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## SUPERVISION OF FOREIGN AND MINORITY SCHOOLS IN THE OTTOMAN STATE ACCORDING TO ARCHIVE SOURCES

SUPERVISÃO DE ESCOLAS ESTRANGEIRAS E MINORITÁRIAS NO ESTADO OTOMANO SEGUNDO FONTES DE ARQUIVO

SUPERVISIÓN DE ESCUELAS EXTRANJERAS Y MINORITARIAS EN EL ESTADO OTOMANO SEGÚN FUENTES DE ARCHIVO

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**ABSTRACT:** The issue of non-Muslim schools in the Ottoman Empire began after the conquest of Istanbul, when church-based religious classes gradually became schools. As the empire weakened and granted capitulations, foreign powers rapidly established private schools, especially after Article 129 of the 1869 Educational Regulations. The growing number of institutions created inspection challenges, leading to new regulations covering both school activities and related events such as theatre, ballet, and lotteries. This study uses qualitative document analysis from the Ottoman State Archives, including transcripts of the examined materials. The findings show that the empire's religious tolerance allowed communities to open schools for their own religious education, but this also increased foreign influence over non-Muslim subjects. Despite efforts, effective control was not achieved until World War I and the abolition of capitulations. The Republic of Turkey later resolved the issue by unifying all schools under the Ministry of Education through the Law of Unification of Education.

**KEYWORDS:** Ottoman State. Foreign School. Regulation. Inspection.

**RESUMO:** A questão das escolas não muçulmanas no Império Otomano começou após a conquista de Istambul, quando as aulas religiosas baseadas na igreja gradualmente se tornaram escolas. À medida que o império enfraquecia e concedia capitulações, as potências estrangeiras estabeleceram rapidamente escolas privadas, especialmente após o Artigo 129 dos Regulamentos Educacionais de 1869. O número crescente de instituições criou desafios de inspeção, levando a novos regulamentos que abrangiam tanto as atividades escolares quanto eventos relacionados, como teatro, balé e loterias. Este estudo utiliza análise documental qualitativa dos Arquivos do Estado Otomano, incluindo transcrições dos materiais examinados. Os resultados mostram que a tolerância religiosa do império permitiu que as comunidades abrissem escolas para sua própria educação religiosa, mas isso também aumentou a influência estrangeira sobre os súditos não muçulmanos. Apesar dos esforços, o controle efetivo só foi alcançado durante a Primeira Guerra Mundial e a abolição das capitulações. A República da Turquia posteriormente resolveu a questão unificando todas as escolas sob o Ministério da Educação por meio da Lei de Unificação da Educação.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Estado Otomano. Escola Estrangeira. Regulamento. Inspeção.

**RESUMEN:** La cuestión de las escuelas no musulmanas en el Imperio Otomano comenzó después de la conquista de Estambul, cuando las clases religiosas basadas en la iglesia se transformaron gradualmente en escuelas. A medida que el imperio se debilitaba y concedía capitulaciones, las potencias extranjeras establecieron rápidamente escuelas privadas, especialmente después del Artículo 129 de los Reglamentos Educativos de 1869. El aumento del número de instituciones generó desafíos de inspección, lo que llevó a nuevos reglamentos que abarcaban tanto las actividades escolares como eventos relacionados, como teatro, ballet y loterías. Este estudio emplea un análisis documental cualitativo de los Archivos del Estado Otomano, incluyendo transcripciones del material examinado. Los resultados muestran que la tolerancia religiosa del imperio permitió que las comunidades abrieran escuelas para su propia educación religiosa, pero eso también incrementó la influencia extranjera sobre los súbditos no musulmanes. Pese a los esfuerzos, el control efectivo solo se logró durante la Primera Guerra Mundial y con la abolición de las capitulaciones. Posteriormente, la República de Turquía resolvió la cuestión unificando todas las escuelas bajo el Ministerio de Educación mediante la Ley de Unificación de la Educación.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Estado Otomano. Escuela extranjera. Reglamento. Inspección.

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## INTRODUCTION

As we all know, education is essential for a society to develop and reach the desired level of welfare. With that in mind, it can be said that the first level of education is for hunter-gatherer human societies to settle down over time and to transfer their experiences and knowledge to the next generations. Developing human societies over time has made education more systematic. The systematization of education has subsequently led to the development of planning, laws, and control mechanisms. Like other institutions, the madrasa system, seen in the Turkish States before the Ottoman Empire, was inherited by the Ottoman Empire. With the increase in the level of education during the Ottoman Empire, these madrasas became the most advanced institutions among their contemporaries.

In the classical period of the Ottoman Empire, education was not under the control of the state itself. But it was carried out in institutions established in certain centers, usually with the status of private education institutions and through foundations. Due to the community structure of Ottoman society, all communities established their own schools and educated their children in these schools, which was also influenced by the tolerant state tradition of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the schools opened by non-Muslims in the country, schools opened by foreigners were added over time. It is possible to take the concept of the first foreign and minority schools back to 1453 when Istanbul was conquered.

Minority groups, who interpreted the permission given by Fatih Sultan Mehmet for the opening of classrooms in churches, to open schools, and to provide education in independent buildings, to train clergy who would only help them perform their worship, started to be protected by foreign states that aimed to use them in time. In this way, foreign states that had a say over the Minority Schools and even added their own state names to the names of these schools, gradually opened their own schools. Thus, besides the confusion of names such as the American Armenian School, the French Armenian School, the French Jewish School, the American School, the French School, the English School, the Russian School, the German School, the Italian School, the Austrian School, the Bulgarian School, etc. had begun (Haydaroglu, 2006, p. 150).

This right, which was given to allow non-Muslims and foreigners living in the Ottoman Empire to receive education in accordance with their religious beliefs, over time turned into institutions where other states were influential on these minority groups, and in a sense, militants were raised from an institution where religious education was given (Haydaroglu, 2006, p. 151; Zengin, 2007, p. 614; Dingeç, 2014).

When the literature is examined, it is possible to reach many publications about foreign and minority schools (Aksu, 2009; Büyükkarcı, 1996; Güler, 1998; Mutlu, 2005; Özcan, 2017; Özeçoğlu, 2020; Padem, 2020; Polat, 2021; Sezer Arığ, 2014; Somel, 2015; Tozlu, 1991).

## METHOD

The study aims to reveal how the control mechanism works in schools established by foreigners and minorities engaged in educational activities in the Ottoman State. For this purpose, this research has tried to determine whether there is a special application related to the laws, regulations, and inspections of foreign and minority schools.

The research was carried out by a scanning method on archive data. The universe of the research is the Ottoman Archive under the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey State Archives. In the search made with the keyword inspection without selecting archives in the database of the State Archives, 20,770 documents of a general nature were reached, and 19,095 documents were reached in the scan made by selecting the Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of State Archives.

Since there is no restriction in this scanning, the excess of the numerical ratio of the raw data obtained can be considered as an important result in terms of showing the functionality of the inspection mechanism in the institutional structure of the Ottoman Empire. However, with the filtering made on the archive data on the subject, 23 documents are accessed by choosing Yıldız Perakende-Maarif as the fund. What is meant by 23 here should not be considered as the number of pages. Each data entry can have different page numbers.

For example, when you enter data, only one page can be encountered, and the content can lead to 300–500-page notebooks. In other words, it is possible to infer that an enormous data source is mentioned for historical researchers.

Among the documents related to foreign and minority schools in the Yıldız Perakende Educational Exposure fund code, two documents are important in terms of explaining the rules according to which the inspections in these schools will be made and how the income from the demonstrations in these schools can be obtained as economic support. As such, the first of the archival documents on which the research is based is the Mekatib-i non-Muslim and Foreign Inspectorship Regulations (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 1–63), and how to inspect ballroom theatre and lotteries to be organized for the benefit of minority schools (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 1–67) are related documents.

The meanings of the words in the archive document are given as footnotes under the page, and for the meanings of the words, F. Devellioğlu's Turkish-Ottoman Encyclopedic Dictionary and Ş. Sami's works, named Kamus-i Türki, were used.

Since the research is conducted on the archive of the Presidency of State Archives, which is open to all researchers, and the document review method is applied, it is a study that does not require the permission of the ethics committee.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was mentioned above that the first examples of minority schools in the Ottoman Empire were established after the conquest of Istanbul. In the last quarter of the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire lost power in the face of the West and started to open Western-style schools. Before this process, it is possible to say that schools opened by non-Muslim citizens and foreigners continued in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, it is possible to conclude that education in the Ottoman Empire continued in a state of confusion.

The legal regulation regarding the opening of schools by foreigners and minorities was first mentioned in the 1869 *Maarif-i Umumiye* Regulation (Hayta, 1995; Mutlu, 1999). Regarding the subject in Article 129 of the *Maarif-i Umumiye* Regulation, Private Schools are schools established by societies or individuals of Ottoman or foreign states, paid or free of charge. Their expenses are covered by the founders or the foundations they are affiliated with.

The conditions of the institutions are as follows: a) The teachers at these schools have a certificate issued by the Ministry of Education or the local education administration, b) The courses are taught in accordance with the rules of morality and politics in these schools, and the curriculum and books are read by the Ministry of Education or the local education administration and the governor. c) Official permission is given by the Ministry of Education, the local education administration, and the governor. Clause B of Article 129 contains a statement that the inspection will be carried out. The manner in which these schools will be inspected is regulated in accordance with the *Mekatib-i* regulation. The regulation was published on September 6, 1888 (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 1–63).

Before the regulation was issued, a petition from the provinces stated that there was a need for a directive on how to inspect non-Muslim and foreign schools. This request is expressed in the document, which is briefly summarized as the duties of non-Muslim and foreign school inspectors, dated September 28, 1887, found in the archive (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 1–52). Accordingly, a regulation is required for the inspection of non-Muslim and foreign schools. Since the inspectors are not required to inspect by themselves, it is desired that the Ministry of Education issue a regulation on this matter as soon as possible.

In this regard, it is stated that two paragraphs have been added to Article 129 of the Education Regulation, but this is not sufficient. It is requested that the regulation be applied to the schools that have been opened or are to be opened to prevent these schools from engaging in political mischief. There is a statement in the document that foreigners opened these schools as evil factories against the *Devlet-i Aliye* (Ottoman Government).

In response to the requests from the provinces, the *Mekatib-i Gayr-i Muslim-i Ecnebiyye* Inspectorate was established, and the above-mentioned regulation was published for this purpose. According to the regulation, the books to be taught in schools opened by minorities

and foreigners, and the programs implemented, will be inspected by the inspectorate. will be inspected by inspectors.

In addition, for the schools to be opened, inspectors will determine the building related to the establishment of the school, the number of teachers, and whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim, within the framework of the rules in Article 129 of the Regulation of Education, together with translation documents containing their professional knowledge. The necessary license will be taken under control by sending it to the Ministry of Education and sending it to Bab-ı Ali after receiving approval. Again, inspectors will check whether the books in the library of the school comply with the rules and whether they contain a situation against the state, and whether the books that are allowed to be taught are read in this way.

It was mentioned before that those educational institutions served as foundations in the Ottoman Empire. The income of foundations can be briefly summarized as income obtained by a person, institution, or activity. Additional document in 1, dated February 16, 1889, is a directive on how to inspect activities such as balls, theatres, and lotteries organized by non-Muslim schools established in the form of foundations for the benefit of the school (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 1-67).

According to the memorandum written to the Ministry of Education on January 31, 1889, there is information on the activities carried out for the benefit of the school in the center of Istanbul and in the provinces, which wasn't permitted to obtain, and the accounting of the revenues obtained after the activity was not checked.

Accordingly, in the decision taken by the Majlis-i Maârif, after it was stated that the inspections of the lottery, ball, and theatre would be different, these were explained one by one. First, it was stated that permission should be obtained for all activities. Since the plays in the theatres should have been inspected by the committee of the inspector, it was emphasized that the revenues obtained at the end of this activity should be accounted for. It has been stated that the tickets for the ball and the lottery can be printed after the approval of the Mekatib-i Ecnebiyye Inspectorate, and then the accounting for the revenues must be reported absolutely. At the end of these procedures, it was decided to inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the municipality, and the Ministry of Security.

Although the education given in foreign and minority schools and other activities were tried to be controlled by laws and directives, the documents in the archive show that the desired success on the subject was not achieved.

Regarding the issue, the rejection of Muslim girls to foreign countries dated November 22, 1887 (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 1-55); Not allowing behavior and words against the state in various ceremonies and meetings held in foreign and non-Muslim schools, in plays such as theater, dated 20 July 1891 (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 2-17);

the expulsion of Muslim students from foreign schools in Beirut on January 19, 1894 (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 3–13); Harmful educational activities in non-Muslim and foreign schools dated February 12, 1894 (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 3–15); Investigation of how much money was found in Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian schools, dated 25 December 1895, and how it was spent.

Foreigners attempted to open schools in Anatolia to increase their influence. Improvement of education in Memâlik-i Mahsûsa-yı Şahane to eliminate the influence to be obtained through foreign schools (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 3–10); There are documents dated October 19, 1900, stating that to reduce the demand for foreign schools, schools should be arranged according to needs, and a trade school should be opened in Beirut (Republic of Turkey State Archives, n.d., pp. 4–42).

The struggle of the Ottoman Empire with the schools opened by minorities and foreigners continued until it announced that it had abolished the capitulations during the First World War (Mutlu, 1999, pp. 18–25). In the Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed at the end of the National Struggle, the desired result was achieved in the issue of the abolition of the capitulations, which was among the issues that the Turkish government could never make concessions to, and the capitulations were completely abolished. During the newly established Republic of Turkey, the solution of the problem was realized with the Law of Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu) dated March 3, 1924 (Öztoprak, 2025). According to the law, all institutions providing education throughout the country have become subject to the rules of the Ministry of Education.

## CONCLUSION

Foreign and minority schools started with the conquest of Istanbul, that is, with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the religious diversification of the people. The social characteristics of the Ottoman Empire, the community characteristics, and the management of the education issue through foundations sometimes led to problems in education. Schools opened by minority foundations caused serious problems. The continuation of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, but the inability to establish a systematic central structure in the field of education has deepened these problems a little more.

While the Ottoman Empire was expanding, it started to lose power, and the capitulations given as commercial concessions in the 16th century began to affect the state culturally over time. The classrooms opened for religious education in churches throughout the country have turned into schools, and these schools have become institutions where education is

given on the one hand, and non-Muslims who are Ottoman citizens are raised with separatist ideas by the foreign states that have assumed the role of patrons of the churches.

The state aimed to control these schools by using its central authority and added a relevant article to the *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* in 1869. The phrase private school in the regulation facilitated the licensing of schools by both minorities and foreigners. In the following period, there was a significant increase in the number of schools. The answer given to the request written to the center because the activities of the schools were inappropriate, was in the form of the inspection regulations of non-Muslim and Ecnebiyye schools.

The Ottoman Empire was strong in the 15th-16th centuries. While non-Muslim minorities and even foreign-supported schools did not pose a serious problem in the centuries, the decrease in the power of the state and the capitulations it gave to the West caused an increase in the number of schools opened by foreigners, and these became uncontrollable.

To conclude, the problem could only be solved when these schools, the effects of which decreased with the abolition of the capitulations, were taken under the control of the Ministry of Education with the Law of Unification of Education enacted on March 3, 1924.

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