Turkish History of Pharmacy Museum in Istanbul

This is the first history of pharmacy museum in Turkey. It was founded in 1960 in the building of the Istanbul University Faculty of Pharmacy. Prof. Dr. Turhan Bayoğlu’s (1920–2002) private collection initially constituted the core of this museum which, in the course of time, was also enriched with objects taken from the Vehbi Koç Pharmacy of the Ottoman Palace as well as those donated by the following contributors: Dr. Mehmet Kamal Berk (Prof. Bayoğlu’s father-in-law, and private physician of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic), Prof. Dr. Sarım Celiktüglo, Pharmacist Etem Peres, Pharmacist Remzi Kocaer, and Pharmacist Süleyman Recep Tugcu. After the building sustained heavy damage in the earthquake of 1999, the museum was closed for safety reasons, and all its contents were stored in another building. When fortification of the building was completed in 2010, a larger and more appropriate place was allocated for the museum on the first floor of the building next to the dead’s office.

Contents of the Museum

Among the major contents of the museum are:

1. various pharmaceutical objects sent to the museum from the Pharmacy of the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul;
2. wooden/glass medicine cabinets and furniture from three old pharmacies in Istanbul;
3. laboratory tools, balances, different-sized mortar and pestle sets, glass and porcelain drug jars, wooden medicine boxes;
4. the first Ottomans pharmaceutical products dating back to the 1890s, and pharmaceutical products from the beginning of the Republic period in 1923 until the 1960s;
5. pharmacists’ diplomas, drug labels, drug manufacturing licenses, pharmaceutical advertisements, brochures, and related ephemeral documents;
6. historical photos of the Faculty of Pharmacy, pharmacies, and pharmacists;
7. other remarkable objects, including a mortar from the Byzantine period, two human fetuses (three months and seven months), one snake in a glass (once used as a part of decoration in Ottoman pharmacies), and so on.

The museum also houses a great number of pharmaceutical books and periodicals used predominantly by Ottoman pharmacies and pharmacy students.

Book Collection of the Museum

Considering that Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1450s, it was introduced to the Ottoman land rather late. It was not until the 18th century that Ottomans began reading printed books rather than hand-written manuscripts. Except for preliminary steps taken by miniatrices in the Empire (i.e., Sephardic Jews who had emigrated from Spain and some other religious groups that actively communicated with Europe), the first printed book (the 11th-century Arabic-Turkish Dictionary of Vakula) was printed in 1729 by Ibrahim Mustafânicâ (1674–1747).

Apart from reference and educational books such as pharmaceuticae, formularies, and pharmacy course books, the Turkish History of Pharmacy Museum also has in its possession rare books printed during 1849, when pharmacy education was officially launched during the Ottoman period at the Imperial School of Medicine in Istanbul. Of these books were published in many languages besides Ottoman Turkish (using the Arabic script), modern Turkish (using the Latin script) and French, which were then followed by German, English, Armenian, and Greek. To better comprehend European influence on the Turkish pharmacy, this study briefly examines the books in the museum's collection by statistically evaluating them according to main subject contents, date of publication, and language. Since only 185 books of the total of more than 300 could be catalogued from the museum’s reorganization until today, only these books were taken into consideration for this study.

(*Arabic script was replaced with a phonetic variant of the Latin alphabet after the Language Reform in Turkey in 1928)

Figure 1. Distribution of languages

Figure 2. Distribution per date of publication

Figure 3. Distribution per subject

Results

The following results have been found.

1. Books written in Ottoman and Turkish make up 85.6% of the collection. The rest are in French, German, English, Armenian, Greek, and Italian. The number of books in French seems rather low in this study, and doesn’t reflect its real importance. Since the first pharmacy class was launched under the Imperial School of Medicine in 1839, French was the official language for pharmacy education. Since this language became more important in pharmacy practice all around the Empire. Therefore, many books, pharmaceutical journals, and pharmacy regulations as well as prescriptions were written in French during this period. Some attempted to change this situation by publishing books in Turkish, particularly after the 1890s. This attempt, however, will take some other fifty years, until the end of the World War II, to be successful, when the French language lost popularity in Turkey.

2. The majority of the books in the collection were published in the period of 1900-1910 (35.1%), followed by 1920-1940 (28.1%). This is believed to be a natural result of the increase in the number of networking houses in Istanbul and technical facilities during this period. Another reason might be the abundance of students in the schools of pharmacy and pharmacists in the country compared to the past. Handwritten copies of educational books or formularies had to be replaced with published books to meet the increased demand in this era.

3. In terms of subjects, chemistry (18.8%), medicine (18.9%), botany and pharmacognosy (17.3%) constitute the majority of the collection. This result is in accordance with the knowledge of pharmacy in this period as well.

To draw a more concrete conclusion about the historical importance of this collection, we believe that the unexamed books at the museum should be added this study in the future.