

Nevertheless, it was the realization of their declining situation that compelled Ottoman reformers to import Western technology, military techniques and institutions in an attempt at restoring the Empire to its former glory.<sup>34</sup> In order to compete with the West, however, the Ottomans had to do more than just integrate Western technology into their military system: they were obliged to imitate the West and begin establishing new military training facilities in order to attain the level of advancement that their enemies enjoyed.<sup>35</sup> Before discussing these reforms, however, a brief examination of the Muslim educational system must be given in order to provide a background to our account of the rise of a secular educational system in the Ottoman Empire.

#### TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Prior to the *Tanzimat* period, the Ottoman government, with the exception of the Palace School, took no responsibility whatsoever for the general education of its subjects. It had always regarded education to be a religious or communal matter and hence saw no reason to intrude into the sphere of education. As a result, the only schools open to Muslim subjects during this period were the Palace School (Mekteb-i Enderun), the primary schools (*mekteps*) and the secondary/higher educational institutions (*medreses*).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis, Muslim Discovery, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Examples of newly established European military training facilities included the French Royal Military School in Paris (1751) and the Austrian military academy at Wiener-Neustadt (1752). Military engineering institutions were also established in Woolwich (1741) and Mezières in France (1748). See Rhoads Murphey, "The Ottoman Attitude Towards the Adoption of Western Technology: the Role of the Efrenki Technicians in Civil and Military Applications." in Contributions à l'Histoire Economique et Sociale de l'Empire Ottoman, ed. by J. Bacqué-Grammont and P. Dumont (Louvain: Editions Peeters, 1983), 287-98.

<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that in Europe, during the early years of the Middle Ages, differences between elementary and secondary schools were somewhat blurred. As a result, schools would teach classes at all levels. Consequently, there were not one but four different religious schools that taught primary classes: Parish, Catechumenal and Catechetical Schools, Monastic, and Cathedral schools. Like the Muslim

### Mekteb-i Enderun (Palace School)

After the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Sultan Mehmet II (r.1444, 1451-81) realized that there was an increasing need for more government officials to deal with the growing internal<sup>37</sup> and external affairs of the empire. In addition, the Sultan was dissatisfied with the training of government officials. He was particularly disappointed with the inadequacy of the system of training officials through apprenticeship and practical experience.<sup>38</sup> He realized that a new institution was needed to train more efficient bureaucrats, qualified to address the increasing administrative demands of the empire. However, since any such institution would increase the number of qualified government officials, it would inevitably accumulate considerable power and authority. Hence, the power

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elementary schools (*mekteps*) these schools primarily taught religious rituals and like the Muslim students who were taught Arabic, the language of their clergy, the Christian students of Europe were taught Latin, the language of their clergy. See Gutek, A History of the Western, 81-85; James Mulhern, A History of Education: A Social Interpretation, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1959), 247-293; Samuel Chester Parker, A Textbook in the History of Modern Elementary Education (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1912).

<sup>37</sup> The Mekteb-i Enderun was not only developed to increase the numbers of and improve the training of the administrative corps, but it also strove to maintain a centralized government under the authority of the sultan. To maintain this central authority, blind obedience to a fixed presentation of the course work was required of the students, and thus originality of thought and process of inquiry was not allowed. Thus independent thinking was discouraged because, if the Sultan's slaves began to question society's customary practices, it could potentially disrupt the system. The students, therefore, were unable to move beyond conventional thinking into the realm of observation, experimentation and analysis. Since it is this change of thinking that allows a society to evolve intellectually and technologically, the graduates of these schools contributed much less to the intellectual and technical developments of their society than their European counterparts.

<sup>38</sup> The establishment of the Palace School can be seen as a sign that the Ottoman Sultan was aware of the deterioration of Muslim education within the empire. Joseph S. Szyliowicz, Education and Modernization in the Middle East (London: Cornell University Press, 1973), 76; Barnette Miller, The Palace School of Muhammed the Conqueror (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 31.

of graduates of this school could eventually jeopardize the sultan's own status.<sup>39</sup> In light of this concern, the Sultan perfected an administrative military institution called the *kapikullari* which, ideally, would produce highly trained officials who would be totally subservient to the ruler's will. This was the rationale behind the founding of the Mekteb-i Enderun or Palace School, whose graduates furnished for centuries the bulk of the candidates for the most prestigious offices within the Ottoman administration.<sup>40</sup>

The objective of the Palace School was clear: "to train the ablest children for leadership positions in the political body of the Ottoman empire, either as military leaders or as high administrators in the 'Sublime Porte' and the provinces of the Empire."<sup>41</sup> This educational institution closely resembled the palace schools established under the Mongols, the Mamluks, the Abbasids and the Seljuks; however, the Ottoman Palace School was unique with respect to the background of the student body. Those who were selected to attend this prestigious school were unmarried males of non-Turkish and non-Muslim origin who were

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<sup>39</sup> According to Miller there were between one to two thousand students studying in the Palace School a given year. Miller, The Palace School, 80. However, Ergin places this number higher at three thousand students in 1635. Osman Ergin, Istanbul Mektepleri ve İlim, Terbive ve San'at Müesseseleri Dolayısıyla Türkiye Maarif Tarihi (History of Turkish Education, with Special Reference to the Schools and Cultural Institutions of Istanbul), vol. 1 (Istanbul: Osmanbey Matbaasii, 1939-43), 9.

<sup>40</sup> In Europe, during the early Middle Ages, there were Royal schools which were established by the Rulers to encourage education amongst the mass population. An example of such a Palace School, the one at Aix-la-Chapelle, was created by Charlemagne (716-814) for nobles and was to be a model for all schools within his empire. However, it would not be the Palace schools but private and city vernacular schools, like the Burgh Schools of Scotland and Germany, which would train students to work in the civil administration. These city schools were created and funded by local communities and had no connection with the church or state. However, their student body was unlike the unique Palace School of the Ottoman Empire, in that the students who attended these German and Scottish schools were mostly sons of noblemen and wealthy businessmen. Mulhern, A History of Education, 267-270.

<sup>41</sup> İlhan Bağöz and Howard E. Wilson, "The Educational Tradition of the Ottoman Empire and the Development of the Turkish Educational System of the Republican Era," Turkish Review, vol. 3, (16) (Summer 1989): 15.

chosen on the grounds of physical and intellectual ability rather than blood or wealth.<sup>42</sup> These young men, usually the sons of Christian subjects, were taken, at around the age of twelve or earlier, to the Ottoman capital, having gone through the *devşirme* system, to become life-long personal and loyal subjects to the Ottoman sultan.<sup>43</sup>

Although these boys were chosen to serve the Sultan, they nevertheless had to endure a harsh form of “pre-schooling” before they could enter the Palace School. This pre-schooling consisted of two levels. It began when the boys were brought to the Ottoman capital and were handed over to special *ağas* who “apprenticed them for a number of years to Turkish peasants and artisans, chiefly in Anatolia, where they learned the Turkish language and were inured to all kinds of hard labor, physical exertion and privations.”<sup>44</sup> When these young men reached maturity, both physically and mentally, and were completely familiar with both the Turkish language and Islamic religion they officially graduated from the first level of pre-schooling. They thereupon returned to Istanbul to begin their second

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<sup>42</sup> İlhan Başgöz and Howard E. Wilson, Educational Problems in Turkey 1920-1940 (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1968), 13; Andreas M. Kazamias, Education and the Quest for Modernity in Turkey (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966), 28; Maynard, The Lise and its Curriculum, 10-11.

<sup>43</sup> The most fundamental way of ensuring loyalty was achieved through the *devşirme* system. The fact that these boys were originally taken away from their family and were not allowed to marry assured the Sultan that these boys would not betray him to outside (the Palace) attachments. This rule of severing all ties to the outside was even extended to the slaves' personal financial life. Originally, from the time these students were admitted into the *devşirme* system until the day they died, they were not allowed to own property or businesses. These laws ensured the Sultan that his slaves, who could eventually become high ranking government officials, would work for the good of the Empire, and not for the good of their own personal gain. Hence these methods for establishing loyalty allowed the sultan to maintain his central power; no slave, no matter how high an administrative position he might achieve, would ever jeopardize his privileged position and remained absolutely loyal to the Sultan. Kazamias, Education, 28; Stanford Shaw, Between the Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III 1789-1807 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 101-102; Speros Vryonis, “Seljuk Gulams and Ottoman Devshirmes,” Der Islam, vol. 41 (1965), 225-252; Szyliowicz, Education, 77.

<sup>44</sup> Leon Horniker, “The Corps of the Janizaries,” Military Affairs, vol. 8, (3) (Autumn, 1944), 184.

level of pre-schooling, the *Acemî Ođlan* stage. Over a span of seven years these youths continued their study of the Turkish language and Islamic religious practices. After graduation those who showed less promise were sent either to the Janissaries<sup>45</sup> or to the gardener corps, depending on their ability, while the ones who showed the greatest promise (both physically and mentally) were sent to the *Iç Ođlan* (page corps). It was within the Palace School that the page corps was educated.<sup>46</sup>

The Mekteb-i Enderun itself consisted of three preparatory schools located outside the Palace proper,<sup>47</sup> in addition to those in the Palace itself. These schools not only prepared students for the more advanced grades within the Palace, but taught the students how to read and write Turkish in the style used by the Ottoman government administration. There were seven halls<sup>48</sup> or grades within the Palace School and within each of these there were twelve *kalfas* (learned men) who were responsible for supervising the young men in their academic advancement as well as helping professors with the instruction.<sup>49</sup> The curriculum included

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<sup>45</sup> The Janissary corps was an elite corps in the standing army of the Ottoman Empire from the middle of the fourteenth century to 1826. It was in June of 1826 that the corps was destroyed by Mahmut II when they revolted against the Sultan's plans to reform the military along Western lines. On the organization of the Janissary corps, see HAR Gibb and Harold Bowen, Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East, vol. 1, part 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 45-70; Nahoum Weissmann, Les Janissaries. Étude de l'Organisation Militaire des Ottomans (Paris: Libraire "Orient", 1964).

<sup>46</sup> For more information on the system of preparatory schooling see Horniker, "The Corps of the Janissaries," 184.

<sup>47</sup> The Edirne, Galatasaray and Ibrahim Paşa schools.

<sup>48</sup> According to Başgöz and Wilson, Educational Problems, 14 and Miller, The Palace School, 101-102, there were six halls: (1) Great Hall (*Büyük Oda*) (2) Small Hall (*Küçük Oda*), (3) Hall of the Expeditionary Forces (*Seferli Oda*) (4) the Hall of the Commissariat (*Kiler Odası*) (5) the Treasury Hall (*Hazine Odası*), and (6) Private Hall (*Has Oda*). However Maynard, The Lise and its Curriculum, 11, fn 25, quotes Ergin as saying that there were seven halls, the last one being (7) *Dođancilar odası*.

<sup>49</sup> Gibb and Bowen, Islamic Society, vol. 1, part 1, 333.

subjects that catered towards general educational training. Hence instruction was provided in

Turkish, Arabic, and Persian language; Turkish and Persian literatures; Arabic grammar and syntax; a study of the Koran and leading commentaries upon it; Moslem theology, jurisprudence, and law; and Turkish history, music, and mathematics. Of the last subject the only branch which is known with certainty to have been taught in the palace schools is arithmetic, although it seems likely that instruction may also have been given in geometry.<sup>50</sup>

The curriculum also encompassed vocational lessons related to manual skills, such as sewing, bookbinding, gold-smithing, leather-working, inlaying, gun-making and repairing, calligraphy and cooking.<sup>51</sup> Hence, in the beginning the Palace School was the only educational institution which taught formal classes in the Turkish and Persian languages and the only one which gave its students a general level of education.

Despite the fact that the Palace School was one of the most promising schools in the empire, by the sixteenth century cracks had begun to show in its foundations. As more and more Muslim-born subjects within the Empire were being deprived of privileged government positions, their parents "turned over their sons to Christians in order that in the guise of Christians they might be accepted into the corps."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, The Palace School, 94-95.

<sup>51</sup> Başgöz and Wilson, Educational Problems, 13; Szyliowicz, Education, 77.

<sup>52</sup> Horniker, "The Corps of the Janizaries," 196.

Slowly, however, more and more Muslim Turks were allowed admittance into the Palace school<sup>53</sup> as the *devşirme* system was gradually discontinued; by 1570-1580 most of the pages within the School were the sons of Muslim Turks.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, by the late sixteenth century, the Palace School had deteriorated in prominence and in the quality of teaching it offered. This deterioration was due to the fact that entrance into and advancement within the school no longer rested on merit, but instead on favoritism, bribery and corruption. This breakdown in the Palace School had the effect of creating unqualified bureaucrats who were ill-prepared for the troubling times which were soon to face the empire. One of the most detrimental results of the breakdown of the *devşirme* system was the fact that the young men who entered the system no longer emerged as loyal only to the Sultan. Now, the *Acemi Ođlan*, whether they were streamed into the Page corps or the Janissary corps,<sup>55</sup> had families in the region. In addition, these new recruits to the Janissaries began demanding the right

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<sup>53</sup> According to Miller, "occasionally, upon the recommendation of the chief white eunuch, Turkish youths of great natural endowment from influential families were presented as slaves to the sultan, thereby becoming eligible for admission to the Palace school." Miller, The Palace School, 173. However, while there has been a debate among Ottoman scholars about the extent of non-Moslems being admitted into the palace corps, there nevertheless was a significant change in recruitment and selection for government position. See Kazamias, Education, 47; Norman Itzkowitz, "Eighteenth Century Ottoman Realities," Studia Islamica, vol. 16 (1962), 81-3; Gibb and Bowen, Islamic Society, vol. 1, part 1, 81-3. According to Lewis, the government began importing slaves from the Caucasus, Georgia, Circassia, Chniya, and Abaza. Bernard Lewis, The Middle East: 2000 Years of History from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 126.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, The Palace School, 171.

<sup>55</sup> It is important to remember that although the Janissaries were taken in the same way as the students in the Palace School, the former were not taught in the Palace School. The Janissaries received their education in a barracks institution much inferior to the Palace School. However, they did endure the difficult pre-schooling (*Acemi Ođlan*) years with the boys of the page corps and therefore were able to forge close relationships with potential high-ranking members of the bureaucracy.

to marry and to own a business, both of which went against the provisions in the *Kanun*.<sup>56</sup> No longer was the Sultan the only family these slaves had and no longer were the slaves financially dependent upon him for everything. Consequently, as time passed, their family and business/economic interests became more important to them than their loyalty to the Sultan; so much so that, through the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Janissaries became more and more self-serving, even to the extent of fermenting rebellion and resorting to assassination to achieve their goals. According to Yapp, this self-serving attitude continued to develop and could be seen in the early nineteenth century when the Janissaries

became increasingly reluctant to go on campaigns and when called out either mutinied or simply deserted. On 23 May 1811, 13,000 Janissaries mustered in Istanbul to go on campaign but before they had traveled more than a few kilometers on the road to Edirne only 1,600 were left. The Janissaries fought no significant military action after 1812. Their character as a body of town bullies whose brawling menaced the security of the citizens was now firmly established. Among the duties of the Janissaries of Istanbul was to serve as the city fire brigade. It was commonly known that they started fires and demanded payment to put them out.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Mekteps (Primary Schools)*

Before the *Tanzimat* reform period elementary education in the Muslim *millet* was furnished by the *mektep*.<sup>58</sup> Commonly called *taş mekteps* (stone schools) because of their

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<sup>56</sup> The *Kanun* was the fundamental law promulgated by Sultan Murad I (r. 1360- 1389) which regulated the life of each member of the Janissary corps. This law, which embodies fourteen articles strictly, forbids a Janissary from getting married or engaging in any trade. See Horniker, "The Corps of the Janizaries," 186.

<sup>57</sup> M.E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East 1792-1923* (New York: Longman Inc., 1987), 103.

<sup>58</sup> While there are no precise indications as to when the first *mektep* was established, some believe that they existed as far back as the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Nevertheless, by the time of the Umayyad Caliphate, primary religious education was firmly established, first within mosques and then later in buildings