficient to merely comb through these public sources, since these publications are not always reported in the mainstream press, and only appear in the respective local presses.

The sole exceptions to this rule are the metropolitan municipalities of Istanbul, Izmir and Bursa, which do put their publications up for sale, but even here there is no consistency: some of these municipalities publications are never put up for public sale, instead being distributed free of charge and in limited editions only to invitees at special public relations events or evenings.

Publications by Non Governmental Organizations

The 1990s were a period in which Turkey witnessed a virtual explosion in the number and type of non governmental organizations—both international and home-grown—that set up shop in the country. The goals of these organizations ranged from education, human and women's rights, and a variety of other cultural, economic and social objectives. To this list we should also add the dozens of long-existing professional associations, chambers of commerce and industry. In order to discover what these institutions are publishing and their means of acquisition would demand a herculean effort in its own right.

Turkish Ministry of Culture Publications

Although the Turkish Ministry of Culture officially sells its publications at a number of affiliated bookstores, some of its publications are never put up for sale and are thus impossible to acquire through normal channels.

State University Publications

There are 94 state and 38 private universities in Turkey, and another five private universities in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Apart from a few universities,¹ state university monographs and serial publications are generally the most difficult to obtain. Once again, these difficulties come in part from the inability to acquire accurate information on the specific university and year in which they are published, and from the fact that they are not officially put up for sale to the general public.

Cultural Publications by Private Companies and Banks

Another peculiarity of the Turkish publishing market is the relatively large number of what is called 'prestige books' published by private companies and banks. "Prestige books" are large size, hardback, coffee table looking books covering fields as different as history, fine arts, culture, architecture, economy, etc. This phenomenon goes back at least 15 years, and there now exists in the country a 'market' for researchers who prepare such books. This publishing field is comprised of books that banks and other private firms publish at the end of each year with the ostensible aim of 'providing a cultural contribution' and which are then distributed according to a very strict protocol. 'Prestige books' fall into three main categories: (a) brief histories of the respective companies and/or banks (b) biographies of the respective firms and/or banks founders; and (c) books on history, art and literature. To this category we have to add also monographs that the History Foundation of Turkey publishes exclusively for the institutions/companies that commissioned them to write their history. Such monographs are delivered to the respective institutions who ordered them and never put on sale.

The books published in this manner are not put up for sale, but distributed free of charge to journalists, Turkish libraries, members of parliament and high level public servants. For all others, the only way to find out about such publications is a careful reading of the press. One of the places where one can often learn of the existence of such works is in the columns of newspaper columnists who have received such publications and who, in gratitude, will make mention the book title or the name of the company that has published it. Although these books are distributed free of charge it is possible from time to time to find them at second hand book stores. However since they are very rare they are traded as modern day antiquarian titles and priced accordingly.

¹ Boğaziçi and İstanbul Universites.

Journals and Magazines Not for Public Distribution

Another source of publications that are acquired only with great difficulty are the journals and magazines currently published by private companies, banks, NGOs, municipalities, public relations firms, hospitals etc. These journals are distributed free of charge to the network of clients, dealers, etc. of the institutions which publishes them and not to the general public. They tend to focus on matters of art, culture and urban subjects. Unfortunately, some of these publications do not even contain an ISSN number.

Official Publications

Under the rubric of 'official publications' I am including those of the military (e.g., those put out by the Turkish General Staff, various branches of the Turkish Armed Forces and the various military museums), those of the various state security services (e.g., General Security Directorate, National Intelligence Organization, Police Academy) as well as those put out by government ministries and their various affiliated organizations. There is no great difficulty in acquiring the publications of the Office of the Turkish General Staff, since most of their publications are put up for sale to the general public. On the other hand, the General Security Directorate, Policy Academy and National Intelligence Organization publications are for 'internal consumption' and not sold to the public. Without having some sort of connections within the upper levels of Turkey's intelligence and security communities it is impossible to acquire such works. A similar situation exists in regard to the publications of the various government ministries.

Privately Published Works

Books and other publications put out by private individuals—often without ISBN numbers are, barring some fortuitous circumstance, generally unavailable for purchase by the general public.

Language and Distribution Difficulties

Some 93% percent of the books published in 2008 in Turkey in the field of social sciences, art and culture are published in Turkish. Five percent appear in English and the remaining two percent is in French, German, Kurdish, Ladino, Arabic, Armenian, and other languages. In contrast to much of what we have reported thus far, these

works tend to be quite easy to acquire. Those whose acquisition presents the greatest difficulty are the works published in Kurdish and Armenian, in part because the works tend to be published in small numbers and also because they are often not distributed for general consumption or through normal distribution channels.

Banned Books

One last category of difficult-if-not-impossible works to acquire is that of works that have, for one reason or another, been banned by the Turkish authorities. In the 70's these were leftist publications. In the 1990's and 2000's they are radical Islamist or Kurdish nationalist publications. One example of these from our recent history is the work "Revolution in Culture and Art" (*Kültür ve Sanat Devrimi*) by Abdullah Öcalan, the former PKK leader now serving a life sentence in Turkey. After receiving an ISBN number and going to print, the authorities intervened, banned the book and all of the copies were gathered up and destroyed before they could be sold.² A similar case occurred with the Turkish-German emigré Kemal Yalçın's "You Rejoice My Heart" (*Seninle Güler Yüreğim*) a work which, after being printed by Doğan Books in 2000 was evaluated by the publisher to take up the Armenian question in an 'unorthodox' and, in the eyes of Turkish officialdom, unacceptable fashion. As a result, in 2002 all copies of the work were gathered up by the publishing company itself and then destroyed in the presence of the İstanbul 13th Public Notary.³ The work was subsequently self-published by the author first in Germany and later on in Turkey. A less recent example is the collection of "Nasrettin Hoja Stories" (*Nasrettin Hoca Hikâyeleri*) put together by the famous Turkish folklorist Pertev Naili Boratav and published in 1996 by Yapı Kredi Publications. After the book was already published it was decided not to put it on the market due to the risqué character of some of the stories and it, too, was destroyed. Numerous duplicates were subsequently made from a surviving copy and sold by hand at high prices.⁴

Conclusion

² "Öcalan'ın Kitap Skandalı", *Milliyet*, 19 Kasım 2008.

³ A. Ömer Türkeş' article on the web page of online bookstore Pandora.

⁴ Özdemir İnce, "Pertev Naili Boratav'ın 'Nasrettin Hoca'sı'", *Hürriyet*, November 19, 2006.

In conclusion the main obstacles in getting books or even knowing what books have been published in Turkey, are two fold: (a) an imperfect and limited distribution system and data base which covers on a non exhaustive basis titles published only in İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir and (b) a gray market where there is little visibility on what title is published by whom. This situation can improve only with the establishment of a widespread distribution system with a large data base and a solid logistics system. However the current sales figure averaging maximum 500 to 1000 copies for non fiction academic works does not seem attractive to distribution companies with a limited capital which are more interested to stock and distribute popular books and fiction titles of best selling Turkish or foreign authors rather than slow moving non fiction titles.