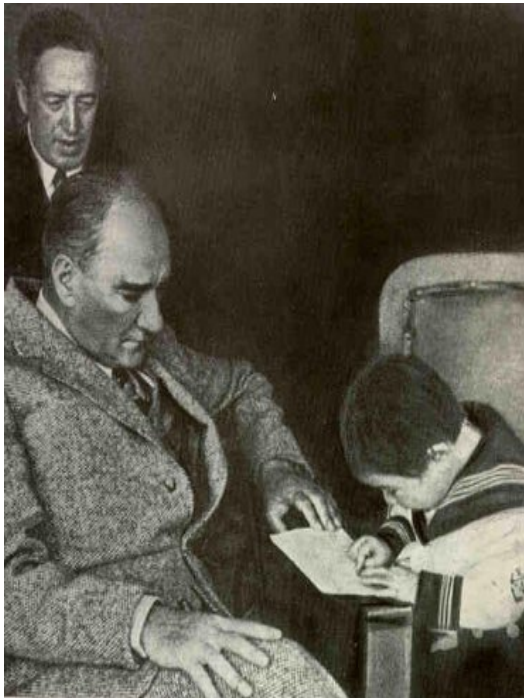


## “Educational Change in the Late Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Periods: Histories, Spaces, and Texts”



**Benjamin Fortna**

**Abstract:** This keynote lecture will address several of the important changes in the political, historical, spatial, temporal, and economic aspects of the educational effort undertaken by the late Ottoman state and its successor in Republican Turkey. Drawing on research into the expansion of reading in both the domains of the state and the private sector, it attempts to show how larger forces at work during this time of turbulent change affected the passage from the imperial to the post-imperial.

*Thanks to the organizers: Tassos, İpek, and Ayça.*

It is quite daunting to have been asked to deliver the keynote lecture for what looks sure to be a fascinating conference on educational change and globalization from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, with a special focus on the Mediterranean region. Certainly in my view there are other colleagues here who are eminently more qualified to speak to this topic. But I am happy to try. My perspective is that of someone who has worked on education in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. My first two books focused on the formal and less formal approaches to education, the first on state schools in the late Ottoman period, the second on the subject of learning to read and reading, an attempt, only partially successful to move beyond the hegemony of the state; my most recent project has been a rather abrupt departure, a biographical study of an individual who seemed determined to cause his teachers and school administrators problems at every turn, which

is perhaps a useful reminder of the importance of unintended consequences in the study of education. I therefore shall try to offer a perspective that reflects the many forces at work in this period of transitions: from imperial to post-imperial; from multi-ethnic to mono-national, from religiously infused to self-consciously (if not always completely) secular.

Like the world around it, the late Ottoman Empire was caught up in a period of unprecedented change. It was buffeted by challenges ranging from new ideologies to foreign capital, covetous neighbors, zealous missionaries and new technologies that cumulatively produced an almost dizzying degree of disorientation but also opened up countless new possibilities. The field of education both responded to the shifting realities and initiated new developments of its own, many of which amounted to radical change. The state's massive investment in education, the often equally vigorous efforts of non-state actors, such as religious and philanthropic associations and private individuals both foreign and domestic, the physically distinct places for "modern-style" education, the rapid rise in literacy and the commodification of a number of practices associated with learning and reading were all important departures from past practice, even though we tend to take them for granted today.

This lecture attempts to reconsider the role of education in the transition from Ottoman Empire to the nation states that succeeded it by bringing together a number of separate strands of research on educational change, the commodification of learning, and biography. It argues that several processes that had begun in the late

Ottoman period, including the differentiation of educational space, the stratification of learning, and the supplanting of the religious communities as the main provider of education, were collectively responsible for the creation of a new educational dispensation, both in terms of conception and lived reality. This new dispensation afforded the nascent states of the post-Ottoman period a number of distinct advantages that they were quick to exploit. But it also generated a range of tensions that can be observed in the process of education broadly understood. Focusing mainly on the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, I shall attempt to demonstrate some of the ways in which education was changing, both as a response to the altered desiderata of the state and the wider world and, in turn, the ways in which the new world of education influenced the late- and post-imperial environment. Special attention will be paid to the spatial, textual and economic aspects of education as reflecting the transition from empire to nation.

In preparing this talk I tried to reflect on the ways in which education acted as both the instrument and the symptom (or perhaps the reflection) of some of the broader changes taking place in the shift from Ottoman Empire to nation states. In many ways, education is crucial to this transition; not only does it reflect a great deal about these societies—first Ottoman and then its several successor states, although here, as I say, I focus mainly on Turkish Republic—and their self-representation, but it also was inherently, even intimately, involved in negotiating the move from a largely religious environment (almost entirely free from state influence) to one heavily dictated by the desiderata of the state.

But it seemed to me that, trying to view the question from some remove, it was important to understand education more broadly than is often the case. In other words, education can be seen as more than simply schools, curricula and course content. Similarly, we need to see in the history of education more than a mechanistic, path-determined transition from a religiously fostered to a politically inspired environment, important though that was in setting the tone for the post-imperial period. Broadly understood, education in this period encompassed a wide spectrum of institutions and individuals, backed both by state sponsorship and private initiative and motivated by a range of political, ideological, economic and social agenda. What they held in common was the desire for communal and individual improvement. This meliorative dimension is crucial for understanding such phenomena as the expansion of school provision, the spread of literacy and the more nebulous but not less important desire to keep up with, in that ubiquitous phrase of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “demands of the present.” Another complicating but crucial development, in my view, was the increasing role of the market in the shaping of a number of aspects of education, including but not limited to school choice, the production of texts, the procurement of teachers, and so on. So I would like here to try, in the time allowed, to explore some of the ways in which these rather unwieldy monolithic constructs—including “the state,” “education” and “the market”—influenced the passage from imperial to post-imperial. I should say that in doing so I am drawing largely on my research into the question of learning to read and reading across the transition from empire to republic.

I shall proceed by concentrating on three main areas: a) loosely speaking, the political/historiographical, b) the spatial and c) the economic. In each I shall try to delineate a few of the main **tensions** at work in the transition from the Ottoman to the post-Ottoman period as far as education, broadly understood, is concerned.

These tensions, I suggest, are useful in indicating the array of options or paths that were available, to educationalists, to parents and to individual students. They can be useful as a corrective to the tendency, common in the literature of this transition, to want to see unidirectional trends, for example, the movement towards secularism as inevitable, unavoidable. Looking at the tensions holds open the array of still viable possibilities as yet un-foreclosed by the passage of time and the weight of historical judgment.

### **Political and historiographical**

The key tensions here are 1) political: the degree of state involvement in education, which traditionally had been the preserve of non-state actors; and 2) historiographical: highlighting the tension between continuity and rupture.

To begin, it is important to note that the school was envisioned as a microcosm of first imperial and then post-imperial society: or rather, schools were treated as miniature laboratories that would help to realize the ideal society (as that conception changed according to the times and to the regimes involved). The flip side of this construct was that first the empire and then the nation-states were seen as a sort of classroom without walls; didacticism was an important

component of the state's approach to inculcating a range of values and behaviors, and not only at school; beginning in the late Ottoman period and proceeding with a vengeance in the post-imperial era, the state began more and more to treat all of society as if it were one large classroom.

The ultimate if somewhat unusually literal example of this trend was of course supplied by Mustafa Kemal, the future Atatürk, especially when he toured Turkey in support of the language revolution of 1928 with a blackboard and actually gave lessons on how to write the new Latin alphabet. It was not for nothing that one of the titles affixed to him was “Başöğretmen,” Educator-in-Chief. But the pedagogical instinct alive in the newly created post-Ottoman states was not limited to the subjects associated with schooling. In many cases teaching the nation, teaching citizenship, and teaching what were effectively “middle-class” manners were also part of the new agenda, both of the state and the social elite. But schools were the main arena of this campaign and are therefore crucial sites for observing the objectives of both governments and independent educationalists in this period; they also provide a good angle on the changing relationship between the state and the people it governed. As a result they reflect the many continuities and breaks inherent in the transition from Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic.

The prevailing tendency in the historiography of this transition has been to emphasize the ruptures. All post-Ottoman states were, for a variety of reasons, keen to underscore the breaks with the Ottoman past. The old regime proved a universally convenient foil for establishing putative but inevitably exaggerated contrasts that flattered the newly created states. The Turkish Republic was

therefore very much in step with its fellow post-Ottoman states in its denigrating of the empire while resolutely refusing to acknowledge the parallels involved, so keen it was to distance itself from its neighbors; it withdrew into a studied indifference which was of course frequently matched by those neighbors themselves. Given the strong—one could say nearly monopolistic—control that the early Kemalist state had over the production of history writing at home and its remarkable ability to influence writers abroad, it is not surprising that what became the standard historical account of the transition from empire to republic reflected Ankara's line.

The main thrust of this account was rarely subtle when aimed at adults, but it was even less unambiguous when presented for the schoolchildren of the new Turkish state. The main dynamic established by the TC was a simple binary juxtaposing the old, reactionary, obscurantist Ottoman Empire with the modern, secular, enlightened version of the Turkish Republic. Parallel to its attempts to claim the liberation of women as a gift of the new regime, the early Kemalist state went out of its way to inflate its educational offerings while belittling the considerable Ottoman achievements even as—or perhaps especially because—its educational apparatus owed so much to its imperial predecessor.

Some examples: Consider this passage included in a children's reader called *The New National Reader for Republican Children* from 1926:

Until recent times the Turks were the slaves of the Sultans. These Sultans, living in ornate, august



palaces, following their pleasure from morning to night, and feeding thousands of retainers in their palaces, supposed themselves to be the personal owners of the country.

The rest of the entry is devoted to describing how the “poor, hungry and naked” Turks of Anatolia eventually woke up and threw off their “blood-sucking oppressors,” “their greatest enemies” the Sultans. The only thing surprising here was that the author of this children’s primer was none other than Mehmed Fuad Köprülüzade (or Köprülü—he would soon drop the Persian patronymic from his illustrious family name), who was at the time the leading Turkish historian of the Ottoman Empire but had been co-opted into the task of denigrating the old regime. Vilifying the sultans also served the purpose of building up the status of Mustafa Kemal who was amassing formidable power.

The generic caricature fashioned for the sultans in the service of the early republic is easily seen in another example: a text written to present the Ottomans as reactionary. The author of *Cumhuriyet Çocuklarına Türkçe Kıraat* (A Turkish Reader for Republican Children) was Ahmed Cevad [Emre], a transitional late Ottoman and early Republican author of textbooks whose work reflected the changes occurring in state education from the Ottoman to the Turkish period. The first in this series features a skit entitled “Yaşasın Cumhuriyet” (Long live the Republic).<sup>1</sup> Its action centers on two children, Osman, a bossy would-be Sultan, or Padishah, and the heroic Turhan (an old Turkish name meaning chief or nobleman). The names are not chosen by accident, of course, but

rather to accentuate the difference between Ottoman imperial past—Osman is the eponym of the Ottoman (Osmanlı) dynasty—and the Turkish nationalist aspect of the Republic. Unsurprisingly, it is Turhan who emerges as the guardian of Republican values against this reactionary Ottoman usurper. Each protagonist is surrounded with a crowd of anonymous partisans, who seem to represent factions in broader society. Here is a taste of the dialogue from the opening lines:

*Osman:* (rifle on his shoulder, with a contingent of children behind him, sternly): Look sharp! Come here all of you and let me see you.

(The children stop their playing and look on in astonishment.)

*Turhan:* (bravely): Are we supposed to come on your order?

*Osman:* Yes, on my order. Leave your games and come here! (He aims his rifle at them, and so do his confederates.)

*Turhan:* What do you want from us?

*Osman:* You will give me all of your toys and all of your playthings.

*Turhan:* Hey, mister! Who do you think you are? You are acting like the evil padishah who robbed the nation. That day has gone, my dear.

Eventually, of course, Turhan and his faction of Republicans win the battle. Turhan’s last line is: “Let’s all shout together, ‘Down with the Sultan; Long live the Republic!’”



Yaşasın cumhuriyet  
TEMSİL

[Parkta: kime kime çocuklar oynı-

— 89 —

yorlar.

[Şahıslar: Osman, Turhan, diğer çocuklar.]

**Osman** (omuzunda tüfek; arkasında bir çok çocuk); sert sert:

Baksanız a! Hepiniz buraya gelin, bakayım!

(Çocuklar oyunlarını keserler; şaşkın şaşkın bakarlar)

**Turhan**— (Cesur cesur! senin sözünle mi oraya geleceğiz?)

**Osman**— Evet benim sözümle. Oyunu bırakın, buraya gelin! (Tüfeğiyle nişan alır; arkadaşları da nişan alırlar).

**Turhan**— Sen bizden ne istiyorsun?

**Osman**— Bütün oyuncaklarınızı: top-larınızı, topaçlarınızı bana vereceksiniz.

**Turhan**— Vay beyim vay! Sen kim oluyorsun? Sen milleti soyan fena pa-

It is therefore important to distinguish two different shifts that were taking place in education during this period.

- 1) Broadly speaking, a move from religiously-organized to state-organized education (usually but not entirely accurately described as secularization). This was well established long before the empire's end and thus has to be disaggregated from post-imperial projects such as that of the Turkish Republic.
- 2) Then there is a change **within** the state-supplied educational approach, from the late Ottoman period to that of the various post-imperial dispensations. In other words, while the main lines of the state system had been laid down since 1869 in the form of the Ottoman Education Regulation, which was largely based on the French system, individual regimes naturally tinkered with the specifics in practice. Thus the Tanzimat system was amended by the policies of Sultan Abdülhamid II which were, in turn, altered by the Young Turk and then the post-Ottoman regimes. But, in my view, the alterations tended to be fairly superficial when seen alongside the continuities running from period to period: highly centralized, paternalistic and alert to the possibilities of using its schools to serve its political agenda. In some respects the most crucial aspect of the state educational system was that it was a system, by which I mean that the structure was in place—a pyramid from Ed Min down to smallest primary school—which could be altered and its messages revised according to the political regime in control. This capacity was of course in practice not always so mechanical; education was a crucially contested sphere.

The historiographical treatment of the transition from Ottoman to post-Ottoman has been a bit more sophisticated than the children's fare but is still overly beholden to this self-serving Republican view. It has tended to emphasize the dichotomy between old versus new, for example, and to dwell far more on the new educational provision than the often equally interesting and equally important evolution of the "old" style of schooling.

Resistance to the message or indeed to the structural aspects of education appeared at various nodal points. And of course, local actors, far from the capitals involved, could and did exert considerable influence over the new educational dispensation, as Jens Hanssen has eloquently showed for the case of Beirut. But the fact that the state system was on the whole a fairly robust allowed subsequent periods to tinker with the content of education to fit their agenda—and to act as if education was a gift of that particular regime.

So, we can observe two inter-related but distinct shifts:

1) The first shift was predicated at the meta-level by a change in what education was meant to do. This movement was epitomized by a religiously-infused construct to a much more practical one symbolized by the term “maarif,” the learning of useful things, or knowledge. This practical bent was visible both in the initial Ottoman impulse to train and to mold competent and loyal bureaucrats for the administration that was burgeoning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the concomitant desideratum of expanding this new form of learning to the rest of the population. The second-stage expansion beyond the purely necessary for the running of the state amounted to a change in magnitude and in turn depended on a massive commitment—in financial, organizational and ideological terms—on the part of the state. This trajectory of expansion was of course carried on, usually quite vigorously, after the empire ceased to exist. While much changed, it was also the case that, taking the long view, a fair amount of inertia could be observed in this

inevitably cumulative process, even if debts to the previous generation were often not acknowledged.

2) I don’t have much time here to rehearse the administrative changes responsible for the second shift, i.e., the elaboration of the new educational system that emerged in the late Ottoman Empire and that was subsequently continued by the nationally-organized states that succeeded it. Such a discussion would need to take into account the various policy changes implemented by the various governments involved, across the Tanzimat, Hamidian, Young Turk periods in Ottoman times and the various iterations of the post-imperial era, as well as the increase in foreign-run schools across the empire, which alongside the parallel systems run by the various religious denominations, together made for a heavily segmented system. Instead, I would like to focus on two less frequently considered aspects of the new system, or rather two instruments that enabled the new form of learning to appear:

- 1) the new conception of educational space
- 2) the new approach to texts

### **Spaces**

The chief tensions here are between religiously- and civilly-defined (i.e., “secular”) space and between loyalty to the family as opposed to the newly valorized nation.

The new classrooms that began to dominate the educational terrain from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards reflected a broad move from religious to civil (ie, state) territory. Of course, religious schools didn’t immediately disappear; in the late Ottoman period they

retained an important role, one that is indeed too often overlooked. But, interestingly, they become co-opted by the state-produced line, functioning largely to supply a negative contrast to the new, state-supplied institutions, as we shall see shortly. In terms of school numbers, of finance, and energy expended, the new, state schools quickly dominated the educational landscape.

They represented a simple but crucially important shift. Although the state never achieved a total monopoly over education, it eventually comes very close in the post-Ottoman states, although of course this is more the case in some than in others. But this idea was not something altogether new. The late Ottoman state harbored the intention for the state to impose itself over the field of education across the empire and surely would have done so had it not faced insurmountable obstacles in the form of missionary, millet and other foreign institutions and the Great Power protection that they enjoyed. The intention behind this impetus is clear from the timing of Turkish Republic legislation. One of the very first laws enacted by Ankara was the Unity of Education Law (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) of 3 March 1924 which placed all educational institutions in the country under the jurisdiction of the Education Ministry, outlawed the local Qur'an schools, decreeing that all *waqf* funds be transferred to the Education Ministry and outlawed all education having an religious or political agenda. Recognizing the pent-up frustrations of state educational officials with the impediments that had prevented total state control over the educational sector in the Ottoman period is necessary to understand why educational legislation was one of the first and most comprehensive regulatory moves of the Turkish Republic, and this is a period when, given the demographic, social and economic devastation wrought by the

preceding decade-plus period of near constant warfare and deprivation. One might have expected other needs to have been more pressing but education was remarkably high on the list. (In fact, even while the "War of National Struggle"/*Milli mücadele* was raging, Mustafa Kemal and his fellow nationalists were engaged in educational matters, so important was the issue of education to the future leaders of the republic.)

But perhaps even more important in the long run than putting clear water between indigenous, "national" schools and their foreign competitors, was reinforcing the trend of supplanting religious with state-supplied education. This was effected through several modes of differentiation: of the physical setting of the school, the type of teacher involved and the learning content intended to be conveyed.

This movement from old to new is epitomized by the creation of purpose-built school buildings that clearly marked the new educational dispensation as distinct. In a process begun in the late Ottoman Empire and carried on in the Republic, the new schools were detached to religious institutions. (True, many of the new Ottoman state schools contained physical and temporal space for religious activity, e.g., mosques and attention to Qur'anic study, but this was qualitatively and symbolically different and subservient to the broader state control over the content and process of learning.) The new school buildings were visually and spatially distinctive as part of the expanding state presence. This was especially noticeable in the provinces where the spate of new school construction in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries produced school buildings (both civil and military) that were instantly recognizable as state institutions; their architecture matched that of the other newly constructed government buildings

and attempted to project an image at once both modern and indigenous. The urban scene was almost universally reflective of the new educational mission of the state.



**IMAGE** \* New style secondary school, Edirne



**IMAGE** \* New style secondary school, Izmir

The changes effected *inside* these new buildings were no less distinctive or dramatic—and they reflect a sea change in education: its conceptualization, implementation and its effects. Consider the following changes that the shift from the old to the new style of education entailed: From the *hoca* and his group of students, usually arranged in a circle, to the serried ranks of students in front of an official of the state; from sitting on cushions on the floor to chairs and desks; from reading from erasable surfaces to reading from printed, individual copies of standardized texts; from a daily rhythm of education that revolved around the times for prayer, and hence the natural pattern of the sun, to a system structured around the rule of the clock (the excellent recent work of François Georgeon and Avner Wishnitzer is crucial here) with parallel shifts in dress, eating habits, in short in bodily and temporal organization of education. Of these dress was particularly important in that it literally clothed the students in the uniform(ity) of the state; students wore numbers on their collars and sometimes even to each other by their numbers (or a combination of names and numbers), reflecting an internalization of the new state regimen.

The teacher naturally played a crucial role in the spaces they controlled

(and, increasingly, personified), not only in carrying out the day-to-day tasks of education but also in serving, wittingly or not, as a symbol for the various changes at work. On the one hand they were sidelined as outmoded, not only in sartorial but also in ontological, sense; the message that went out was that the *hocas* represented the dark world of the past. They were depicted as backwards, despotic,

violent and essentially pre-modern. On the other hand they served as useful foils for the contrast with the new-style teacher and the approach to education he (sometimes she) represented. (Despite the critical but eventually only temporary component of late Ottoman educational construct).

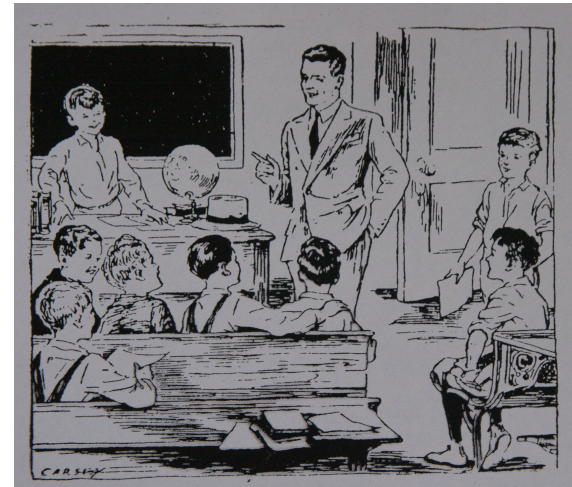


**IMAGE** \* Old style (medrese) school

Ironically, more than merely being sidelined or eclipsed as they became outnumbered by the newly trained state school teachers, the *ulema* as epitomized by the individual *hoca*, assumed a new and important role in the creation of the new educational dispensation: by serving as a conveniently negative symbol used to heighten the contrast between old and new, a contrast which attracted an increasingly ideological and political edge in the late Ottoman and especially in the early Turkish Republican period. It is important to note that this trend predates the republic. For example, the late

Ottoman writer Ömer Seyfettin wrote a story called *Falaka* (The Bastinado) of 1917 that depicts the *hoca* as an ignorant bumpkin who's menace is symbolized by the dreaded device that enabled the soles of the feet to be beaten.

Ahmed Rasım short stories “Eski meketplerde dayak” (1926) and (recycling the title from Ömer Seyfettin) “Falaka” (1927) dwell on graphic descriptions of physical punishment (lots of blood). Also notable is the conscious linking of the nasty but rather slow witted *hoca* with the “bad old days,” a time of jinn, peris, and bogeymen and it's purported aim of helping “today's youth” to understand these olden times.



**IMAGE** \* The new teacher





IMAGE \* Old vs New

Such portrayals of the *hoca* and the old style of education with which he was so vividly linked set up a clear contrast with the new style teacher. This was a figure who seemed to come straight from Central Casting, or at least that was how he (and increasingly she) was depicted in literature produced for children during this period. The new teacher was marked out in every respect by contrast with his religious equivalent. Where the *hoca* was depicted as slow-witted, unsophisticated, cruel and sometimes dirty for good measure, the new style analogue was depicted as a model of brightness, urbanity, westernization and modernity. Taking advantage of the increased possibilities of illustration in children's texts, the contrast was emphasized most graphically through clothing; the *hoca* in robes and a turban was contrasted with the "modern" looking civil teacher with his suit and tie, and sometime even a fedora for good measure. Some images were even taken from Western publications to dramatize the effect of the contrast.



But the new teacher's role was not merely symbolic. Taking advantage of a trend that had begun in the late Ottoman era and aggressively pursued in the early TC, the new teacher was held up as a paragon for his role not only inside the classroom but also outside it. The extracurricular role given to the new teacher frequently set up an arena of competition between the state, represented by the new model teacher, and the family. While some educationalists were careful to depict the school and the home environment as working in cooperation or simply to ignore the parental or familial role, others were far less subtle. To take only one of many examples, the late Ottoman educator Mehmed Ziya's children's publication entitled *Çocuklara Kiraat* (A reader for children) was quite emphatic about the need to break the family's hold on learning. "Can the education that a child receives from his father and mother suffice?," he wrote to his young readers. "No chance! Actually, is it not the case that the stories that are considered education in our homes consist of baseless, shocking words and mere illusions?" he replied before going on to state that learning to read school, the domain of the new teacher, that is the only way forward for children.

The students were caught in the middle of what was increasingly a tug of war between the state and the family. Time after time children were confronted with the message that the new teacher was a more suitable guide to life than their parents. The children's families were either openly mistrusted or conveniently sidelined as the state attempted to effect a more direct relationship with its young citizens. The enlightened teacher, heavily idealized, of course, served as the perfect contrast to the outmoded *hoca*, the fedora, suit and tie standing out against, vs baggy trousers and bare calves).

In new buildings, dramatically contrasted with old, decrepit *maktabs*, the new teachers were presented as leading their students towards the happy land of progress and knowledge.

**Texts: Vehicles and Commodities [which also allow us to see some images of school interiors]**

The key tensions here are 1) between education as something to be imparted vs. something to be acquired; and 2) between learning as a public benefit and a for-profit enterprise.

The proliferation of texts was key to new educational dispensation. The new curricula depended on a much greater variety of reading material than the old-style education ever had. And, crucially, the increased literacy rates generated by the rise in schooling meant that a market for reading was created which sometimes reinforced but at other times worked at cross purposes to the agenda of the schools, as we will see shortly.

But first let us consider two aspects associated with the proliferation of texts for the young:

1) The relationship between text and audience

§ A fundamental disjuncture occurred in the way publications addressed their target audience of young readers. Struggling to find the right balance, publishers adopted a variety of modes of address, ranging from the patronizing to the collegial and



even conspiratorial (against teachers, for example). A related tension was that to be found between officially- and privately-produced materials, one produced for reasons of state and the other for profit, often in alignment in terms of message but sometimes not.

However produced, we find reading primers that address children by looking down on them from a great height, referring to their “mini-mini” brains and generally emphasizing their ignorance. One of the most popular reading primers from the late Ottoman period (Arakel’s *Talim-i kıraat*, 1887) begins with a passage called “Attending School” which emphasizes the benefits of going to school and learning to read:

I am a little child. I don’t know anything yet...I have teachers...who  
teach me how to read and write and educate me. I must obey them...I  
go to school happily.

Such stilted projections of wishful thinking and crude didacticism were common in both empire and republic; they essentially envision the child audience as an empty receptacle waiting and ready to be filled with the stuff of knowledge and education. But such a simplistic projection contrasted sharply with other modes including the comic and satirical which struck a strongly discordant note against the more usual didactic, patronizing tone. For example, we might note the appearance of humorous pieces in which the teacher (whether old-style or new-style, Ottoman or Republican), and

normally portrayed as the paragon of respectability and progress, was ridiculed for ineptitude or made the butt of jokes.



**IMAGE \*** Teacher out of Control (*Yeni Yol*, 1925)

But not limited to old-style hoca, an increasingly popular victim. The new-style teacher, referred to as Muallim Bey (as opposed to “hoca”), could equally be lampooned. For example, the children’s magazine *Bizim Mecmua* from the early 1920s has some fun at the

expense of the new-style teacher when the math problem he gives in class is converted into a joke by a cheeky student:

The teacher: What do five kuruş bread, five kuruş tea and five kuruş cheese make?

The student:

[not side-splitting, usual, humorless.]



a jarring contrast w/

this scene, another math lesson, the teacher is again made to look ridiculous:

The Math Lesson:

My son, what is ten take away ten?

!!

Why are you silent? For example, a man buys ten apples. He throws two away because they are rotten; he drops five; three are stolen by vagabonds; so now how many are left?

A pear [slang for idiot].

This split understanding of childhood comes through clearly both in the contradictions between responsibilities/agendas (ec, moral, imperial/national) and the impetus towards entertainment and in the mixed messages about children's responsibility (or irresponsibility).



IMAGE \* The math lesson (Yeni Yol, 1925)

A final example, accompanied by an illustration, provides more evidence that the fez- and frock coat-wearing teacher is equally subject to ridicule. In

**IMAGE:** \*Ventriloquist tendencies (*Gürbüz Türk Çocuğu*, 1927) cover illustration: two children beside a small chalk board:

“Every nation’s level of civilisation depends upon the attention and care it pays to its children.” These are hardly the words one expects to find being produced by children who still have their baby fat. While this might be seen in some respects as an improvement over the know-nothing child, but nevertheless these children need to have words put into their mouths, ventriloquism puppets of the adults who are responsible for disseminating these messages about learning.

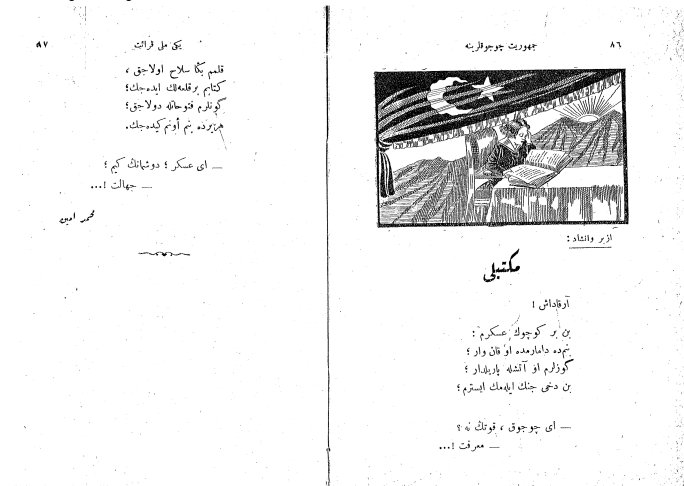
Mixed messages also extend to the question, increasingly evident in times of stress (warfare, political change) of children’s political engagement. At times children were considered far too young (and therefore inconsequential) to be bothered with contemporary issues. Some publications went on, issue after issue, month by month without a single reference to what was taking place in the wider society, even during periods of warfare and unprecedented political change. Other publications, however, brought the political developments of the time directly into the classroom. Some even portrayed the problems of first the empire and then the republic as weighing down heavily on young readers. The message was clear: There was a direct relationship between how well children could read and the larger fate of their country.

In these texts, education and reading were freighted with great political importance. In Ott period, we begin to see images of the Sultan appearing in children’s textbooks, along with maps of the empire. This practice was continued and of course massively amplified in TC, showcasing MKA’s role as Educator-in-Chief, and focusing attention on the shape of the new republic. Children’s publications from late Ottoman and early Republican period featured writings of some of the most prominent figures of the time, such as Ziya Gökalp, Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, Mehmed Emin, Ömer Seyfettin and Kâzım Karabekir, refelcting the seriousness with which officialdom took the task of teaching reading. [This could produce slightly tortured passages (eg Köprülüade on Kanice)]

Ultimate expression of this trend to impose adult concerns was what we might refer to as the “militarization of reading,” particularly prominent from 1911 onwards, after the Italian invasion of Ottoman Trablusgarp (Libya) and the subsequent war there, a war that however asymmetrical and however brief had important implications for the conceptualization of the Ottoman/Turkish nation.



**IMAGE \* Asker olacaksin (Kolay Kiraat, 1925/6)** Now shoulder your wooden rifle, mini, mini. But tomorrow the game will end; They will say to you, Go on soldier!



**IMAGE \* Mektepli (Mehmed Emin's poem; note the way in which the scene of the reading child is framed by the national flag.**

Friend! Arkadaş!  
I am a little soldier:

I have that blood in my veins  
My eyes gleam with that fire  
I also want to wage war  
--O child, what is your strength?  
--Knowledge!

Yet, often children's reading materials appear serenely oblivious of political life. Some children's reading material proceeded as if matters of state were completely irrelevant to the matter at hand, namely, teaching children to read. This sort of approach saw children as inhabiting a playful, carefree, almost Disney-esque world, a fluffy world of dolls, lambs, sweets, silly jokes, a world of fun that extended even as far as the imaginary, futuristic world of space travel.





**IMAGE** \* Spaceship (novelty, technology, modernity, following on from Brummett's work on popular press in YT period)

Sometimes the mixture of serious and playful could be combined in a single publication, or even a single image:



**IMAGE** \*Nebahat teaches her dolls Turkish: “Muallime Nebahat Türkçe ders veriyor”

An image that neatly encapsulates the tension between the serious and the frivolous at work.

## 2) The second aspect of new textual regime: Commodification

Less visible but no less crucial to the creation of the new educational dispensation was an underestimated economic dimension. The teaching materials used to impart the content of the new-style schools were in important respects categorically distinct from those used in the pre-modern educational mode.

Crucial here is the shift from collective to individual texts, a change with important knock-on effects:

→ stimulating the publishing industry via the sheer volume of demand from the education ministry (and a radical diversity of printed material given the wide-ranging curriculum of the new schools)

→ generating a new critical mass of readers (demand for extracurricular pubs → magazines, books)

→ opening up new opportunities for writers: making or supplementing incomes through authoring textbooks, etc.  
 → creating a new relationship between individual readers and their books (or magazines which were becoming an important format in this period)

The new texts were different from what had gone before.

§ The emphasis was on the consumption of individual printed copies (as opposed to the collective, transitory texts produced on erasable surfaces)

§ They were relatively inexpensive → individual libraries (in fact, many publishers began marketing their merchandise as part of “libraries” (public libraries also increasingly available). In short, the availability of texts was increasing and the ways people interacted with the written word was changing. Old modes such as reading aloud and in groups persisted but increasingly the relationship between reader and text was more direct, unmediated. Young people were given (either at school or at home) their own copies of texts. They held them in their hands and made them part of their daily lives.



§Increasingly, these texts were illustrated, a development with important consequences for the relationship between the child and his or her political, social, cultural and economic understanding of life beyond the text.

Interestingly, the children's literature from this period seems generally reluctant to emphasize the reading as an individual pursuit. This is in keeping with a trend whereby children's publications produced outside of the educational orbit tended to try to find a connection with or piggyback on school life. Mostly we have accounts of collective reading in the new style—that is with each child reading their own copies of the text. But increasingly, we can also begin to see examples of children described and occasionally depicted as reading individually and choosing texts that had nothing to do with organized schooling. (In some daring cases children's publications even went so far as to satirize the tedium and predictability of school life, as we've seen.)

This is where the tension between the aims of the educationalists and the businessmen could diverge. For the most part the fundamental difference between their objectives was concealed by the fact that they both expressed the same goals for society and its children and by the fact that the market was expanding so rapidly that competition rarely placed the producers under stress.

But at times, the tension between progress and profit became more visible:

As seen above, publishers attempting to forge alliances with reader, sometimes at the expense of the state/educational establishment/teacher.

Over time publishers began to solidify the links with its readership:

Contests, quizzes, games, soliciting of correspondence

Ultimate expression of this, perhaps, were the requests that publishers of children's magazines (a genre with much more freedom than state-sponsored textbooks) made of their young readers to send them information and in some cases photographs of themselves. Personification of the emerging children's reading public that was coming into being in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Lives



Lives lived in these new spaces, alongside these texts were ultimately the most important legacy of the Ottoman educational system to its successor states.

All sorts of tensions are at play here: individual vs. collective (both in terms of educational, esp. reading practices and the formation of identities); secular vs. religious; national vs. supra-national, etc; different versions about modernity, progress, what's gained and what's lost in the shift from pre-modern to modern-style education, a process that both enhanced and suppressed individuation]

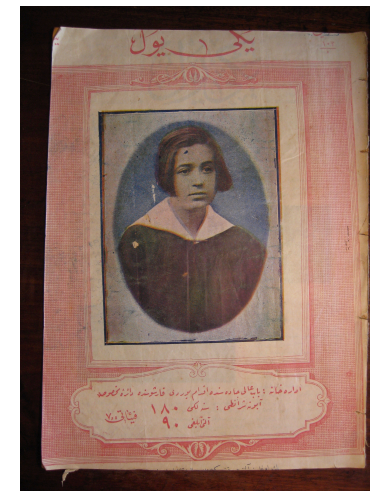
It is difficult to generalize from the varied range of autobiographical literature from this period, but a number of broad observations are possible:

- 1) the existence of a substantial number of these self-narratives itself is evidence of the new educational dispensation. More children were learning to read and many of them completed the cycle, so to speak, by becoming writers themselves.
- 2) We see that the new educational opportunities were changing the way people lived, both by creating new socio-economic opportunities and by opening up unprecedented possibilities for intellectual exploration.

In the aggregate the boom in education that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century generated untold social, economic and cultural effects. New routes of entrée into new types of professions. Education and the literacy on which it depended and which it produced occasioned a newly engaged tranche of society the majority of whose parents and grandparents would not have

had the same access to texts and to the variety of jobs that an increasingly textual society demanded.

- 3) The proliferation of texts frequently produced a new kind of relationship between readers and their texts. Education and reading are interwoven with autobiographies in new ways, reflecting the penetration of this new system (school, teachers, individual texts) into everyday life. The physicality of the text (what some have referred to as its “bookness”) was doubtless key here. We have many descriptions of children curling up with their books, running their hands over them and in one case even climbing into a newly built bookshelf in order to commune with the printed word.



The new educational dispensation had important implications for state and society. The shift to the new style of schooling, with its purpose-built state-owned buildings and its dedicated, age-specific



array of texts, had profound implications for the state-society relationship. Although the state was not always as in control as its officials expected (or as subsequent historians have assumed), the new situation nevertheless fundamentally altered the playing field. The new buildings meant state would be at forefront of educational issues, both positive and negative, for the foreseeable future. The new curriculum ensured the politicization of educational content. New reliance on large numbers of printed texts gave a large boost to the publishing industry. Also, individualized texts changed reading habits; they altered the way people lived.

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<sup>i</sup> Ahmed Cevad, *Cumhuriyet Çocuklarına Türkçe Kıraat* 1:1

(Istanbul: Hilmi, 1929), 88-91.