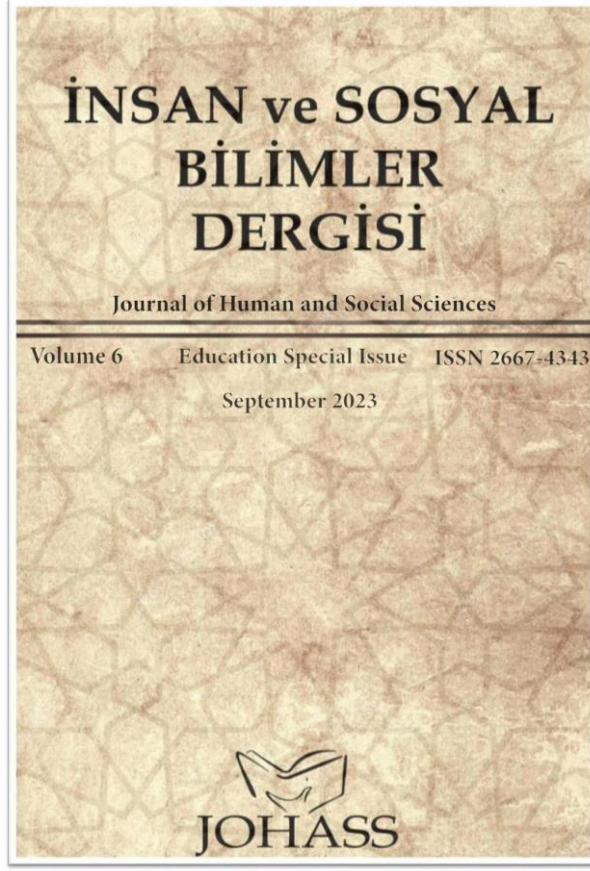


JOURNAL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (JOHASS)



<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/johass>

**A Study on the Preparation of Textbooks for the Ottoman Sıbyan Schools
in the Late 19th Century**

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Article Type: Research Article

Received: 11.09.2023.

Revision received: 25.09.2023

Accepted: 26.09.2023

Published online: 28.09.2023

Citation: Çam, İ. D. (2023). A Study on the Preparation of Textbooks for the Ottoman Sıbyan Schools in the Late 19th Century. *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, 6(Education Special Issue), 99-116.

A Study on the Preparation of Textbooks for the Ottoman Sıbyan Schools in the Late 19th Century

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Abstract

The nineteenth century witnessed remarkable developments in primary education. The vital importance of the primary education in various aspects was emphasised at every opportunity. In this context, reform in this level of education was one of the issues on the agenda of statesmen. Accordingly, close attention began to be paid to the sıbyan schools. Education in these schools was made compulsory in the above-mentioned century. Efforts were made to ensure that children, who had reached the age of education, acquired some basic knowledge. On the other hand, important steps were taken to improve teaching methods, renew programmes and prepare appropriate textbooks for these children. The publication of the Regulation for Writing and Translation [Telif ve Tercüme Nizâmnâmesi] dated 14 May 1870 [12 Safar 1287] was an important step especially in the context of the aforementioned textbooks. In this sense, the present study focuses on the contents, number of pages, prizes and writing duration of the textbooks to be put into the competition, especially for sıbyan schools, in line with the declaration attached to the end of the relevant regulation, without ignoring the provisions of it regarding the books to be written or translated. This regulation and the declaration attached to it constitute the main material of the study, but the literature on the subject is also included in the evaluation. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that 11 textbooks were aimed to be prepared for sıbyan schools and important provisions were determined in this context. This endeavour constituted a concrete example of the close relationship between education and power.

Keywords: The regulation for writing and translation, Ottoman sıbyan schools, textbooks

Research Article

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Introduction

The Ottoman Empire, which had long resisted the dissolution of its traditional structure, gradually recognised the necessity of adapting to change. The nineteenth century marked a crucial turning point in this regard (Uyanık, 2006). During this century, the Ottoman people also saw their own change as a necessity in a changing world and realised that it was necessary to focus on education fundamentally within this framework (Ortaylı, 2009, p. 146).

The necessity of raising qualified individuals capable of adapting to changes led to the transformation of education into a public service. As other modernising states, the Ottoman Empire also acknowledged education as a public service in the nineteenth century. In this process, almost a magical power was attributed to education to fix the numerous issues detailed in reports from the provinces to Istanbul. Furthermore, it was considered the main apparatus for progress, economic growth and social penetration. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the Ottoman ruling elites began to see education as an ideological apparatus for ensuring political unity, increasing social welfare and raising individuals loyal to the state (Fortna, 2005; Uyanık, 2006).

As part of this overarching mission for education, it became imperative to elevate its status beyond its current position. Primary education, serving as the bedrock of the entire educational system, took centre stage in this effort. Indeed, reforming primary education institutions and improving the quality of instruction therein became a top priority for policymakers. Sıbyan schools, in particular, received significant attention. Compulsory education in such schools was introduced during the same century (Uyanık, 2006).

The Regulation of Public Education [Maârif-i Umûmiyye Nizâm-nâmesi] dated 1 September 1869, marked a significant milestone in the reform of education. This regulation established a legal and institutional framework for educational reform, introduced a system and set the stage for future plans (Vurgun, 2022, p. 775). It not only intended to modernise education, but also to set a standard for it. Under this regulation, the Ottoman central administration defined the framework of education (Gürkan, 2017, p. 205). According to the regulation, sıbyan schools provided education for a duration of four years. Boys and girls were required to attend the school between the ages of 7-11 and 6-10, respectively. The regulation also outlined procedures for handling cases of absenteeism or failure to send children to school, ensuring school attendance. The regulation's provisions reflected an ambition to expand sıbyan schools throughout the empire. As outlined in the regulation, the

curriculum in these schools included courses such as *Alphabet* [Elifba], *The Holy Qur'an* [Kur'an-ı Kerim], *Tajwîd* [Tevvîd], *Catechism* [İlm-i Hâl], *Morality* [Ahlâk], *Hand Writing* [Yazı], *Arithmetic* [Hesâp], *Brief Ottoman History* [Muhtâsar Târih-i Osmânî], *Brief Geography* [Muhtasar Coğrafya] and *Useful Knowledge* [Ma'lûmât-ı Nâfia] (Maârif-i Umûmiyye Nizâmnâmesidir, *Düstûr*, Tertîb-i Evvel-Cüz-ü Sâni, 1289, pp. 184-186).

In accordance with this regulation, it was deemed appropriate to improve the teaching methods of all schools both in Istanbul and in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, and to gradually write or translate textbooks to be taught in these schools. Specifically, there was a plan to prepare engaging and straightforward textbooks for sıbyan schools that would captivate, rather than bore, the children (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 2). A pivotal step in this process was the publication of the Regulation for Writing and Translation [Telif ve Tercüme Nizâmnâmesi] dated 14 May 1870 [12 Safar 1287]. This regulation contained crucial provisions related to writing or translation of books. In addition, it included a declaration specifying the details about the 11 textbooks to be put into competition, particularly for sıbyan schools. These details were related to the content of the textbooks, their number of pages, the prizes they would receive according to their ranking in the competition, and writing duration of them. The present study aims to make a comprehensive evaluation by focusing on these details, without ignoring the provisions outlined in the relevant regulation regarding the writing or translation of books. The literature review showed that this issue has not been addressed in detail. In this respect, the current study will contribute to textbook research in line with its aim.

Books to be Written or Translated

The Regulation for Writing and Translation divided the books to be written or translated into three groups. They were as follows:

1. Books that are put into competition by assigning a monetary prize according to their size and complexity.
2. Books that are outsourced without prior orders.
3. Books translated or written by an individual for a predetermined price (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 4).

In the provisions concerning books eligible for the competition, it was specified that the declaration and conditions for these books would be announced quarterly, starting in *Muharram*, through newspapers or special documents. Three categories of prizes were

established for these books. As such, the top-performing book would receive the first prize, while the second-best would be granted the second prize. The third-place book would be recognised with an honorable mention [referred to as “zıkr-i cemil”]. In situations where numerous books deserving of the first prize emerged, it was decided that the second prize would not be awarded. Instead, the funds allocated for the second prize would be combined with the first prize money and distributed equally among the authors. If there were many books deserving of the second prize, it was considered appropriate to equally distribute this prize among the authors. The regulation also took into account books that did not qualify for any prize. In other words, it stipulated that authors of books not deemed worthy of any of the aforementioned prizes, but from which some benefits were anticipated through their publication, would not receive a prize. Instead, they would be granted a suitable monetary incentive to stimulate their enthusiasm (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 5-6).

One of the most crucial aspects of the competition was maintaining anonymity. In simple terms, the authors or translators of the books entered into the competition were not supposed to know each other’s identities. To achieve this, it was decided not to disclose their names. Instead, a distinct phrase would be inscribed on each book to distinguish them from one another. Additionally, each author, using their own seal and signature, would enclose a letter within an envelope, sealing it securely. They would also write the same distinguishing phrase on this envelope as found on their respective book. Ensuring the anonymity of the authors’ identities was deemed of utmost importance, and it was clearly stated that if the name of any author was intentionally or accidentally revealed, their book would be disqualified. This policy of anonymity also extended to authors of books that were not deemed deserving of any prize. These authors had the option to have their books collected through confidential procedures without disclosing their names or titles. Furthermore, authors of rejected books retained the right to publish their works independently if they wished to do so (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 6).

In preparation for the competition, authors were required to discreetly deliver their books to the office of a head clerk in the Department of Science [Dâire-i İlmiyye] using a method of their choice. It was specified that the phrase on these books, delivered in this manner, would be meticulously documented in a special record book, and a unique identification number would be assigned based on the order of receipt. This identification number needed to be inscribed on both the book itself and the sealed accompanying envelope.

Timely delivery of the books to the appropriate department was a critical consideration. It was explicitly noted that books not delivered punctually would not be accepted. Furthermore, it was outlined that the books arriving on schedule would undergo evaluation by the Council of Education [Meclis-i Maârif]. Those meeting the necessary criteria would be accepted, their prizes determined, and the date for the distribution of these prizes would be announced via newspapers. A special significance was attributed to the prize distribution day. According to the information found in the regulation, on this occasion, the Minister of Education, along with other deputies and representatives from prominent officials, would be in attendance at the Grand Council of Education [Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif]. The accepted books would be presented, and in the presence of the assembled participants, the seals on the accompanying envelopes would be opened, revealing the identities of the authors and presenting them with their well-earned prize certificates (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 7-8).

Books offered from external sources, without prior orders, were essentially categorised into two main groups: those intended for schools and those aimed at the general public. Books for schools were further divided into three distinct types, each with its designated prize. The first type encompassed books recommended for classroom use, and it was specified that these books would receive the top prize. The second type included books highly regarded [takdir] for school utilisation, and it was stated that the second prize would be conferred upon them. The third type consisted of books officially authorised for educational purposes, and the authors of these books were acknowledged with an honorable mention. Books intended for the general public were similarly divided into three types, with a prize assigned to each. The highest-rated book received the first prize, while the next in line was granted the second prize. The third book in this category earned recognition through an honorable mention alone. It was decreed that authors of prized books would provide ten complimentary copies of each to the Ministry of Education [Maârif Nezâreti]. These books would be placed in the libraries of the Grand Council of Education, the University [Dârülfünûn], and other libraries deemed necessary (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 8-9).

Similar to other books, those intended for translation or writing for a predetermined price were also governed by specific provisions. According to these provisions, individuals desiring to write or translate a book for an agreed-upon price committed to do so in accordance with a sample they would present to the Grand Council of Education. In return, they would receive the full contracted payment. It was crucial for these books to be delivered on time; otherwise, a warning was issued that they would be rejected, and the payment would

not be processed. To inform prospective suitors, it was deemed appropriate to announce the books available for ordering. Additionally, it was decided that ordered books would be divided into suitable chapters, and payments would be made based on completed chapters. Authors would submit their finished chapters to the council as per the specified schedule. If these chapters were found to align with the provided sample during examination, the corresponding agreed-upon payment for those chapters would be disbursed, and the submitted chapters would be retained. Adherence to the established schedule was paramount. If an author failed to deliver a chapter on time without a valid excuse, a grace period of fifteen days would be granted. Afterward, the uncompleted portion of the contract would be declared null and void, and the book would be assigned to another party. It was also mandated that a certified copy of the protocol outlining the terms and conditions for writing or translating the books would be provided to the individuals undertaking the work. Moreover, in accordance with the regulation, authors and translators had no rights on these books beyond their names. The Ministry of Education undertook responsibility for the printing and sale of these books, and it was decided that fifteen complimentary copies would be given to the author or translator (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 9-11).

The regulation's provisions pertaining to the three groups of books mentioned above primarily addressed the inscriptions required on these books. In addition, it outlined the process for awarding certificates to winning authors and the disbursement of cash prizes. It placed significant emphasis on recording the names of authors and translators of prized books, the date of the decision, and the prize amounts in a comprehensive record known as the award book. Furthermore, it stipulated that the names of the authors or translators in question would be inscribed on decorative plaques and prominently displayed in the departments of the Grand Council of Education, the University, and other suitable locations. Procedures for disbursing prize money when authors or translators choose to remain anonymous were also detailed. However, it was important to note that prize money may either be left to the education treasury [maârif veznesi] or assigned as a prize for another book. The regulation also allowed for individuals of goodwill and generosity to pledge a monetary sum for a book to be written or translated by a competent individual. Such books can be ordered in the benefactor's name or submitted for competition. Also, it was emphasised that these individuals have the option to supplement the prize established by the Ministry of Education with an additional amount. Lastly, it specified that the reasons leading to the rejection of books would be documented on

a note and provided to the owner along with the book (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 11-14).

Textbooks Specific to Sibyan Schools

The Regulation for Writing and Translation included a declaration that detailed the specifications of textbooks eligible for entry into the competition for sibyan schools. This declaration covered aspects such as their content, number of pages, the prizes based on competition ranking, and writing duration. Among these textbooks, the *Alphabet* [Elifba] was the first of a total of 11. It began by addressing to the signs that certain letters [*wāw*, *yā*’, *alif*, *hā*’, *kāf*] should have according to the way/place of use and language [Arabic-Persian]. Subsequently, in order to facilitate gradual syllable learning, it was argued that the book should be included phrases comprising straightforward and easily understandable words. Furthermore, it was decided to include new signs alongside familiar ones in the first half of the textbook, with the latter half exclusively featuring the new signs. The declaration also emphasised the flexibility of including any methods that might aid in spelling, and even relevant illustrations within the textbook (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 14-15).

To enhance the process of spelling, the creation of suitable signs for the previously mentioned letters was proposed. However, it was emphasised that these signs should align with the established method. It was strongly advocated that the words selected for use should, whenever possible, be drawn from the vocabulary that children are familiar with and use in their daily lives. Besides, their meanings should correspond to the children’s level of comprehension. When it came to composing words and phrases, the focus was initially on simplicity and ease, followed by a gradual progression towards more complex and challenging forms. The goal was to ensure that these words and phrases were engaging and appealing to children. In essence, the vision for this textbook was to enable a child to master syllables within a span of six months, ultimately allowing them to read Turkish texts containing simple and familiar phrases. This textbook was intended to have a length of approximately 100 pages. The top prize for this textbook was set at 5000 kurus, with the second prize at 3000 kurus. Authors were given a deadline of four months to complete their work (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 15-16).

Another one of these textbooks was titled *Morality* [Ahlâk]. This particular textbook was designed to commence with a concise introduction explaining the subject and objectives

of the field of morality. It delved into various topics, including the religious obligations of individuals, their responsibilities towards their parents, teachers, fellow humans, their own well-being, those of authority [Ulu'l Amr], and their homeland. *Morality* was also devoted to topics such as the necessity of obeying laws and duties towards animals and other living beings. This textbook matched *Alphabet* [Elifba] in terms of the number of pages, prize amounts, and writing duration (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 16).

Practical Virtues [Fazâil-i Fiiliye] was yet another textbook intended for inclusion in the competition for sıbyan schools. This textbook focused on commendable actions and behaviours highlighting moral virtues among the Muslims and other nations in the past. Similar to the *Morality* textbook, it was considered appropriate to divide these topics into chapters. Given that similar content can be found in Siyar, History, and Morality books, it was advised to conduct thorough research and carefully select suitable material. It was also emphasised that existing books on this subject could serve as valuable sources for content. The number of pages, prize amounts, and writing duration for this textbook mirrored those established for the first two textbooks (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 17).

Turkish Grammar [Kavâid-i Türkiye] was the fourth textbook in this series. It was structured into two parts. The first part, commencing with an introduction, focused on noun, adjective, pronoun, verb, preposition, and phrase. The second part was dedicated to topics such as agreement, complements, and sentence connections. According to the declaration in question, each rule, exception, and caution in this textbook should have accompanied by a set of illustrative examples. As outlined in the declaration, the complexity of the examples to be given and the complexity of the rules should be equivalent. This textbook was intended to cover a limited number of rules, but a large number of examples. This approach was justified by the idea that learning rules becomes easier with multiple examples and that it facilitates the acquisition of spelling and meanings of words used in this context. This textbook specifically focused on the rules of the Turkish language. However, even those rules originating from Arabic and Persian, widely recognised and necessary to be known in the Turkish language, would be separately compiled, explained with relevant examples, and appended to the end of this textbook as an additional section (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 17-19).

In addition to this textbook, a *Spelling Booklet* was slated for development. This booklet was designed to encompass all the essential components for enabling students, with the guidance of their teachers, to easily grasp the nuances of their mother tongue. To achieve

this, it was vital to steer clear of the complex rules of language. Furthermore, it was stressed that the examples provided should be drawn from the works of reputable authors. The *Turkish Grammar* textbook was expected to span a minimum of 150 pages, while the *Spelling Booklet* was to consist of 100 pages. For their respective contributions, the first book was set to receive a prize of 12,000 kurus, and the second, 8,000 kurus. The writing duration for the *Turkish Grammar* textbook was stipulated at 6 months (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 20).

The fifth textbook in this series was *Geography* [Coğrafya]. The planned topics for inclusion in this textbook were as follows: general insights into the shape, position, and movement of the Earth; the various circles assumed on the Earth; geographical terms; human species; governmental structures, and religious sects; detailed information about the five continents, commencing with Europe, covering aspects like borders, populations, and more; the boundaries and extent of the Ottoman lands, along with descriptions of their mountains, rivers, lakes; administrative divisions, both historical and contemporary, within the Ottoman territories; an overview of the nations and various communities residing within these regions; features of each province, such as its boundaries and populations, soil and industrial products, central administration, sanjaks, fortified areas; railways and roads, postal and telegraph networks within the Ottoman territories; information about the Ottoman State's regime, armed forces, judicial system, general education; a table indicating its military organisation, provinces and sanjaks (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 20-21).

The geography textbook was to be structured into multiple lessons, with each lesson concluding with relevant questions. Additionally, where applicable, historical knowledge would be incorporated into the material. This textbook was intended to span 100 pages, and prizes of 5000 kurus for the first one and 3000 kurus for the second one were established. Authors were allotted a four-month timeframe for the preparation of this textbook (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 21-22).

The sixth textbook in this series focused on *Ottoman History* [Tarih-i Osmanî]. It was designed to commence with an introduction about how the Ottoman State emerged and the situation of the states and nations in Anatolia during that period. This comprehensive history textbook was planned to cover significant events spanning from the inception of the Ottoman State to the current date [1870], a chronological table displaying the birth, accession, and death dates of all Ottoman sultans, a timeline of the key events featured in the book, and a map illustrating the Ottoman territories in Europe, Asia, and Africa. It was also decided to

divide the reign of each of the sultans, who ascended to the throne until the current date [1870], into a section. According to the declaration in question, events would be portrayed objectively. However, issues related to patriotism were found praiseworthy. The narrative style of the textbook was intended to resemble a story, and it was decided that the textbook would not pass judgment but rather highlight virtues and condemn inappropriate or unsightly actions. Furthermore, it was underscored that the names of cities and statesmen, and dates would be mentioned only in the context of important events in this textbook. The number of pages, prize amounts, and writing duration for this textbook were the same as the previous textbook (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 22-23).

Another textbook in this series was titled *Composition* [İnşâ]. This particular textbook was designed to commence with a comprehensive introduction to the art of composition and the fundamental principles of effective correspondence. It primarily focused on providing examples of letters, petitions, and promissory notes. However, it was emphasised that this textbook would not delve into the lengthy, intricate, and often challenging topics typically encountered in prose [nesir] books. Instead, the content would consist solely of short letters, ranging from four to five lines, and eventually, extending to one page. In this context, the phrases used needed to be straightforward and comprehensible for children. The letters featured in the textbook were organised into sections such as congratulations, expressions of gratitude, advice, condolences, and similar categories. This textbook was intended to span 100 pages, with a first-place prize of 5000 kurus and a second-place prize of 3000 kurus. Authors were given a four-month timeframe for the preparation of this textbook (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 23-24).

The eighth textbook in this series was titled *Poetical Literature* [Edebiyât-ı Manzûme]. This textbook was designed to commence with a brief introduction covering the definition, subject, purpose, and other key characteristics of poetry. Its primary focus was on various forms of poetry, including supplications [münacat], praise for the Prophet, tributes to rulers, and a wide range of poems composed in diverse rhymes and meters. The poems themselves didn't require restructuring; however, they needed to be carefully selected from the works of renowned poets, with the poet's name indicated below each poem. It was advised that the chosen poems should adhere to commonly accepted standards of etiquette, avoiding words and thoughts that deviate from general decorum. This textbook was planned to have the same number of pages, prize amounts, and writing duration as the previous textbook. (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 24).

The textbook titled *Orthographical Exceptions* [Şevâzz-ı İmlâ] focused on words that deviated from orthographic rules, such as “lakin,” “kezalik,” and “hâhiş”. The primary goal of this textbook was to make it easy for children to grasp and understand these words. To achieve this, it was decided that the textbook would include a table featuring the orthography and pronunciation of these words, their meanings, and the language from which they originated. To provide a clear example for the authors, a template was presented. This textbook was planned to contain some short phrases and, if possible, brief stories related to the words featured in the template. It would be divided into a suitable number of lessons, with each lesson covering four or five words and spanning approximately two pages of phrases that incorporated these words. Furthermore, each lesson would incorporate previously learned vocabulary to reinforce understanding. In cases where the reasons for these non-standard orthographies were known, brief explanations would be provided. Both the first and second of this textbook, expected to be between 30 to 40 pages in length, would be awarded prizes of 4000 and 3000 kurus, respectively. Authors were given a four-month timeframe to complete this textbook (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 25-26).

The textbook *Useful Knowledge* [Ma'lûmât-ı Nâfia] was conceived as a comprehensive collection of useful knowledge spanning various fields, including Astronomy, Geography, History, Physics, Chemistry, Geology, Morality, and more. Therefore, the topics covered within this textbook did not need to be directly related to each other. It was designed to function as an engaging storybook for children, offering an enjoyable reading experience. Given this purpose, it was decided that the content would be presented in a simple and concise manner, tailored to pique children’s curiosity and hold their interest. This textbook was intended to span 100 pages, with a first-place prize of 5000 kurus and a second-place prize of 3000 kurus. Authors were given a four-month timeframe to complete this textbook (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, p. 26).

The final textbook in this series was the *Calligraphy* [Meşk Mecmûası]. This textbook was designed to commence with an introductory section covering the selection and preparation of calligraphic tools such as pens, ink, paper, and their usage, alongside various calligraphic techniques. It was dedicated to a range of specific topics, which can be outlined as follows: Vertical, horizontal, and oblique extensions [keşide] in accordance with the rules of *Thuluth* [Sülüs] script; the bowls found at the end of some muqattaa letters; only the front parts of some muqattaa letters; varieties of muqattaa letters; dots, and vowel points; words comprising two, three, and four letters; Arabic and Turkish phrases focused on moral

enhancement; Arabic and Turkish phrases in the *Naskh* [Nesih] script; Turkish phrases specifically in the *Riq'ah* [Rik'a] script; phrases presented in the *Dīwānī* [Divāni] script; Persian and Turkish phrases in the *Ta'līq* [Ta'lik] script. In addition to these topics, the textbook aimed to incorporate various methods that would facilitate the learning of calligraphy. The prize amount and writing duration for this textbook mirrored those of the preceding textbook in the series (Meclis-i Kebir-i Maârif-Dâire-i İlmiyye, 1287, pp. 27-28).

Discussion and Results

There is more than one definition of the concept of textbook. This confirms that the textbook does not have a universally accepted definition (Marsden, 2001, pp. 6-8). Typically, textbooks are crafted in alignment with an official curriculum. They belong to the category of books that have a broad readership, serving not only as a reflection of the authors' viewpoints but also embodying an official, or at the very least, a consensus-driven perspective (Copeaux, 2000, p. 3). Textbooks are as important as rituals especially in transmitting the ideology of the state. Official discourse, transmitted through both textbooks and rituals in public schools, influencing the implicit and explicit curriculum, enables individuals to understand their roles and positions in society (Meşeci, 2007, p. 1).

Textbooks play a pivotal role in the broader process of socialisation, encompassing both general and, importantly, political socialisation (Alkan, 2005, p. 131). They act as a significant instrument that determine the boundaries of "legitimate knowledge" in a country, transmitting and continually reproducing it. Through their content, structure, and language, textbooks convey crucial messages to their readers (Çayır, 2014, p. 1). Given these distinctive characteristics and more, textbooks have consistently occupied a central position, attracting the attention of political authorities. Particularly since the nineteenth century, with the expansion and widespread accessibility of education, the interest of governments in textbooks has amplified (Gündüz, 2023, p. 77). The approach of the Ottoman Empire in this process was quite remarkable.

Prior to the Tanzimat Period in the Ottoman Empire, it was difficult to identify the existence of textbooks in the modern sense. Children attending sıbyan schools primarily encountered parts from *the Holy Qur'an*, *the Elifbâ Cüzü*, and the widely used reading book of Birgivi Mehmed Efendi. The initial printed materials designed for educational purposes consisted of compact Persian-Ottoman and Arabic-Ottoman dictionaries, grammar-books,

catechisms, and technical books, some of which were translated from foreign languages, taught primarily in military professional schools. Nonetheless, textbooks specifically crafted for civilian educational institutions began to spread from the Tanzimat Period onwards. During this period, the issue of the preparation and regulation of textbooks by the central administration was constantly on the agenda. Consequently, the textbooks incorporated into official school curricula started to be determined by relevant state institutions (Nurdoğan, 2014, pp. 85-86; Somel, 2010, pp. 236-238).

In this direction, a series of decisions were made and comprehensive studies were conducted within various councils, associations, and committees. Thereafter, the responsibility for textbook preparation was delegated to the Department of Science, operating within the framework of the Grand Council of Education in accordance with the Regulation of Public Education (Gündüz, 2023; Kayaoğlu, 1996; Vurgun, 2022). This regulation and particularly the Regulation for Writing and Translation dated 14 May 1870, played a pivotal role in the expansion of modern textbooks and the translations from European languages (Nurdoğan, 2014, p. 85; Somel, 2010, p. 238).

This last regulation firstly focussed on the books to be written or translated. These books were categorised into three distinct groups, each subject to important provisions. The first group comprised books presented for competition. The provisions pertaining to these books revealed a planned schedule for their execution, with categorisation and prizes determined based on their respective merits. It was also evident that efforts were made to prevent discouragement and nurture writing enthusiasm of authors whose books didn't attain any prize. Anonymity was a very important rule in the competition. This rule was undoubtedly noteworthy in terms of conducting the competition in an objective manner and making decisions on textbooks in this way. According to Kayaoğlu (1996, p. 72), this rule aimed to “uphold the principle of equality among participants and ensure fair treatment for all individuals.” Furthermore, the relevant provisions outlined the examination process and delineated additional procedures to be executed following the timely submission of the books.

The second group encompassed books that were not specifically commissioned but were instead offered from external sources. The provisions governing these books provided insights into their categorisation and the determination of prizes for each of them. In addition to giving a certain number of complimentary copies of these books to the Ministry of Education, it was decided that they would also be placed in various libraries. It can be said

that this decision served a dual purpose: making these books available to the public and enhancing the visibility of the authors.

The third group encompassed books subject to writing or translation for a prespecified price. The provisions pertaining to these books elucidated that the writing or translation processes would be formalised through contractual agreements between the parties involved. It was also evident from these provisions that authors or translators were strongly encouraged to adhere to deadlines, and protocols were outlined in case of any lapses. According to the relevant provisions, authors and translators possessed no rights over these books other than their names. As Akay (2015, p. 94) emphasised, this arrangement meant that authors and translators were granted moral rights solely in relation to the mentioned books.

Furthermore, as also outlined in the preamble of the regulation, in addition to a substantial monetary prize designated for each eligible book, authors could potentially generate a financial gain from the sale of their books for use in schools since they were legally entitled to copyright protection. Within this framework, the Regulation for Writing and Translation played a pivotal role in maintaining the progression of copyright protection and comprehension within the Ottoman Empire (Başar, 2021, p. 977; Turan, 2016, p. 223). The regulation delved into various aspects, including the specifications for inscriptions on the books and the procedures for rewarding authors. Notably, it also mandated that authors whose books were rejected would receive explanations for the decision. This provision was evidently designed to afford authors the opportunity to revise and enhance their books.

The final section of the regulation pertained to the declaration of the 11 textbooks to be put into the competition for sıbyan schools. This declaration outlined the number of page, prize amount, and writing duration for each textbook. While some of these specifications were identical for certain textbooks, others varied. In terms of content, these textbooks were planned to cover significant topics. It was clear that some of these topics were challenging for children who were at the beginning of their educational life. Notably, the topics planned to be covered by the textbooks such as *Alphabet*, *Turkish Grammar*, *Composition*, *Poetical Literature*, *Orthographical Exceptions*, and *Calligraphy* were particularly noteworthy in this regard. Nonetheless, authors were provided with various guidelines aimed at overcoming difficulties and facilitating learning in these topics.

The primary guidelines were as follows: to emphasise easy-to-spell words and gradually progress to more challenging ones in both words and phrases, use words that children are familiar with in their everyday language, ensuring that their meanings align with

the children's level of comprehension, enhance the textbook's content and appeal by incorporating suitable illustrations, include numerous examples to illustrate concepts, favoring a balance between the complexity of rules and examples, steer clear of intricate language rules and convoluted topics that may be challenging for children, and opt for concise stories/texts and teaching methods that simplify the learning process.

The "desired" content of these textbooks provided valuable insights into the understanding of political culture of the ruling elites in the Tanzimat Period and the ideal individual they targeted (Alkan, 2005, p. 108). It can be said that with the content of the textbooks such as *Alphabet*, *Turkish Grammar*, *Composition*, *Poetical Literature*, *Orthographical Exceptions* and *Calligraphy* were aimed to raise individuals who could read and write, have a grasp of grammar, conduct private or official correspondence and understand poetry. On the other hand, the content designed for textbooks including *Morality*, *Practical Virtues*, *Geography*, *Ottoman History* and *Useful Knowledge* indicated that the targeted individuals were also expected to exhibit moral character, fulfill their duties, exhibit an awareness of the Ottoman collective identity, and embody practical virtues that would fortify this identity, have knowledge about the world in a broad sense, possess an understanding of both Ottoman and non-Ottoman geography from various perspectives, have familiarity with Ottoman history, demonstrate patriotism, and command a wide array of knowledge in various disciplines.

As understood from the Official Gazette of the Ottoman Empire, *Takvim-i Vekâyi*, the writing and translation of these textbooks generated significant interest nationwide. In fact, the Department of Science, upon learning that such textbooks were being submitted from distant regions of the Empire, chose to extend the initially established deadline (Kısm-ı Gayr-i Resmî: Mevâdd-ı Dâhiliyye, 1287, p. 2). According to Berker (1945, p. 84), this competition represented a pioneering effort to systematically create essential textbooks for sıbyan schools, marking a commendable advancement given the time period.

However, concrete information regarding the competition's outcomes remains scarce. Only limited data were obtained from the sources. As is understood from available data, following 1870, some of these textbooks or comparable ones were published and distributed to schools. Berker (1945, pp. 84-85), initially noted that he had found no records in the archives confirming the completion of the competition, which began in 1870, and the production of the textbooks mentioned above. Nevertheless, he added that two archival documents from 1875, which he later presented, shed some light on the subject. The first of

these documents noted that some textbooks written by Selim Sabit Efendi, one of the leading educators of the Tanzimat Period, had been licensed. The second document stated that some textbooks had been sent to the students of the sıbyan school established for Circassian Muhajirs in the village of Ali Paşa in Silivri. Some of the textbooks referenced in these documents were either identical or closely resembled those listed in the original declaration, both in terms of nature and titles.

The details given by Bilim (2002, pp. 205-207) about the content of the textbooks prepared especially by Selim Sabit Efendi support this situation. Moreover, Alkan (2005, pp. 105, 108), contends that the winning textbooks were indeed published and distributed to certain schools. A bibliography compiled by Öztürk (1998, pp. 33-39) also reveals the existence of textbooks that bear resemblance to some of those listed in the original declaration. However, as highlighted by Somel (2010, p. 238), it should be noted that traditional texts persisted to be used alongside modern textbooks until the late 1870s.

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