Learning to read and write in late Ottoman Cyprus

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Résumé. Le xixe siècle a été marqué dans l'Empire ottoman par l'introduction des réformes du Tanzimat qui ont contribué à la réorganisation et à la modernisation de l'État. L'éducation était essentielle dans ce processus, car on pensait que l'introduction de nouvelles méthodes d'enseignement et de nouveaux programmes soutiendrait la modernisation de l'Empire. Les effets des réformes se sont également fait sentir à Chypre avec l'ouverture de nouvelles écoles ou la réorganisation de celles existantes. Avec l'avènement des Britanniques, les chrétiens et les musulmans de l'île ont commencé à investir dans l'éducation. En conséquence, en quelques années, de nombreuses écoles ont ouvert et le nombre d'élèves a augmenté. Dans cet article, nous essaierons d'analyser la structure de l'éducation musulmane et chrétienne à Chypre au xixe siècle avant le transfert de l'île à la Grande-Bretagne en 1878. Pour ce faire, nous examinerons d'abord les institutions éducatives ottomanes pour voir comment cela se passait à Chypre. Ensuite, nous examinerons les écoles chrétiennes et le rôle de l'Église dans la fondation et le fonctionnement de ces écoles. Nous tenterons ainsi de reconstruire la carte pédagogique de Chypre au xixe siècle. Quand, en 1878, les Britanniques reprennent l'administration de l'île à l'Empire ottoman, les deux communautés investissent dans l'éducation tandis que les Britanniques prennent eux aussi des mesures pour moderniser le système éducatif. Dans le même temps, les premiers journaux paraissent à Chypre, les premiers livres sont également imprimés, modifiant radicalement la façon dont les Chypriotes lisent et écrivent.

Abstract. The 19th century in the Ottoman Empire was marked by the introduction of the Tanzimat reforms that sought to reorganize and modernize the state. Education was pivotal in this process as it was thought that the introduction of new teaching methods and curricula would support the modernization of the Empire. The effects of the reforms were felt in Cyprus too with the opening of new schools or the reform of existing ones. With the advent of the British though, both Christians and Moslems in the island started investing in education. As a result, in a few years many more schools opened, and the numbers of students increased. In this paper we will try to analyze the structure of the Moslem and Christian education in Cyprus in the 19th century before the transfer of the island to Britain in 1878. To do that we will first look at the Ottoman educational institutions to see how this was reflected in Cyprus. Then, we will look at the Christian schools and examine the role of the church in the founding and running of schools. In this way we shall attempt to reconstruct the educational map of Cyprus in the 19th century. When in 1878 the British take over the administration of the island from the Ottoman Empire, both communities invest in education while the British, too, take steps in the modernization of
the educational system. At the same time, the first newspapers appear in Cyprus the first books are also printed. This changes drastically the way Cypriots read and write.

The Ottoman attempts to reform education

The Tanzimat reforms were not the first attempt to reorganize and reform the Ottoman state. It was Sultan Selim III’s New Order (Nizam-i Cedid) in the end of the 18th century that among others created new channels of communication between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. More specifically the reforms that were put forward by Nizam-i Cedid allowed foreign instructors to undertake the task of providing modern education to the army cadets. These foreigners were now free to socialize with the Ottomans, Muslims and Christians, and were responsible for the diffusion of western ideas in the Ottoman society. In the same way, the opening of Ottoman embassies in Western European capitals created a channel for the conveyance of new ideas from Europe to the Empire.¹

Later, under Sultan Mahmud II’s reign (1808-1839) some reforms were passed that paved the way for the Tanzimat reforms. Until then most schools could not provide the necessary knowledge for the public servants to perform their duties. The reason was that schools were controlled by the ulama, the religious scholars. As a result, the schools provided only religious educations and not topics such as arithmetic, science and foreign languages that were necessary for students to advance to technical education.² The Sultan did not dare reform the already existing religious schools. Instead he chose to establish a separate system that followed a different philosophy. Instead of coming into conflict with the ulamas, Mahmud II established two special schools for those students who did not wish to follow a theologian’s career. In these schools (Rüşdiye), that were opened in the Süleymaniye and Sultan Ahmet mosques in Istanbul lessons such as grammar, history and mathematics were taught for those students willing to continue their education in military technical schools. The School of Education (Mekteb-i Maarif-i Adliye) and the Mekteb-i Maarif-i Ebediye were opened for the students who wished to work in the government. These schools taught lessons such as Arabic, French, geography, history, political science, and mathematics.³ Together with a training school for scribes that were already serving in the government (Mekteb-i Irlaniye), Sultan Mahmud paved the way for the educational reform that was going to be introduced a few years later with the Tanzimat reforms.⁴

The breakthrough in Ottoman education though was achieved, as previously discussed with the Tanzimat reforms. The term derives from the Arabic meaning reorganization. It is a period that begins with the imperial edict of Gülhane (Gülhane Hatt-i Şerifi) in 1839 and ended in 1876 with the ascent to the throne of Sultan Abdul Hamid, although it is argued that the reforms

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¹ Zurcher 2003, pp. 22-23.
² Shaw 1977, p. 47.
³ Ibid., p. 48.
⁴ Ibid., p. 49.
era came to an end in 1871. The level of education that was offered in the traditional medreses was not anymore adequate for the new society that was emerging and put more emphasis on science and progress. Nevertheless, the struggle for the implementation of secular educational laws was not easy. Just like Mahmud II, the Tanzimat reformists sought to establish modern secondary schools and higher education institutions, necessary for the reorganization and reform of the state. The Mülkiye (School of the Civil Service) and the Galatasaray Sultani (High School) were the two most important schools.

In the later stages of the Tanzimat, the Regulations on General Education (Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi) were passed in 1869. They provided the necessary framework for the reorganization of the Ottoman schools. This organization distinguished the schools into two main categories: the public and the private schools. The public schools were organized in three phases: the primary schools (sibyan, ibtidaî), the secondary schools (rüştiye, idadi and sultani) and the colleges of further education (Darülmuallimin – Teacher Training Academy for the Boys, Darülmuallimat – Teacher Training Academy for the Girls, Darülfnun – University.) The private schools were categorized in Muslim and non-Muslim private schools.

Regarding the lessons taught, science subjects such as physics, biology and statistics were included but as the case of the Galatasaray Sultani school in Istanbul shows, after sultan Abdul Hamid ascended to the throne in 1876 Islamic subjects such as kalam, adab, inşa’, and fiqh were also taught. In this way the European subjects were balanced by the Islamic ones. At the same time, the Tanzimat reforms allowed the opening of various European schools that soon became the preferred educational institutions for the Ottoman elite, both Moslem and non-Moslem.

It would be interesting to have a look at the curriculum of the Ottoman state primary schools. In a guidebook for teachers, published in 1870, we learn that the proposed program was as follows: In the first year: ABC, Qur’an, morals, mental mathematics, and writing. In the second year: Qur’an, catechism, introductory information, counting and enumeration, and large text hand-writing. In the third year: Qur’an, Qur’anic recitation, history of the prophets, the four mathematical operations, the Qur’anic script. Finally, in the fourth year: Qur’an, geography, Ottoman history, Turkish grammar and the rıka script. At the time that the so-called new method of teaching (usûl-i cedide) was introduced in the Ottoman Empire, the British rule was initiated. Given that the British did not intervene in the educational issues of both the Moslem

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5 Zurcher 2003, p. 50.
7 Samani 2017, pp. 207-208.
8 Ibid., p. 208.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Kalam is the study of Islamic doctrine; with adab students were taught the rules of conduct; inşa’ constituted the teaching of the official language (Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Persian etc.) and fiqh is the teaching of Islamic jurisprudence.
13 Fortna 2011, p. 130.
and the Christian communities in Cyprus until the 1930s we can assume that this curriculum was implemented in Cypriot Moslem schools as well.

Ottoman schools in Cyprus

The Ottoman schools in Cyprus in the 19th century can be divided in four main categories: Elementary schools (sibyan mektepleri), secondary schools (iptidai mektepleri), middle schools (rüstıye mektepleri) and higher education institutions (medrese). The sibyan and the medreses were primarily religious schools, attached to mosques and until the reforms focused primarily on the teaching of religious lessons. The rüstıye and the iptidai schools were a product of the Tanzimat reforms and were introduced gradually in the second half of the 19th century. The Sibyan schools were primary schools that offered schooling that lasted up to four years. There were normally reserved for the male students although there were also female sibyan schools. They were the most common Ottoman schools in Cyprus before the reorganization of education but some of them opened right after the Ottoman conquest of the island. For example, the sibyan schools in Nicosia (attached to the Ömeriye mosque), Keryneia, Paphos and Lefka were established between 1571 and 1600. The three sibyan schools in Nicosia (Yeni Cami, Debbaghane and Sarayounü), as well as those in Peristerona and in Episkopi were established between 1600 and 1800. The schools in Strongylos, Gülhane, Nevbethane and Abdiçavuş in Nicosia, Malia, Argaki, Paphos, Morfou, Lapithos, Kazafani and Palaiosofos, close to Keryneia were established between 1800 and 1878. These schools were administered by the religious endowments (evkaf) and all their expenses were paid by it. Until the end of the Tanzimat period 41 sibyan schools across the island opened. These were funded by the public and as a result their operation depended on the economic situation of the village or the district they belonged. As a result, we have various sources on the precise number of schools in operation. In case villagers could not support financially the hiring of a teacher for the school of the village, pupils would have to commute to a school in a nearby village to receive schooling.

The new teaching methods (usul-i cedid) that were introduced with the Tanzimat reforms were responsible for the introduction of new subjects, the equipment of schools with blackboards, desks, maps etc. as well as new and more modern textbooks. Further steps for the modernization of education were taken with the establishment of the Public Education Regulations (Maarif-i Umumiye Nizâmâmesi) by the Ministry of Education in 1869. The Ministry of Education with the Education Regulations provided the necessary provisions for the operation of the schools. For example, we learn that in 1872 the Ministry of Education ordered that
a sibyan should be built in every district with 400 houses.\textsuperscript{19} Furthermore, the Ministry in 1872 stated that the courses taught at sibyan schools should be Qur’an, catechism, arithmetic, writing and reading.\textsuperscript{20} The new subjects (geography, history etc.) were not included in the Ministry’s guidelines.

The textbooks taught in the Cypriot schools were also dispatched by the Ministry of Education. For example, in 1872, upon request of the Governorship of Cyprus, 150 copies of the catechesis book were dispatched to Cyprus in order to be distributed for free to school students in Limassol.\textsuperscript{21} In the same way the Ministry took steps for covering the expenses of the teachers in case the locals could not bear the expenses. That was not the case in the schools run by the religious endowments. In these schools, all expenses, including the teachers’ wages, were covered by the endowments. But what was the procedure followed for the hiring of teachers? An exam took place in front of a committee that consisted of the headmaster of the rüştiye school (Junior High school), the local ulema, hodjas and people who were capable of writing. The topics examined were the Qur’an, catechesis, writing and Turkish.\textsuperscript{22}

From the above it can be seen that the educational reforms were not implemented in the Cypriot schools until the later stages of the Tanzimat reforms. The religious subjects remained in their place and the modern lessons were not always taught. The institutions that offered higher education in Cyprus before the reforms were the medreses. The medreses, apart from schooling offered accommodation, meals and sometimes even an allowance for the students. The subjects included grammar, Arabic, Islamic law, religion, philosophy of law, rhetoric, calculation, geometry, astronomy, history, and geography.\textsuperscript{23} The main medreses in Cyprus were found in Nicosia: The Küçük Ayasofya Medrese, founded in 1640; the Arabahmet Medrese, founded in 1718-1719; the Sarayönü Medrese, founded in 1748, and Laleli Medrese founded in 1827-1828.\textsuperscript{24} The most important medrese, though, was the Great Medrese (Büyük Medrese) built in 1573 and situated behind the Selimiye Mosque (Ayasofya Mosque). To the east of the Ayasofya Mosque a library was built on the orders of Sultan Mahmud II in 1829.

**Greek Orthodox Schools in Cyprus**

As far as the Greek Orthodox schools are concerned, the Church of Cyprus played an important role in the educational life of the Christians in the island. Ecclesiastical committees supported and organized the operation of schools before the Tanzimat era.\textsuperscript{25} Following the pattern we saw with the Ottoman Muslim schools, Christian schools too were not oriented
towards the teaching of modern subjects. The first Greek schools were established in Larnaca in 1733 and in Nicosia in 1741. The former was the Deacon Filotheos School in Larnaca that was founded under Bishop Ioannikios II while the latter was the Greek school of Nicosia founded by Archbishop Filotheos. The school in Larnaca taught church subjects such as ecclesiastical writers, ecclesiastical law etc. The school in Nicosia was called Ελληνομουσείο. After ceasing its operation between 1775 and 1784 it reopened in 1812 by Archbishop Kyprianos under the name Ελληνική Σχολή (Greek School). Kyprianos was also responsible for the opening of the Greek School of Limassol. The Greek School of Nicosia stopped its operation in 1821 and evolved into what is today the Pancyprian Gymnasium. We know that in 1869 the Pancyprian Gymnasium had 39 students and subjects like Greek, Turkish, French and Mathematics were taught. In Famagusta there was a primary school before 1850. In 1859 the Faneromeni all-girls school (Παρθεναγωγείο) began its operation with one teacher from Greece and 115 students mainly from wealthy families. Its lessons included reading, writing, religious lessons, and handicrafts.\textsuperscript{26} All-girls schools also operated in Larnaka and in Limassol with teachers coming from Greece.

The Pancyprian Gymnasium

The Pancyprian Gymnasium was until 1896 the Greek School of Nicosia. It was administered by a committee that was presided by the Archbishop. It had five teachers, two for Greek language lessons, one for French, one for Ottoman Turkish and for theological and philosophical lessons. Schooling lasted for five years and subjects included Greek, spelling and syntax, religious history, catechesis, Greek history, arithmetic, French, Ottoman Turkish, geography, Christian ethics, geometry, psychology, Greek literature, dogmatic philology, and logic.

The languages of Cyprus in the 19th Century

Until the 19th century, the vernacular language in Cyprus had less similarities with the vernacular Greek spoken in mainland Greece.\textsuperscript{27} Since the Greek Orthodox community constituted the majority of the population, the Greek Cypriot dialect was the common language of Cypriots, Christians, Moslems, Armenians and Maronites. Until the advent of the British, the Greek Cypriot dialect was the language of commerce. The Turkish Cypriots spoke the Greek Cypriot dialect in much bigger numbers whereas only few Greek Cypriots could speak Turkish. In schools, both Moslems and Christians started coming under the influence of teachers that had studied in Istanbul or in Athens or from locals that had studied in the Ottoman Empire or in Greece, respectively. The language of instruction in the Greek Orthodox schools was the

\textsuperscript{26} Michailidou 2017, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{27} Litra, Psaltis 2011, p. 37.
katharevousa, an archaic form of Greek that was different from the Greek Cypriot dialect. It should be noted that Ottoman Turkish taught in schools was also different from the Turkish Cypriot dialect.

The use of foreign languages in Cyprus in the 19th century cannot be properly assessed. We know, though, that during the Ottoman times 19 consuls from various countries served in Cyprus and they had the right to appoint their own translators (dragomans).\textsuperscript{28} These translators could also serve the Ottomans in the island. In most cases the translators were of Armenian, Jewish and Greek origin.\textsuperscript{29} They would be often transported from one consul to another and in some cases, they performed commercial activities too. Almost all consulates were functioning in the port city of Larnaca but the consuls had the right to travel around the island.

In provinces like Cyprus, where the majority of the population did not speak Turkish, the Sultan’s subjects dealt with the provincial administration and the courts with the help of translators. These translators were appointed by the Ottoman government and were called official documents translators of the Dîvân (Dîvân tercümanı) or translators of the Palace (Saray tercümanı).\textsuperscript{30} The translators appointed in the courts were called mahkeme tercümanı. These translators became the voice of the non-Muslim populations and were the intermediaries between the people and the local government.\textsuperscript{31} Some were also appointed by the consuls, as we saw earlier, they became tax collectors and became the most important civilian administrators in the provinces.\textsuperscript{32} In Cyprus, Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios is the most famous translator during Ottoman rule. He was appointed in 1779 and remained in his post until 1809.

The translators were responsible for mediating to the local government, translating documents and made the voice of the non-Muslims heard to the authorities. Throughout the 19th century, although the Greek Cypriot dialect was the language of local trade, Turkish remained the language of the administration and since most Greek Cypriots did not speak Turkish the task of the translators was of vital importance, both for the non-Muslims and for the administration. Until 1878 most of the government and the court translators were Greek Cypriots although in the years following the Greek revolt of 1821 only a few Greek Cypriots were appointed to the post.\textsuperscript{33}

Even though the Armenian population in Cyprus had decreased in the 16th and 17th centuries, there were about 200 Armenians living on the island in the 19th century. There does not seem to be an Armenian translator appointed by the provincial government of Cyprus. This can be attributed to the fact that most Armenians were Turkish speakers.\textsuperscript{34} This is also ascertained by the fact that the British appointed Armenians to the post of translators after 1878 because they spoke both Turkish and English.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{28} Özkul 2013, p. 272.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 276.
\textsuperscript{30} Meral 2013, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Dinç and Çelik 2012, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
The advent of the British and its consequences in education and literacy

In the early stages of the British administration, due to the uncertainty about the status of the island and the fact that Cyprus had come under British control without a war, the British did not implement an anglicization policy like they had done in India and Hong Kong. Indeed, the British allowed the two communities to run their schools without interfering. Most Greek Cypriot teachers studied in the University of Athens without an entry exam and of course without English being a prerequisite. The British, influenced perhaps by a philhellenic point of view, introduced a laissez-faire linguistic policy by abstaining from making English mandatory in education. Of course, Turkish was replaced by English as the language of the administration and translators and interpreters were hired to facilitate the Cypriots’ communication with the authorities but also in order to support the smooth function of the colonial government.

Nevertheless, the number of schools increased and the British did proceed with the establishment of the English School of Nicosia in 1900 and the Victoria Girls High School in 1901, which was the first secondary education institution for female students in Cyprus. As far as the Muslim schools are concerned, right after the transfer of the island's administration to the British, only the Qur’an and religion were taught. In some villages, students had access to limited or no education at all. Only a few years after the end of the Ottoman rule, out of the 15 Muslim schools in Nicosia 8 would only instruct students how to learn the Qur’an by heart and towards the end of the century would lessons like Turkish language and basic arithmetic be included in the curriculum.

The liberal approach of the British allowed the printing of the first newspapers in Cyprus. The first Greek Cypriot newspaper was published in 1878 in English and Greek while the first Turkish Cypriot newspaper in 1889. The newspapers in Cyprus in the early years of the British rule were short-lived due to high costs and low readership. The slowly improving literacy rates in Cyprus made the reading of newspapers in public places such as the coffee shops in cities and villages alike. The newspaper would be read by a literate member of the community, a school teacher or a member of the clergy who would undertake the task of reading the news to the illiterate many.

Conclusions

Through the analysis of the Muslim and the Christian Orthodox educational systems this article has tried to analyze the way that schooling shaped the reading and writing patterns of

36 Hadjiioannou, Tsiplakou, Kappler 2011, p. 20.
37 Ibid., p. 21.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Keseci 2017, p. 497.
Cypriots in the 19th century. While the island, like the rest of the Ottoman Empire, went through social and political changes put forward by the *Tanzimat* reforms, new schools opened, new subjects were introduced and students, not without obstacles, started to get acquainted with ideas coming from Western Europe. While the Greek Cypriot dialect remained the language of commerce due to the dynamism of the Greek Orthodox community, the advent of the British would replace Turkish with English as the language of the administration and the elites and the presence of foreign tradesmen made French and Italian, the languages of the Levantine communities across the Eastern Mediterranean heard in Cyprus too. The Muslims in Cyprus could communicate in the Greek Cypriot dialect, whereas only a few Greek Cypriots spoke Turkish. At the same time, both Muslim and Christian students were exposed to the standard versions of Turkish and Greek and this gradually exposed the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot dialects to the Greek and Turkish spoken elsewhere. The final stages of the *Tanzimat* reforms and the exodus of the Ottomans accelerated the modernization of education but most importantly allowed the publication of the first newspapers and books that would change the way Cypriots read and spoke. The advent of the British boosted education but also the printed press helped create new readers. Also, gradually, English became the language of the administration. The use of other European languages was confined to a small group of the commercial elite and the translators.
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