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Building Loyalty: The Role of Education in Ottoman Provincial Policy – The Case of Mardin

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of educational institutions in the Ottoman district of Mardin during the 19th century and early 20th century, with a particular focus on the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods. Drawing upon archival records, provincial yearbooks, and surviving architectural examples, the study explores how education became a strategic tool in the Ottoman Empire’s effort to centralise authority and cultivate loyalty among its diverse provincial populations. The establishment of modern state schools such as *ibtidâî*, *rüşdiye*, and *idâdî*, alongside teacher training colleges, reflected the central government’s intention to standardise education and produce a new

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class of civil servants. At the same time, traditional institutions such as *madrasas* and *sıbyan mektebs* continued to operate, illustrating a layered educational landscape where classical Islamic learning coexisted with modern bureaucratic goals. The article also considers the role of minority and missionary schools, particularly those of the Armenian, Chaldean and Syriac communities, as well as the Capuchin Catholic and American Protestant missionaries, and their interactions with state policy. The article highlights how education functioned as both a political instrument and a contested cultural field in the late Ottoman Empire through the lens of Mardin.

Keywords: Ottoman education, Tanzimat reforms, Hamidian era, Mardin, provincial policy.

Sadakatin İnşası: Osmanlı Taşra Politikasında Eğitimin Rolü – Mardin Örneği

Öz

Bu makale, 19. Yüzyılda ve 20. Yüzyıl başlarında, Tanzimat ve II. Abdülhamid dönemlerine odaklanarak Osmanlı sancağı Mardin'deki eğitim kurumlarının dönüşümünü incelemektedir. Arşiv belgeleri, salnameler ve günümüze ulaşan mimari örnekler ışığında, eğitimin Osmanlı Devleti'nin taşrada otoriteyi merkezileştirme ve farklı toplumsal gruplar arasında sadakat geliştirme çabasında nasıl stratejik bir araç haline geldiği ele alınmaktadır. *İbtidâî*, *rüşdiye* ve *idâdî* gibi modern devlet okullarının ve öğretmen okullarının kurulması, merkezin eğitimi standartlaştırma ve yeni bir memur sınıfı yetiştirme niyetini yansıtmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, *medrese* ve *sıbyan mektebi* gibi geleneksel kurumların da varlığını sürdürmesi, klasik İslami eğitimin modern bürokratik hedeflerle iç içe geçtiği çok katmanlı bir eğitim manzarasına işaret etmektedir. Makale ayrıca, Mardin'deki Ermeni, Keldani ve Süryani cemaatlerine ait azınlık ve Kapuçin Katolik ve Amerikan Protestanlarının açtıkları misyoner okullarını ve bu okulların devlet politikalarıyla olan ilişkilerini de değerlendirmektedir. Mardin örneği üzerinden, geç Osmanlı döneminde eğitimin hem bir siyasi araç hem de müzakereye açık kültürel bir alan olarak işlev gördüğü ortaya konmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı eğitimi, Tanzimat reformları, Hamidiye dönemi, Mardin, taşra politikası.

Introduction

In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire launched a comprehensive programme of modernisation and administrative reform, with the

Tanzimat Edict (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu*, 1839) and deepened under the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909). These reforms sought to halt the fragmentation of imperial authority by centralising administration, expanding state control over the provinces, and introducing new civil, military, and educational institutions aligned with European models. Education became a particularly crucial domain within this process, serving not only as a tool for cultivating bureaucratic elites but also as a mechanism for instilling loyalty and reshaping imperial subjecthood.

The Ottoman state invested heavily in the construction of a centralised and standardised school system. New types of institutions, including *ibtidâî* (primary), *rüşdiye* (secondary), and *idâdî* (high) schools, were established across the empire, supported by teacher training colleges and governed by provincial education councils. These institutions reflected the modernising ambitions of the state and were intended to replace or marginalise classical forms of Islamic education. Nevertheless, traditional institutions such as *madrasas* and *sıbyan mektebs* persisted well into the late Ottoman period, often coexisting alongside modern schools in a complex and contested educational landscape.

This article examines how these transformations played out in the provincial setting of Mardin, a culturally, ethnically and confessionally diverse city in the empire's southeastern periphery. Drawing on Ottoman archives, provincial yearbooks (*salnâmes*), educational yearbooks (*Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*), missionary records, local sources, and architectural evidence, it investigates the development of modern state schools during the Tanzimat and Hamidian eras, while also attending to the continuity of traditional Islamic education and the institutional autonomy of minority communities. The case of Mardin further reveals the presence of missionary schools, particularly American and French initiatives, and explores how their activities shaped local educational practices and architecture.

By focusing on the spatial, political, and confessional dimensions of schooling in Mardin, this study demonstrates that education in the late Ottoman Empire was not a uniform project of centralisation, but a

negotiated field shaped by local actors, imperial policies, religious communities, and transnational forces. In doing so, it highlights the role of architecture and institutional design in the formation of educational authority and imperial identity at the provincial level.

The Transformation of Education During the Tanzimat Era

Educational reforms in the Ottoman Empire were initiated within the military sphere with the proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict (1839–1876), but they soon expanded into the civil domain and gradually permeated the entire imperial territory.¹ While the initial objective was to centralise and modernise the army and the state bureaucracy, Tanzimat reformers increasingly emphasised the creation of a modern educational system. These institutions were intended not only to generate new forms of knowledge, but also to cultivate a class of well-educated civil and military bureaucrats capable of guiding the Empire through a rapidly changing global order. Furthermore, they aimed to foster a disciplined and informed citizenry, considered essential for the success of the broader modernisation agenda.²

Even prior to the Tanzimat era, the Ottoman state had undertaken deliberate initiatives to expand access to public education. A notable early example occurred in 1824, when Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839) issued a *ferman* known as *Talim-i Sıbyan*, which mandated compulsory primary education for children in Istanbul and its surrounding regions. This decree marked one of the earliest formal attempts to institutionalise civic education, reflecting a nascent recognition of the importance of widespread literacy and mass education.³

Under the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid (1839–1861), efforts to broaden educational access continued. In response to an imperial decree calling for the establishment of schools across the empire,

¹ Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 2.

² İlhan Tekeli, "Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Eğitim Sistemindeki Değişmeler," *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, 2 (1985), p. 466.

³ Mustafa Mesut Özekmekçi, "II. Mahmud Döneminde İstanbul'daki Sıbyan Mektepleri ve Öğrenci Sayıları", *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, LX (2022), pp. 149-150.

rüşdiyye schools, intermediate-level institutions, began to be founded.⁴ The first *rüşdiyye* was established in 1847 in the Davutpaşa district of Istanbul. Subsequently, similar schools were opened in other districts of the capital, as well as in provincial cities close to Istanbul such as Edirne, Tekirdağ and Bursa.⁵

Nevertheless, it was under the Tanzimat administration that these early efforts evolved into a more structured and comprehensive educational reform, reflecting the Empire's wider ambitions of modernisation, state-building, and administrative centralisation. A pivotal milestone in this transformation was the enactment of the General Education Regulations (*Maârif-i Umûmiye Nizamnâmesi*) in 1869.⁶ Influenced significantly by the educational reforms of the French Minister of Education, Jean Victor Duruy, this legislation sought to establish a centrally coordinated and rationalised schooling system across the Empire.⁷ The regulation introduced a clear structural framework and planning mechanisms, aligning Ottoman education with contemporary European, especially French, models. The objective was both integration with European standards and internal standardisation of educational practices.

The Ottoman educational system was officially divided into two principal categories, each comprising several hierarchical levels: *Mekâtib-i Umûmiye* (public schools) and *Mekâtib-i Husûsiye* (private schools). The *Mekâtib-i Umûmiye* encompassed a structured progression beginning with primary education, which was delivered

⁴ Ali Akyıldız, *Tanzimat Dönemi Osmanlı Merkez Teşkilâtında Reform (1836-1956)*, İstanbul, 2000, pp. 228-229.

⁵ Ayşegül Altınova Şahin, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Rüşdiyye Mektepleri*, Ankara, 2018, pp. 112-118.

⁶ The General Education Regulations (*Maârif-i Umûmiye Nizamnâmesi*), consisting of five chapters and a total of 198 articles, were officially issued on 1 September 1869 (24 Ca 1286 AH) as part of the Ottoman Empire's broader educational reform efforts. Mine Çağır, İbrahim C. Türk, "1869 Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi ve Türk Eğitim Tarihindeki Yeri", *Avrasya Sosyal ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi (ASEAD)*, 4.11 (2017), p. 64.

⁷ Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908, Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline*, Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2001, p. 4.

through *ibtidâî* schools and *sıbyan mektebs* (4 years); secondary education through *rüşdiye* schools (4 years); and tertiary education through *idadî* (3 years) and *sultânî* schools (3 years). This category also included teacher training institutions such as the *Dârü'l-Muallimîn* (for male teachers) and *Dârü'l-Muallimât* (for female teachers), as well as higher education at the university level, primarily offered through the *Dârülfünun*. The *Mekâtib-i Husûsiye* comprised schools established by Muslim Ottoman subjects, non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, and foreign nationals.⁸

In addition to this institutional structuring, the 1869 regulations introduced provincial education councils (*maârif meclisleri*), tasked with implementing and supervising state education policies at the local level. These councils regulated a wide range of aspects related to schooling, including the geographical distribution of educational institutions, the duration of teaching terms, age requirements for enrolment, examination systems, and criteria for class advancement.⁹

Educational Reforms under Sultan Abdülhamid II

During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), the Ottoman Empire witnessed a notable intensification of educational reform and centralisation. Modern educational institutions were systematically established throughout the imperial provinces, serving not only to promote state-led modernisation but also to assert imperial authority and counter the growing influence of non-Muslim and foreign educational initiatives.¹⁰

The promulgation of the *Kanûn-ı Esâsî* (the first Ottoman constitution) in 1876 was particularly significant for its inclusion of educational provisions. Article 15 granted all Ottoman subjects the right to public and private education,¹¹ while Article 16 stipulated that

⁸ Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi*, Ankara, 1991, pp. 24-25.

⁹ Koray Ergin, "Osmanlı Devleti'nde Kanunnamelerden Nizamnamelere Geçiş," *SDÜ Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 39 (2016), p. 18.

¹⁰ Tekeli, op. cit., p. 471.

¹¹ Madde 15: "Emri tedris serbestir. Muayyen olan kanuna tebaiyet şartile her osmanlı umumi ve hususi tadrise mezundur". See, A. Şeref Gözübüyük, Suna Kili, *Türk Anayasa Metinleri 1839-1980*, Ankara, 1982, p. 28.

“all kinds of schools shall be placed under state supervision and there shall be unity in the education of Ottoman citizens, except in matters pertaining to religion.”¹² These clauses introduced a new legal framework aimed at homogenising education across the empire through a unified curriculum and pedagogy.

An equally transformative development was the designation of Ottoman Turkish as the official language of the state. This decision, embedded in Article 18, required that all civil servants, including teachers, be proficient in Turkish.¹³ As a result, the language became the cornerstone of basic education, reinforcing the state’s integrative goals.¹⁴ Despite the diversity of the imperial population, local linguistic and cultural particularities were largely excluded from the new, standardised educational framework.

Among the earliest state-sponsored institutions to appear in the provinces were the secondary schools (*rüşdiye mektepleri*). Designed to instil loyalty among peripheral populations, these schools were positioned as the highest level of education¹⁵ available in many provincial contexts, delivering a four-year curriculum.¹⁶ While the reformers sought to elevate modern education, they did not seek to fully abolish the classical system. Traditional *sıbyan* schools continued to operate, providing foundational instruction that served as a feeder for *rüşdiye* schools.

¹² Madde 16: “Bilcümle mektepler Devletın tahtı nezaretindedir. Tebaai osmaniyeınin terbiyesi bir sıyaki ittihat ve intizam üzere olmak için iktiza eden esbaba teşebbüs olunacak ve mileli muhtelifenin umuru itikadiyelerine müteallik olan usulü talimiyeye halel getirilmeyecektir”. Gözübüyük and Kili, *ibid*, pp. 28-29.

¹³ Madde 18: “Tebaaı osmaniyeınin hidematı devlette istihdam olunmak için devletin lisanı resmisi olan türkçeyi bilmeleri şarttır”. Gözübüyük and Kili, *ibid*, p. 29.

¹⁴ Füsün Üstel, “*Makbul Vatandaş’ın Peşinde - II. Meşrutiyetten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi*”, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2005, p. 27; Necdet Sakaoğlu, *Osmanlıdan Günümüze Eğitim Tarihi*, İstanbul, 2003, p. 93; Somel, *ibid*, pp. 168, 205.

¹⁵ Somel, *ibid*, p. 11.

¹⁶ Kodaman, *ibid*, p. 24.

Following the consolidation of Abdülhamid's regime after 1880, new layers were added to the educational hierarchy:¹⁷

- İbtidâî (primary) schools were established in villages and neighbourhoods
- Rüşdiye (secondary) schools in districts with a population of at least 550 households
- Idâdî (high) schools in localities with 1,000 households
- Sultânî schools in provincial capitals

This hierarchical expansion enabled educational modernisation to penetrate the *kazas* (counties) and *nahiyes* (subdistricts), connecting them to the imperial centre, Istanbul, through structured institutional links.¹⁸

Two distinct paradigms of education thus coexisted during the Hamidian era: the traditional *sıbyan mektebs*, representing classical Islamic pedagogy, and the modern *ibtidâîs*, which embodied the new state-centric approach. To support the expanding school system, teacher training colleges (*dârü'l-muallimîn*) were founded to supply qualified educators. Girls' education was also increasingly encouraged, and vocational as well as higher education (*dârü'l-muallimât*) facilities began to appear in provincial cities, marking a significant step toward a more inclusive and technically oriented Ottoman education system.¹⁹

Institutional Framework and Educational Structures in Mardin

All public, private, non-Muslim, and foreign schools within the Ottoman Empire were brought under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Education (*Maârif-i Umûmiye Nezâreti*), modelled after the French educational system. In alignment with the centralising policies of the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods, an Educational Directorate (*Maârif-i Umûmiye Müdürlüğü*) was established in each provincial

¹⁷ Somel, *ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁸ Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and the Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Oxford, 2002, p. 113.

¹⁹ Tekeli, *op. cit.*, pp. 471-72.

centre. These were supported by Educational Councils (*Maârif-i Umûmiye Meclisleri*) and further branches in districts (*kaza*) and sub-districts (*nahiye*) to ensure local implementation.²⁰

According to the *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir* (provincial yearbooks), educational councils were established in Mardin and its surrounding counties as early as 1884,²¹ though they only became fully operational around 1894.²² Each council typically consisted of a director and four appointed members. Their responsibilities included implementing ministry directives, managing both state funds and local donations, supervising schools, libraries, printing houses, and other educational and cultural institutions, overseeing examinations, issuing diplomas, and compiling regular reports on local educational conditions.²³

Under Sultan Abdülhamid II, several new schools were opened in Mardin to fulfil the educational ideals of the era. These included *ibtidâî* (primary) schools for both girls (*inâs*) and boys (*zükûr*), as well as a *rüşdiye* (secondary school) and an *idâdî* (high school).²⁴ While the Ottoman state funded a significant portion of the operational expenses of these institutions, charitable donations and revenues from religious endowments (*waqfs*) played a crucial supplementary role.²⁵

Despite these state-led modernisation initiatives, traditional educational institutions such as madrasas and *sıbyan mektebs*, emblematic of the classical Islamic pedagogical tradition, remained active in Mardin throughout the late Ottoman period.²⁶ Not only were some medieval madrasas continue to operate, but new ones were also constructed and continued to offer religious instruction. This enduring presence underscores the resilience of traditional Islamic education,

²⁰ Kodaman, *ibid*, pp. 38-48.

²¹ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1302 (1884-1885), defa 12; Ahmet Zeki İzgöer (ed.), *Salnâme-i Diyarbakır – Diyarbakır Salnameleri 1286-1323 (1869-1905)*, vol. 3, Diyarbakır 1999, p. 322.

²² *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1312 (1894-1895), defa 14; İzgöer, *ibid*, vol. 4, p. 136.

²³ Kodaman, *ibid*, p. 47.

²⁴ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1302 (1884-1885), defa 12; İzgöer, *ibid*, vol. 3, p. 351.

²⁵ BOA. MF.MKF. 109/44, 22 Şevval 1306 (21 June 1889); BOA. MF.MKT. 361/36, 22 Safer 1315 (23 July 1897); *Diyarbakır Vilayeti Resmî Gazetesi*, 4, 16 Cemâziye'l-evvel 1286 (24 August 1869), p. 2.

²⁶ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, Matbaa-i Amire, İstanbul, 1321, p. 506.

which coexisted with the emerging, secularised schooling system introduced through Tanzimat and Hamidian reforms.

With the notable exception of the *Mekteb-i Rüşdiyye*, constructed in 1900–1901 and later upgraded to an *idâdî*, no purpose-built school structures from the late Ottoman period have survived in Mardin. As a result, it remains uncertain whether dedicated *ibtidâî* (primary) school buildings were systematically constructed during the Tanzimat and Hamidian eras. Archival sources suggest that in 1894, two new *ibtidâî* school buildings were erected in the Şehidiye quarter, funded by revenues from local religious endowments (*vakıf gelirleri*).²⁷ While some purpose-built primary school structures may indeed have existed, it appears more likely that educational activities were frequently housed in pre-existing buildings originally intended for other functions, reflecting a pattern of spatial adaptation rather than systematic architectural investment in primary education infrastructure (Figs. 1-2).

Mardin was also home to a diverse array of non-Muslim communal schools and missionary-run establishments, which operated with varying degrees of autonomy.²⁸ Crucially, just as the Ottoman state selectively invested in facilities for Muslim students, no purpose-built school buildings appear to have been constructed specifically by the Christian communities. Instead, instruction commonly took place in repurposed ancillary structures within the courtyards of churches and monasteries, reflecting both spatial constraints and the adaptive strategies employed by these communities to sustain educational practice.

In contrast, Catholic and Protestant missionary organisations adopted a more systematic approach by constructing purpose-built school facilities as part of larger institutional complexes. These missionary complexes often comprised dedicated school buildings alongside churches, residences, and occasionally hospitals, demonstrating a more systematic and enduring investment in

²⁷ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 510.

²⁸ Sıraç Aktürk, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Mardin Sancağında Eğitim*, Atatürk University Social Sciences Institute, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Erzurum, 2015, p. 77.

educational infrastructure than the ad hoc adaptations seen in local communal schools.

A particularly significant initiative of the Hamidian period was the establishment of the Imperial School for Tribes (*Aşiret Mekteb-i Hümayûn*), founded by Abdülhamid II as a means of fostering political loyalty among the Empire's tribal populations, especially the Muslim Kurdish dynasties and religious sheikhdoms. This strategy aimed to reinforce ties between the Ottoman centre and the periphery by educating the sons of powerful tribal and religious leaders in Istanbul. The first such boarding school was opened in 1892, with plans for future replication across the Empire. Designed for 210 boys aged between 12 and 16, the school offered a five-year curriculum intended to prepare students for military or bureaucratic careers, thereby transforming them into loyal servants of the Ottoman state upon their return to their native regions.²⁹

İbtidâî (Primary) Schools

The *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*³⁰ records the establishment of the first modern *ibtidâî* (primary) schools in Mardin in 1301 AH / 1883–1884, during the governorship of Samih Pasha. These initial efforts included one *inâs ibtidâî mektebi* (girls' primary school) and two *zükûr ibtidâî mektebi* (boys' primary schools). In the following year, in 1302 AH / 1884–1885, two additional girls' schools and four boys' schools were opened,³¹ reflecting a rapid early expansion of the provincial primary education infrastructure.

Despite these promising developments, widespread financial difficulties, particularly the inability to pay teachers' salaries and cover basic operational costs, resulted in the closure of many of these

²⁹ Eugene L. Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes (1892-1907)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28 (1996), pp. 83-107; Selim Deringil, *İktidarın Sembolleri ve İdeoloji. II. Abdülhamid Dönemi (1876-1909)*, İstanbul 2002, pp. 108-111.

³⁰ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1301 (1883-1884), defa 11; İzgörer, *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 251.

³¹ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1302 (1884-1885), defa 12; İzgörer, *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 351.

schools, dispersing their student populations.³² It was not until 1894 that a renewed investment in primary education occurred.³³ That year, two new *ibtidâî* school buildings were constructed in the Şehidiye quarter, funded by revenues from local religious endowments.³⁴

By 1902, two officially recognised Hamidian-era *ibtidâî* schools were functioning in Mardin. Notably, the teaching personnel were recruited from the local population and held formal teaching diplomas from the *Dârü'l-Muallimîn* in Diyarbakır, illustrating the increasing professionalisation of the provincial teaching cadre.³⁵ Salaries were formally disbursed through the Ziraat Bank,³⁶ although delayed payments and irregular disbursements were common due to ongoing fiscal constraints in the region.³⁷

According to the *Annuaire Oriental du commerce de l'industrie, de l'administration et de la magistrature*, Mardin was home to 23 boys' schools and one girls' school in 1889–1890;³⁸ 15 boys' schools and one girls' school in 1896;³⁹ and, by 1901 and again in 1912, nine boys' schools and one girls' school.⁴⁰ However, the source does not differentiate between modern *ibtidâî* schools and traditional *sibyan*

³² Letter sent from Education Administration in Mardin to Diyarbakır Province, BOA. MF. MKT. 92/84, 28 Safer 1304 (26 November 1886). See also, Faruk Atik, *Merkezileşme Sürecinde Mardin'de İmar ve İnşa Faaliyetleri*, Mardin Artuklu University, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Mardin, 2021, p. 56.

³³ *Salnâme-i Diyarbakır*, sene 1302 (1884-1885), defa 14; İzgöer, *ibid*, vol. 4, p. 137.

³⁴ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 510.

³⁵ Aktürk, *ibid*, p., 126.

³⁶ BOA. MF. MKT. 652/23, 08 Cemâziye'l-evvel 1320 (13 August 1902)

³⁷ BOA. MF. MKT. 1035/80, 17 Zilhicce 1325 (21 January 1908).

³⁸ M. Thomas Boyajian, "Mardine (Sandjak de Diarbékir)", *Annuaire Oriental du commerce de l'industrie de l'administration et de la magistrature*, 9me année (1889-90 – Hégire 1306), p. 741.

³⁹ Ammasian Effendi, "Mardine (Sandjak de Diarbékir)", *Annuaire Oriental du commerce de l'industrie de l'administration et de la magistrature*, 14me année (1896-Hégire 1313-1314), p. 1095.

⁴⁰ A. Cassapian, "Mardine (Sandjak de Diarbékir)", *Annuaire Oriental du commerce de l'industrie de l'administration et de la magistrature*, 17me année (1901 – Hégire 1318-1319), p. 1315; Selmo Razakallah, "Mardine (Sandjak de Diarbékir)", *Annuaire Oriental, commerce, l'industrie administration, magistrature de L'Empire ottoman* (1912 – Hégire 1330), p. 1704.

mektepleri (Qur'anic elementary schools), nor does it specify the curricula or institutional nature of these schools.

Rüşdiye and Idâdî Schools

The initiative to establish a *rüşdiye* (secondary school) in the city centre of Mardin predates the promulgation of the General Education Regulations (*Maârif-i Umûmiye Nizamnâmesi*) in Istanbul in 1869. According to the *Diyarbakır Vilayet Gazetesi* dated 24 August 1869, construction had begun on a *rüşdiye* next to the Şehidiye Madrasa, and by that year, the building was reportedly nearing completion.⁴¹ However, it appears that this initial project remained unrealised at the time, with the actual establishment of the school delayed by nearly three decades.

The *Salnâme-i Diyarbakır* records that formal *rüşdiye* education in Mardin began in 1288 AH / 1870–71, with twenty-five students receiving instruction in a rented house due to the absence of a dedicated building and officially appointed staff.⁴² The earliest instruction was provided by Davut Efendi, who taught from 1870 to 1874.⁴³ In 1875, İbrahim Lebib Efendi was appointed as the official teacher, leading to an increase in student enrolment to forty.⁴⁴ Archival correspondence between the Ministry of Education (*Maârif Nezâreti Celîlesi*) and the Imperial Council of State (*Bâb-ı Âlî Sadâret Dairesi*) further indicates that, over the following years, not only did the

⁴¹ "In accordance with the directive and notification issued by the provincial administration regarding the construction of a *rüşdiye* school in the town of Mardin, the construction of the aforementioned school has commenced in a sound and orderly manner, built with masonry, adjacent to the Şehidiye Madrasa. This progress has been made possible through financial contributions from civil servants and other philanthropists, and the building is now nearing completion". *Diyarbakır Vilayeti Resmî Gazetesi*, numro 4, 16 Cemâziye'l-evvel 1286 (24 August 1869), in Cihat Durgun, *Diyarbakır Vilayet Gazetesi'nin (1-15 Sayıları, H. 1286-M. 1869) Transkripsiyonu ve Değerlendirilmesi*, Bingöl University, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Bingöl, 2002, p. 36.

⁴² *Salnâme-i Diyarbakır*, sene 1287 (1870-1871), defa 2; İzgöer, ibid, vol. 1, p. 130.

⁴³ *Salnâme-i Diyarbakır*, sene 1288 (1871-1872), defa 3; *Salnâme-i Diyarbakır*, sene 1290 (1873-1874), defa 5; İzgöer, ibid, vol. 1, pp. 195, 343.

⁴⁴ *Salnâme-i Diyarbakır*, sene 1292 (1875), defa 7; İzgöer, ibid, vol. 2, p. 179.

position of head teacher change, but the number of branch teachers also grew significantly.⁴⁵

By 1890, increasing student numbers prompted a request to the Ministry of Finance (*Maliye Nezâreti*) in Istanbul for the construction of a new classroom and the repair of existing facilities.⁴⁶ However, the ministry responded by stating that the construction, maintenance, and furnishing of *rüşdiye* and *ibtidâî* schools were to be funded by local communities, and thus no support could be provided from the national education budget.⁴⁷ As the existing arrangements proved insufficient, calls for a purpose-built educational facility grew more urgent.

On 3 July 1897, a telegram was sent from Mardin to the Ministry of Education, requesting authorisation for the construction of a proper school building due to the inadequacy of the rented premises.⁴⁸ The long-abandoned site of the Muzafferiyye Madrasa was proposed for redevelopment. It was reported that, with financial contributions from the public, the construction of a *rüşdiye* school had commenced on the site, including a mosque within the complex, and permission was therefore requested.

Initially, the proposed transformation of the Muzafferiyye Madrasa into a school met resistance. It was argued that the madrasa had been endowed for the instruction of *ulûm-ı dîniyye ve âliye* (religious and higher sciences), and as such, repurposing the structure for secular education was deemed impermissible without the approval of the relevant religious authorities. Consequently, an order was issued to halt construction immediately, and local educational officials were duly informed.⁴⁹

However, a few months later, the position shifted. In correspondence dated 6 February 1898 from the Imperial Council (*Bâb-*

⁴⁵ On this subject, numerous archival documents are available in the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives (*BOA*), particularly in the *MF.MKT* (Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalemî) collection. See also, Aktürk, *ibid*, p. 98.

⁴⁶ Aktürk, *ibid*, p. 93.

⁴⁷ *BOA*. MF. MKT. 117/12, 24 Şaban 1307 (15 April 1890).

⁴⁸ Aktürk, *ibid*, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁹ *BOA*. MF.MKT. 575-1, 10 Cemaziye'l-âhir 1315 (6 November 1897).

ı Âlî / *Sadâret Dairesi* / *Âmed-i Dîvân-ı Hümâyün*), it was acknowledged that although altering the function of charitable endowments (*vakıfs*) was generally impermissible without formal authorisation, the construction of both the mosque and school buildings had nearly been completed. Under these exceptional circumstances, the project was allowed to proceed, on the condition that the endowed status of the property be preserved.⁵⁰ This decision was formally reviewed and endorsed by the Council of State (*Şûrâ-yı Devlet*) on 27 February 1898, with the stipulation that the historical foundations of the Muzafferiyye Madrasa be retained.⁵¹

In 1317 AH / 1899 CE, the deteriorating Muzafferiyye Madrasa was demolished, and a modern *Mekteb-i Rüşdiyye* was constructed on its site in *Rebî'ü'l-evvel* 1318 AH / July 1900 CE under the supervision of Halid Bey Efendi, then-governor of Diyarbekir (r. 1896–1902). The school was formally inaugurated on 10 July 1900 (12 *Rebî'ü'l-evvel* 1318) with a ceremony attended by Governor Halid Bey, Mardin Mutasarrıf Nüzhet Pasha, Muslim and non-Muslim dignitaries, and local notables. An inscription in Ottoman Turkish, rendered in *sülûs* script above the main portal, commemorates the school's establishment and the significance of the event.

سَايَةِ تَرْقِيَّاتِوَايَةِ حَضْرَتِ خِلَافَتِنَاهَيْدِهِ دِيَارْبِكْرِوَالْيَسَى
عَظُوفَتْلُو خَالِدِ بَكِّ أَفَنْدِي حَضْرَتْلَرِينَكْ أَتْرَ هِمَّتْ
وَعَيْرْتْلَرِيْلَهْ إِعَانَةً اِنْشَاء قِلِنَانِ اِشْبُو مَكْتَبِكْ رَسْمْ
كُشَادِي بِيكْ اَوْجِيُوْرُ اَوْنْ سَكِرْ سَنَهْ سِي رَبِيْعِ الْاَوْلَنْدَهْ اِجْرَاء قِلْنِمِشْدِرْ
سَنَهْ ١٣١٨

Sâye-i terakkiyyât-vâye-i Hazret-i Hilâfet-penâhîde Diyârbekir Vâlisi
'Atüfetlû Hâlid Bek Efendi Hazretleri'nin eser-i himmet
ve gayretleriyle i'âneten inşâ kılınan işbu mektebin resm-i
küşâdı bin üç yüz on sekiz senesi Rebî'ü'l-evvelinde icrâ kılınmıştır.
Sene 1318

⁵⁰ BOA. İ. EV. 18-32, 05 Şevval 1315 (27 February 1898).

⁵¹ BOA. ŞD. 143-37, 27 Şaban 1315 (21 January 1898).

Under the auspicious shadow of the progress-inspiring protection of His Imperial Majesty the Caliphate,

through the efforts and zeal of His Excellency Atufetlü Halid Bey Efendi, Governor of Diyarbekir,

this school was constructed with charitable contributions and its official inauguration was carried out

in the month of July in the year 1318 Hijrî (1900 CE).

Remarkably, only three months after its inauguration, the school was elevated to *idâdî* (high school) status on 29 October 1900, in celebration of the 25th anniversary of Sultan Abdülhamid II's accession to the throne.⁵² In a letter dated the same day and addressed to the Directorate of Internal Press (*Matbûât-ı Dâhiliye İdaresi*), Mardin Mutasarrıf Gâzî Mihalzâde Mehmed Nüzhet reported that "the *rüşdiye* school constructed in Mardin through public donations was transformed into an *idâdî* school by imperial decree, and inaugurated under the name *Şehinşâhî Şevket-i İttisâm* on this auspicious occasion."⁵³

Thereafter, the school became known as the Mardin Hamidian High School (*Mardin Hamidiye Idâdî Mektebi*). According to the *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i* for 1321 AH / 1903–1904, the school had an enrolment of sixty-one students,⁵⁴ while the *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir* reports a slightly higher figure of seventy-five.⁵⁵ The curriculum encompassed a broad range of subjects, including Ottoman Turkish, French, Arabic, Persian, history, geography, drawing, mathematics, calligraphy, religious instruction and ethics, agriculture, and hygiene.

Operational expenses were administered by the Provincial Directorate of Education (*Vilâyet Maârif İdaresi*), while teachers'

⁵² However, Sultan Abdülhamid II acceded to the throne on 31 August 1876.

⁵³ BOA. MF.MKT. 536/11, 26 Receb 1318 (19 November 1900).

⁵⁴ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 506.

⁵⁵ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1321 (1903-1904), defa 19; İzgöer, *ibid*, vol. 5, p. 272.

salaries were disbursed via the Mardin branch of the Ziraat Bank. According to the *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, *rüşdiye*-level education was discontinued following the establishment of the *Idâdî*, which assumed control over the original premises.⁵⁶

The building⁵⁷ has endured into the present day, serving over time as a *rüşdiye*, *idâdî*, *ortaokul* (secondary school), commercial high school, and vocational high school for girls.⁵⁸ Today, it continues to function as an *olgunlaşma merkezi* (maturation institute), reflecting its lasting civic utility. Contrary to earlier assumptions, the mosque referenced in the original documents was likely never constructed on the site of the former Muzafferiyye Madrasa.

In 1932, during the early Republican period, a new primary school building was erected adjacent to the original structure as part of the national literacy campaigns following the Alphabet Reform.⁵⁹ Designed in architectural harmony with the earlier building, this new addition signals the state's ongoing commitment to expanding educational access and modernising school infrastructure. The two buildings, joined by a common staircase and entered through twin portals, each bearing a triangular pediment, reflect a cohesive architectural ensemble serving Mardin's educational needs across generations.

Architectural Analysis of the *Mekteb-i Rüşdiye*

The school building is located on an elevated site overlooking the Mesopotamian plain, a location that not only offers commanding views of the surrounding landscape but may also reflect the symbolic and strategic considerations underpinning its original placement. Positioned on the southwestern flank of the Zinciriye (Sultan İsa)

⁵⁶ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1319 (1901-1902), defa 18; İzgöer, *ibid*, vol. 5, p. 105.

⁵⁷ The *Rüşdiye / Idâdî* school building in Mardin is located in the central district of Artuklu, within the Şar neighbourhood, on plot number 9 of block 68.

⁵⁸ Özden Gökhan Baydaş, *Diyarbakir ve Mardin'deki Tarihi Kamu Yapıları*, Yüzüncü Yıl University, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Van, 2007, p. 154.

⁵⁹ İzzettin Kutlu, Saide S. Eray, "Mardin İdadi Mektebi'nin Mekansal ve İşlevsel Değişimi Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *Sanat Tarihi Dergisi*, 30.1 (2021), pp. 289, 293.

Madrassa, built in 1385, the school's placement suggests a deliberate integration into Mardin's historic architectural and topographic fabric.

Although some secondary sources⁶⁰ attribute the construction of the rüşdiye school building to the architect Lole, there is no extant documentary evidence to support this claim. In the absence of archival references or inscriptions, such an attribution remains speculative and must be treated with scholarly caution.⁶¹

It is a two-storey, rectangular structure built in the Ottoman neoclassical style. According to architectural historian Zeynep Çelik, Esad Saffet Pasha, then Ottoman ambassador to Paris, sent architectural plans for schools to Istanbul in 1885–86, which were later distributed to the provinces.⁶² This explains the strong resemblance between Ottoman provincial school buildings and Parisian educational architecture of the era.

The school's rectangular classrooms are arranged around a cross-shaped central corridor, with the lower floor vaulted with barrel ceilings and the upper floor finished with flat ceilings. Each room opens to the corridor through large windows and doors, ensuring a well-lit interior. The façades are symmetrically arranged, and the storeys are separated by plainly moulded friezes. Round-arched windows with keystones are set in groups of two or three between engaged pilasters, each topped with simple capitals. The entrance is marked by a two-storey projecting portico in baldachin form, supported by paired and clustered columns on tall bases (Fig. 1).

A particularly remarkable feature is the courtyard portico with a triangular pediment, which blends the Ottoman neoclassical style with Mardin's local architectural traditions. The rectangular entrance is flanked by stylised vegetal interlace motifs and mouldings. Engaged

⁶⁰ Kutlu and Eray, op. cit., 289.

⁶¹ On this subject, see Birgöl Açıkyıldız, "Architects, Stonemasons, and Building Artisans of Mardin: Builders and Maintainers of a Local Tradition", *Prof. Dr. Zülküf Güneli'ye Armağan – Tasarım & Koruma*, ed. E.E. Dağtekin, F.M. Halifeoğlu, G. Payaslı Oğuz, H. Özyılmaz, İstanbul, 2018, pp. 61-70.

⁶² Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914*, Seattle and London, 2008, p. 194.

columns support the pediment, which contains a segmental arch framed by friezes, its interior decorated with lotus and palmette designs. Two symmetrical elliptical Arabic inscriptions read *mekteb 1318 (1900–1901)* and *mekteb-i eftâl*.⁶³ Above the arch, a central motif features clustered palmettes and a pinwheel element, all framed with dentils and relief friezes (Fig. 2).

This neoclassical portico later became a model for school entrances and windows in the Mardin. A smaller replica was constructed next to it during the early Republican period in 1932, serving as the gate to the newly built school.

Traditional Education

Prior to the Tanzimat era (1839-1876), education in the Ottoman Empire was predominantly conducted through traditional Islamic institutions. These included *sıbyan mektebs* (elementary religious schools), madrasas (higher theological and legal academies), and *Enderun* schools, an elite institution housed within the Topkapı Palace. Supplementing these formal structures were informal centres of learning such as mosques, private libraries, and the residences of affluent statesmen and members of the *ulema* (religious scholarly class), many of whom maintained private study circles (*halqas*) that functioned as instructional spaces.

Additionally, *tekke*, *zâwiya*, and *dergâh* (various types of dervish lodges) played a vital role in religious education, particularly in the spiritual instruction of broader society. These Sufi institutions transmitted mystical knowledge and practices, blending moral guidance with communal identity formation. Their inclusive and often

⁶³ Although the archival sources do not explicitly mention whether the building was used as a preschool, the inscription on the gate indicates that it functioned both as a *mekteb* and as a *mekteb-i eftâl*. The *mekteb-i eftâl* represents one of the earliest institutional forms of modern preschool education in the Ottoman Empire, particularly gaining prominence during the Second Constitutional Period (1908–1918).

non-hierarchical pedagogical methods contributed significantly to the Ottoman educational ecosystem.⁶⁴

Among these institutions, the *Enderun* held exceptional status. Functioning until 1909, it was a palace school designed to train the empire's administrative and military elite. It primarily recruited Christian boys through the *devşirme* system, an elite levy system whereby non-Muslim children were taken into imperial service, and educated them in a highly disciplined, centralised environment. The curriculum included Islamic sciences, languages, physical training, and statecraft, with the explicit goal of producing loyal and competent officials and officers for the Ottoman state.⁶⁵

The overwhelming majority of these traditional educational institutions were sustained through religious endowments (*waqfs*) and private charitable donations. Unlike the centrally regulated schools established during the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods, these institutions operated independently of the imperial bureaucracy. Only those destined for high-level posts within the civil or military hierarchy were educated under direct state patronage, often through palace or military schools.

Despite sweeping reforms in the 19th century aimed at modernising the Ottoman educational system, traditional institutions such as *sıbyan mektebi* and *madrasas* remained active and continued to play a meaningful role in provincial education.⁶⁶ In many regions, including Mardin, these institutions coexisted with newly founded secular and centralised schools, reflecting a hybrid educational landscape in which classical and modern paradigms of knowledge operated in parallel. This coexistence underscores the resilience of the Islamic pedagogical tradition and its capacity to adapt within the broader context of Ottoman imperial transformation.

⁶⁴ Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Eğitim", *Osmanlı Uygarlığı* 1, ed. Halil İnalçık and Günsel Renda, Ankara, 2009, p. 345.

⁶⁵ Ülker Akkutay, *Enderûn Mektebi*, Ankara, 1984, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Tekeli, op. cit., p. 466.

Sıbyan Mektebs

Sıbyan mektebs functioned as the principal form of elementary education for Muslim children in the Ottoman Empire. Typically enrolling pupils as young as five or six years old, these institutions were ubiquitous across the empire's urban neighbourhoods, villages, and provincial districts. Their operations were generally sustained through *waqf* (endowment) funding, and instruction was delivered by madrasa-educated teachers, local *imams*, or other literate religious figures.⁶⁷

The pedagogical aim of *sıbyan mektebs* was to instil foundational literacy and numeracy skills, primarily in Ottoman Turkish. Instruction centred on reading and writing, basic arithmetic, and religious education, with particular emphasis placed on the memorisation of selected *surahs* from the Qur'an. Upon completion, students who demonstrated aptitude often progressed to more advanced religious education within the *madrasas*, where they received formal training in Islamic jurisprudence (*fıqh*), Arabic grammar, logic, and theology.⁶⁸

According to the *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umûmiye*, several *sıbyan* schools were founded in Mardin between 1874 and 1905, during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁶⁹ These schools were generally affiliated with mosque complexes and played a central role in the religious and communal life of the city. The *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir* for the year 1321 AH (1903–1904 CE) explicitly lists five *sıbyan mektebs* operating in Mardin.⁷⁰ However, detailed archival documentation regarding their exact locations, teaching staff, or enrolment figures remains limited. It is also significant that, despite their historical importance, *sıbyan* schools are largely absent from the broader educational accounts provided in the *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, which otherwise offers extensive information on institutional infrastructure in the post-Tanzimat era. This omission may suggest either a lack of systematic reporting or a historiographical tendency to prioritise centralised, modern institutions introduced during the Tanzimat and

⁶⁷ Atik, *ibid*, 45.

⁶⁸ İhsanoğlu, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

⁶⁹ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 509.

⁷⁰ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1321 (1903-1904), defa 18, defa 19; İzgöer, *ibid*, vol. 5, pp. 203, 307.

Hamidian reforms, to the detriment of long-established local traditions of Islamic education.

Madrasas

The madrasa, an institution of higher Islamic learning, served as a cornerstone of the Ottoman educational system from the foundation of the state. Traditionally, madrasas offered instruction in the Islamic sciences, *hadith* (Prophetic traditions), *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence), as well as elements of the rational and natural sciences. Functioning under the patronage of religious endowments (*waqfs*), they played a central role in the training of civil, military, and judicial elites.

Mardin, a historic urban centre with deep-rooted Islamic traditions, is home to a remarkable concentration of madrasa⁷¹ that testify to its enduring role as a centre of religious scholarship. Architecturally and intellectually, these institutions reflect the city's prominence during the Artuqid (1101–1409) and Akkoyunlu (1378–1501) periods, when Mardin emerged as a significant focus of Sunni Islamic learning in Upper Mesopotamia.

During the Tanzimat era, however, madrasas came under increasing scrutiny from Ottoman reformers who viewed them as obstacles to progress. These institutions were criticised for their rigidity, resistance to innovation, and perceived inability to train the technocratic personnel needed by a centralising and modernising state. Consequently, madrasas were increasingly marginalised within the

⁷¹ Among the extant examples are the Sitti Radviyye (Hatuniye) Madrasa (12th century), Necmeddin Madrasa (12th century), Eminateddin Madrasa (12th century), Şehidiye Madrasa (13th century), Altunboğa Madrasa (14th century), Zinciriye (Sultan İsa) Madrasa (1385), Kasimiye (Sultan Kasım) Madrasa (late 14th–early 15th century), Marufiye Madrasa (Beyt el-Artuki) (14th–15th century), and Shah Sultan Hatun Madrasa (late 15th–early 16th century). In addition to these surviving monuments, several historical madrasas no longer exist, including the Muzafferiye Madrasa (13th century), Husamiye Madrasa (12th century), Melik Mansur (Sheikh Aban / Libben) Madrasa (13th–14th century), and Paşavatlar Evi (Savur Kapı) Madrasa, for which the precise date remains uncertain. See, Ara Altun, *Mardin'de Türk Devri Mimarisi*, İstanbul, 2010, pp. 70-114.

emerging imperial educational hierarchy dominated by secular and state-controlled schools.⁷²

Nonetheless, a number of Mardin's medieval madrasas continued to function well into the late Ottoman period. Among them, the Kasımiye Madrasa (14th–15th centuries) stands out for its monumental scale, elegant articulation, and ornate decorative programme. Dramatically sited on the western slopes of the city overlooking the Dunaysir Plain, it remained operational during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, with enrolment figures of 86 students in 1318 AH / 1900–1901 CE,⁷³ and 75 students in both 1319 and 1321 AH (1901–1902⁷⁴ and 1903–1904⁷⁵ respectively) (Fig. 3).

Another significant institution is the Şehidiye Madrasa (13th century), located in the Şehidiye neighbourhood near Government Square in central Mardin. This complex, featuring a mosque, madrasa, tomb, and *iwans* arranged around an open courtyard, is distinguished by its elaborate stone craftsmanship. This madrasa also retained its function during this same period, enrolling between 11⁷⁶ and 12 students in 1321 AH / 1903–1904⁷⁷ (Fig. 4).

In addition to these historic establishments, late 19th century saw the foundation of two new madrasas by respected local scholars: Sheikh Hamid (1802–1881), a leading Naqshbandi figure from a learned family originating in Siirt,⁷⁸ and Sheikh İbrahim.⁷⁹ According to

⁷² Kodaman, *ibid*, p. 1.

⁷³ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1318, p. 1341.

⁷⁴ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1319, p. 611.

⁷⁵ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 506.

⁷⁶ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1318, p. 1341.

⁷⁷ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 506.

⁷⁸ Muhammed Sadık Hamidi, "Mardin ve İlçelerinde Hâmidiyye Medreseleri", *Medrese ve İlahiyat Kavşağında İslâmî İlimler (Uluslararası Sempozyum)*, Vol. II, ed. İsmail Narin, Bingöl, 2013.

⁷⁹ No reliable information has been found regarding the identity of Sheikh İbrahim, nor was it possible to determine the location of the Sheikh İbrahim Madrasa during my fieldwork in Mardin. One of Sheikh Hamid's sons bore the same name, Sheikh İbrahim (1821–1895), and is known to have founded madrasas in Dara and Ayınkâf (present-day Gercüş). However, it remains unclear whether he also established a

contemporary records, the Hamidiye Madrasa⁸⁰ enrolled 61 students in 1321 AH / 1903–1904, while the Sheikh İbrahim Madrasa enrolled 14⁸¹ (Fig. 5).

These figures attest to the persistence and adaptive capacity of Islamic education in Mardin, even amidst broader imperial attempts to restructure and secularise the educational system. They underscore how local religious authorities and communities continued to value traditional forms of learning, sustaining them within a rapidly transforming sociopolitical landscape.

Minority Schools

The Ottoman Empire formally recognised only three non-Muslim communities as *millets*: the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Gregorian, and Jewish populations. The Christian population was governed through two officially sanctioned patriarchates in Istanbul, namely, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Armenian Patriarchate. In a city like Mardin, where diverse ethnic and religious communities coexisted, including Arabs (Muslims), Armenians, Chaldeans, Jews, Kurds (Muslim and Yezidi), and Syriacs, this classification shaped both administrative policies and educational frameworks. Arabs and Kurds were categorised under the Muslim *millet*, while Syriacs were described as the “Syriac *taifa* affiliated with the Armenian *millet*” and the Chaldeans were placed under the authority of the Church of the East (Nestorian)

madrasa in Mardin itself. For information about Sheikh İbrahim Hamidi, see İbrahim Büyük, *Şeyh Hâmid-i Mardinî ve Hâlidiliğin Hâmidîyye Kolu*, Şırnak University, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Şırnak, 2019, pp. 108-109.

⁸⁰ The Hamidiye Madrasa forms part of a larger complex comprising a madrasa, a dervish lodge (*tekke*), and a mosque. The complex is located in the Babu’s-Sor Gate neighbourhood of Mardin. Its founder was Sheikh Hamid himself, who established the madrasa and dervish lodge shortly after settling in Mardin in 1844. The mosque within the complex remains in use today for daily prayers and is now known as the Hamidiye Mosque. Although the adjacent structures that once served as the madrasa and dervish lodge are still standing, they no longer host any religious or scholarly activities. Büyük, *ibid*, p. 107.

⁸¹ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 506.

and were affiliated with the Armenian Gregorian Patriarchate in Istanbul through the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate.⁸²

Within the non-Muslim communities, both social cohesion and educational activity were closely tied to religious institutions, with churches and synagogues serving as the principal venues for instruction. Education was predominantly administered under clerical authority, with teachers typically being priests or rabbis. Instruction was delivered in each community's liturgical language, such as Greek, Armenian, Chaldean, Syriac, or Hebrew, reinforcing religious and cultural identity. Prior to the Tanzimat era (1839–1876), educational practices among minority groups remained largely informal, locally organised, and community-driven. Lessons were often held within or adjacent to houses of worship, and curricula were primarily focused on religious instruction and moral formation.⁸³

Evidence suggests that the presence of non-Muslim educational institutions in Mardin dates back well before the 19th century. Archival records indicate that one of the most prominent among them, the Mardin Boys' Primary School, was established as early as 1695–96 and enrolled approximately 140 students. This early foundation underscores the deep-rooted tradition of community-based education among Mardin's non-Muslim populations, predating the formal reforms of the Tanzimat period.⁸⁴

The Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*) of 1856 marked a significant turning point in the educational landscape of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in relation to its non-Muslim populations. The 1856 Edict unequivocally extended educational rights to all Ottoman subjects,

⁸² Açıkyıldız, Birgül, "Syriac and Chaldean History and Culture", *Diyarbakır's Documentary Cultural Heritage: Manuscripts of Syriac Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary and Mar Petyun Chaldean Church*, ed. B. Açıkyıldız and N. Soyukaya, İstanbul, 2024, pp. 56-57.

⁸³ Interview with Metropolitan Saliba Özmen of the Dayr al-Za'farān Monastery, representing the Syriac Orthodox Church, 26.04.2025.

⁸⁴ BOA. MF. MGM. 4/73, 14 Eylül 1309 (26 September 1893), in Hatip Yıldız, "II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Diyarbakır Vilayeti'nde Yabancı Okulların Denetlenmesi Çabaları ve Ermeni Milliyetçiliğinin Yayılışı", *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 7.24 (2008), p. 259.

irrespective of religious affiliation.⁸⁵ It granted recognised communities the right to establish and manage their own schools, benefit from state-owned properties for educational purposes, and allow their members access to public civil and military institutions. This measure ensured greater cultural autonomy and institutional development for non-Muslim groups. However, it also introduced mechanisms for increased centralised oversight: all educational institutions, regardless of religious orientation, were placed under the supervision of a Mixed Educational Council appointed by the Sultan. Furthermore, the appointment of teachers was brought under state authority, signalling an early attempt to standardise and centralise education across the Empire.⁸⁶

According to the *Annuaire Oriental du commerce de l'industrie, de l'administration et de la magistrature* dated 1306 AH (1889–90 CE), Mardin was home to a diverse and vibrant array of educational institutions reflecting its multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character. These included two Syriac schools and two Chaldean schools.⁸⁷ Vital Cuinet observed that by the 1890s, all non-Muslim educational institutions in the city operated solely at the primary level. These included two boys' schools affiliated with the Armenian Catholic community, two serving the Chaldean Catholic community, two run by the Syriac Catholic community, and one maintained by the Syriac Orthodox Church.⁸⁸

By 1896, this landscape had evolved: while some schools had closed, new institutions had emerged. At that time, Mardin hosted one Syriac school, one Chaldean school, and two Armenian Catholic schools (for boys and girls), alongside fifteen Turkish boys' schools and one Turkish

⁸⁵ Tekeli, op. cit., p. 467.

⁸⁶ Ayşe Ozil, "Ottoman Reform, Non-Muslim Subjects, and Constitutive Legislation: The Reform Edict of 1856 and the Greek General Regulations of 1862", *Narrated Empires: Perceptions of Late Habsburg and Ottoman Multinationalism*, ed. Johanna Chovanec and Olof Heilo, Cham, 2021, p. 173.

⁸⁷ Boyajian, op. cit., p. 741.

⁸⁸ Cuinet, *ibid*, p. 498.

girls' school.⁸⁹ According to the same annual records for 1901 and 1912, the number of local Christian schools remained stable at four.⁹⁰

However, the *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir* for 1319 (1901–02) and 1321 (1903–04) reports the operation of seven Christian schools in Mardin.⁹¹ Furthermore, the *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umûmiye* of 1321 (1903–04) records three additional institutions affiliated with the Armenian community: an Armenian Protestant *rüşdiye*, an Armenian *rüşdiye* likely of the Catholic denomination, and an Armenian *idâdî*. The Armenian Protestant *rüşdiye* was founded in 1277 AH (1860–61 CE) and formally licensed on 8 August 1309 AH (1893 CE). While the Catholic *rüşdiye* appears to have operated without an official license, the *idâdî* was established in 1280 AH (1863–64 CE) and licensed on 16 March 1309 AH (1893 CE).⁹²

Further testimony comes from by M. Joseph Tfinkdji, a Chaldean Catholic priest in Mardin, who documented the city's Christian educational landscape in 1914. He reported that the Armenian community operated two large and well-organised boys' schools; the Chaldeans maintained a flourishing school within their church compound; the Syriac Catholics oversaw two schools; and the Syriac Orthodox community ran three schools. Notably, the latter institutions adopted pedagogical methods influenced by Protestant missionary education.⁹³ According to H. Gabriel Akyüz, Syriac Orthodox schools in Mardin were established within the courtyards of several historically significant church complexes. These included the 6th-century Mar Behnam and Saro Church (commonly known as Kırklar Church), the Mort Şmuni Church (6th century), and the 5th-century Mar Mihael Church. Additionally, a Syriac teacher training school was founded in the early 20th century at the Dayr al-Za'farân Monastery, a major

⁸⁹ Ammasian Effendi, op. cit., p. 1095.

⁹⁰ Cassapian, op. cit., p. 1315; Razakallah, op. cit., p. 1704.

⁹¹ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1319 (1901-1902), defa 18; sene 1321 (1903-1904), defa 19; İzgöer, ibid, vol. 5, pp. 203, 307.

⁹² *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1321, p. 507.

⁹³ M. Joseph Tfinkdji, "Le Catholicisme à Mardin", *Les Missions catholiques* (1914), pp. 29-30.

ecclesiastical centre dating back to the 5th century.⁹⁴ This initiative marked a significant step in the institutionalisation of Syriac Orthodox (*Kadim*) Christian education in the region (Fig. 6).

Among all minority schools, the most detailed documentation exists concerning the Syriac Orthodox school, located at Mardin Mar Behnam and Saro Church, which was the last private minority school operating in Mardin. According to its priest, H. Gabriel Akyüz, the institution was founded in 1799. This claim is corroborated by archival materials written in Classical Syriac, including a Gospel commentary compiled in the same year. These sources indicate that the school was established under the trusteeship of Muksi Adem Tatreğa, son of Ilyas, and remained operational until 1928.⁹⁵

By 1920, the school had developed into a comprehensive educational institution encompassing primary, middle, and secondary levels, governed by its own internal statutes and regulations. In 1928, the school's director, Metropolitan Mar Ivennis Hanna Gandor, formally petitioned the Diyarbakır Directorate of National Education for its closure, which was subsequently approved.⁹⁶

However, a 1926 memorandum from the Mardin Education Council (*Maarif Meclisi*) to the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Vekâleti Celîlesi*) presents a slightly different chronology. According to this report,⁹⁷ the school was established without official authorisation in 1335 AH (1919 CE) and was later granted a licence under the name *Dârü't-ta'lîm Idâdîsi* in accordance with the provisions of the *Mekâtib-i Husûsiyye Talimatnâmesi* in Nisan 1337 (April 1921). Nevertheless, following repeated inspections and administrative evaluations, it was determined that the institution could no longer fulfil the requirements of an *idâdî* school. Consequently, a formal closure order was issued in 1340 AH (1924 CE).

⁹⁴ Gabriel Akyüz, "Mardin Merkez'de Bulunan Süryani Kadim Kiliseleri", *Taşın Belleği Mardin*, ed. F. Özdem, İstanbul, 2005, pp. 365, 372, 377, 381.

⁹⁵ Gabriel Akyüz, *Mardin İli'nin Merkezinde Civar Köylerinde ve İlçelerinde Bulunan Kiliselerin ve Manastırların Tarihi*, İstanbul, 1998, pp. 63-66.

⁹⁶ Akyüz. *Ibid*, pp. 65-66.

⁹⁷ BOA. 180-9-0-0/Genel, 36-19-3, 02 September 1926.

Subsequent appeals led to a revised authorisation, this time permitting the institution to operate at the primary (*ibtidâî*) level as a coeducational (*muhtelit*) school. This proposal was approved by the Provincial Administrative Council (*Vilâyet idare Meclisi*). Under the directorship of Sâdik Bey, the school was permitted to continue functioning. However, due to the absence of an officially printed licence (*ruhsatname*), both the director and the institution remained unofficial in legal terms.

The document further notes that a detailed investigation was being conducted into the current status of the school. It states that should any legal irregularities be identified, this Syriac Orthodox institution, being the last remaining private school in Mardin, would be subject to closure. It is likely that the school was subsequently shut down around 1928, possibly within a short period of two years following the report.

The school's multilingual and interdisciplinary curriculum was particularly remarkable. Subjects included:⁹⁸

- Languages: Syriac, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and English
- Sciences and humanities: Geography, Arithmetic, Algebra, Engineering, Natural Sciences, Chemistry, Hygiene, Moral and Civic Education, History
- Arts and practical disciplines: Calligraphy, Drawing, Physical Education, Object Studies, *Usul defteri* (record-keeping)
- Religious education: Chant theory and sacred music (*makamlar*), based on the *Zahra Kudsiye* (*The Holy Rose*), a theological text.

These schools were primarily funded by the church, supplemented by individual donations, community fundraising efforts, and modest parental contributions. Instruction typically remained at the elementary level and was conducted in each community's vernacular, though Ottoman Turkish was also included in the curriculum. Armenian Catholics, in particular, often attended Latin schools operated by Italian

⁹⁸ Akyüz. *ibid*, pp. 65.

Capuchin priests and Franciscan nuns, especially those from Lons-le-Saunier, where they received instruction in French, Italian, Ottoman Turkish, and Armenian.⁹⁹

Although discrepancies exist among the sources concerning the exact number of schools, collectively they provide valuable insight into the educational diversity and institutional development among Mardin's indigenous Christian communities in the late Ottoman period.

Efforts to bring these schools under tighter state control accelerated with the General Education Regulations of 1869 and the establishment of the Inspectorate of Non-Muslim and Foreign Schools (*Mile-i Gayr-i Müslime ve Ecnebi Okulları Müfettişliği*) in 1886. Under these frameworks, the Ottoman state assumed the right to:¹⁰⁰

- Inspect curricula and textbooks
- Mandate Ottoman Turkish as a compulsory subject
- Appoint Turkish-speaking Muslim teachers to oversee instruction
- Fund teaching staff through provincial education budgets

The 1880 amendments to the Education Law expanded the state's power to monitor not just curricula but also the materials used in non-Muslim schools. In 1894, Ottoman Turkish became a mandatory subject, and Muslim instructors were appointed accordingly, ensuring these schools could be observed from within.¹⁰¹ Ottoman sources note that Ottoman Turkish (*Lisân-ı Osmânî*) teachers were assigned to Armenian, Chaldean, and Syriac schools in Diyarbakır, a policy presumed to have applied in Mardin as well. In addition, the licensing of non-Muslim schools in Diyarbakır province formally began in 1893.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Cuinet, *ibid.*, p. 414.

¹⁰⁰ Mustafa Gündüz, *Osmanlı Eğitim Mirası. Klasik ve Modern Dönem Üzerine Makaleler*, Ankara, 2013, pp. 86-87.

¹⁰¹ Deringil, *ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁰² Yıldız, *op. cit.*, 259-260.

Further restrictions were imposed on public ceremonies such as examinations and award distributions: speeches to be delivered by school principals, teachers, or students were required to be submitted in advance to the education authorities for approval. However, as these bureaucratic controls were increasingly seen as ineffective, alternative surveillance measures were adopted to maintain oversight of minority education.¹⁰³

Importantly, Muslim children were prohibited from attending non-Muslim and foreign schools. Regular inspections were carried out to enforce this regulation. A report from the Diyarbakır Provincial Education Directorate confirmed that no Muslim pupils were enrolled in foreign schools in the province.¹⁰⁴

The schools affiliated with Mardin's local Christian communities were generally located within the annexes of church courtyards. While education in earlier periods was conducted informally within church and monastic buildings, the Tanzimat era saw a gradual transformation of these facilities into more formalised institutions to meet evolving educational needs. Archival sources suggest that many of these schools operated without official licenses, despite the Ottoman state's repeated attempts to regulate and control them through licensing mechanisms.

Rather than commissioning the construction of new school buildings, communities typically repurposed existing structures within church precincts for educational use. Following World War I, many of these institutions were shuttered and subsequently converted into residential dwellings. However, several of these historic educational spaces remain identifiable today.

For example, the school building adjacent to the still-active Kırklar Church continues to function as a space for community-based instruction in the Syriac language and religious education. Similarly, The school building of the Mort Şmuni Church, built in 1796, located in the west of the church,¹⁰⁵ the now-defunct school buildings within the

¹⁰³ BOA. MF. MGM. 2/34, 28 Zilkade 1309 (24 June 1898).

¹⁰⁴ BOA. MF. MGM. 4/87, 2 Cemaziye'l-âhir 1311 (11 December 1893).

¹⁰⁵ Akyüz, *ibid*, p. 377.

courtyards of the Mar Efreem Monastery, constructed by the Syriac Catholic community in 1884 (Fig. 7), and the Surp Kevork Church (Fig. 8), originally built in the fifth century and later used for Armenian Catholic rites from the seventeenth century onward, are still extant, though currently in disuse. The precise location of the school once affiliated with the Chaldean community's Mar Hurmuzd Church (Fig. 9), however, could not be determined.¹⁰⁶

Missionary Schools

Alongside state-led educational reforms and community-run institutions, missionary schools emerged as influential actors within the educational landscape of 19th-century Mardin. These institutions formed part of a broader initiative by Catholic and Protestant missionary organisations aimed at evangelising and reshaping Christian communities. From the mid-19th century onwards, missionaries increasingly prioritised education as their principal tool of engagement, founding extensive networks of schools, churches, orphanages, hospitals, and cultural centres designed to disseminate Western religious and cultural values.

Initially, the Ottoman state tolerated these missionary activities, particularly in the wake of the 1856 Imperial Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermanı*), which expanded the religious and civil liberties of non-Muslim subjects. Complementary commercial agreements, most notably the 1862 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation with the United States, further granted American missionaries with significant privileges, including the right to establish educational institutions and employ local intermediaries from any religious background. These provisions facilitated the strengthening of relations between American missions and the Armenian community, who frequently served as intermediaries in both educational and economic contexts.¹⁰⁷

Catholic missionary activity in Mardin predates the arrival of Protestant missions. The Capuchin Order, active in upper Mesopotamia

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a representative of the Chaldean Church in Mardin, conducted on 26 April 2025.

¹⁰⁷ İlknur Polat Haydaroglu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Yabancı Okullar*, Ankara, 1993, p. 120.

since the 1540s, had achieved notable success among the Armenian community by the 17th century and later expanded its influence among the Syriac Christian population after 1850. Missionary activities in Mardin were administered through the Catholic mission based in Mosul. In 1841, a Catholic missionary residence was established in Mardin by Spanish and Italian Capuchins. This residence served as the seat of the Apostolic Prefect and accommodated three missionaries, along with five Franciscan nuns from Lons-le-Saunier.¹⁰⁸ From 1876 onwards, the Franciscan Sisters operated an educational institution in the city, where eight nuns were actively engaged in the education of young girls. In addition to the school, they maintained a shelter and a workroom (*ouvroir*) for older girls, thereby offering both instruction and social support to the local female population.¹⁰⁹ This initiative not only complemented the Catholic mission's broader religious objectives but also contributed significantly to the social and educational infrastructure of Mardin's Christian communities during the late Ottoman period.

In 1884, the Capuchin Latin Catholics established a monastic complex in Mardin's Şar quarter, consisting of a monastery, church, and school (Fig. 10). This institution offered a distinct alternative to Orthodox and Protestant educational and religious structures. French, Italian, Arabic and Ottoman Turkish were taught.¹¹⁰ Ottoman records from the turn of the 20th century further elaborate that within a building constructed by the Capuchin friars in Mardin, two unlicensed schools, one for boys and one for girls, were being run by Capuchin monks and Franciscan nuns.¹¹¹ However, the Catholic missionaries were compelled to leave Mardin in 1914. During World War I, the complex was requisitioned and occupied by the gendarmerie and police forces. By 1925, it was repurposed to serve as a grain depot, post

¹⁰⁸ Férahian, "Diarbékir (Arménie)", *Les Missions catholiques*, 20 (1888), p. 293.

¹⁰⁹ Tfinkdji, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹¹⁰ Akyüz, *ibid.*, p. 102.

¹¹¹ Ammasian Effendi, *op. cit.*, p. 1095; BOA. DH. ŞFR. 286/88, 30 Rabiulevvel 1318 (20 Temmuz 1900).

office, and hospital.¹¹² Following this period, the entire complex was demolished during road expansion works undertaken by German engineers,¹¹³ and today no physical trace of it remains.

Among the Protestant missions active in the region, the most prominent was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), which established one of its four eastern Ottoman stations in Mardin in 1858.¹¹⁴ Two missionary families had already been dispatched from Mosul in 1856 to take up residence in Mardin, marking the beginning of sustained Protestant missionary engagement in the city. Notably, Mardin was the only ABCFM station in the region where Arabic was used as the primary language of communication.¹¹⁵ The Board's missionary strategy centred on the establishment of what it termed "Gospel institutions," with schools forming the cornerstone of its evangelical activities. These institutions aimed to disseminate Protestant teachings among local Armenian, Chaldean, Nestorian, and Syriac Christian communities, as well as the Kurdish population.¹¹⁶

Vital Cuinet notes the existence of three Armenian Protestant schools in Mardin, two for boys and one for girls, operated under the supervision of American missionaries. Instruction in these schools was conducted in Armenian, Turkish, and English, reflecting their multilingual and multicultural orientation.¹¹⁷ According to the *Annuaire Oriental du commerce de l'industrie, de l'administration et de la magistrature*, one boys' and one girls' school operated by American missionaries between 1889 and 1912.¹¹⁸ Likewise, the *Salnâme-i*

¹¹² AMAE, La Courneuve, AMAE-OBIP-1418-191118-5708_Turquie_capucins_Mardin, 6 January 1927.

¹¹³ Akyüz, *ibid*, 102-103.

¹¹⁴ W. C. Dewey, "Mardin in Mesopotamia", *The Missionary Herald at Home and Abroad*, 85, Boston, 1889, p. 96.

¹¹⁵ *The Missionary Herald*, 116.11 (1920), p. 448.

¹¹⁶ Portions of the Scriptures were translated into Kurdish and subsequently printed to support this mission. Crosby H. Wheeler, *Ten Years on the Euphrates or Primitive Missionary Policy Illustrated*, Boston, 1868, p. 32; Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 96; *The Missionary Herald*, 52.1 (1856), p. 6; *The Missionary Herald*, 53.1 (1857), p. 5.

¹¹⁷ Cuinet, *ibid*, p. 498.

¹¹⁸ Boyajian, *op. cit.*, p. 741; Ammasian Effendi, *op. cit.*, p. 1095; Cassapian, *op. cit.*, p. 1315; Razakallah, *op. cit.*, 1704.

Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umûmiye (1318 AH / 1900–1901 CE) documents the presence of two foreign schools in Mardin: one operated by the Capuchin (Catholic) order and the other by Protestant missionaries.¹¹⁹ This information is corroborated by the *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir* for the years 1319 (1901–02) and 1321 (1903–04), which also list two *ecnebi mektebi* (foreign schools) active in the city.¹²⁰

In the 1870s, several Protestant missionaries stationed in Mardin, namely Mr. Bill, Mr. Andrus, and Dr. Thom, acquired land in the Mişkin neighbourhood, located on the western outskirts of the city. Between 1874 and 1879, they purchased three houses along with their stables and secured a state-owned plot through public auction. Although they initially received permission to construct residential buildings, their subsequent attempts to erect a church, hospital, and schools on a portion of the property were met with official resistance.¹²¹ Nonetheless, the missionary complex was eventually completed, encompassing religious, medical, and educational facilities. The official approval of the school, hospital, and place of worship by the Council of State (*Şûrâ-yı Devlet*) was granted on 17 October 1908 (21 Ramazan 1326).¹²²

A substantial stone complex was constructed by the missionaries at the western edge of the city, near the Diyarbakır Gate. The compound included residential quarters for missionary families, a dispensary, and several educational institutions: a boys' high school, a girls' high school, a theological seminary for young men, a primary school, a mixed middle school, and a preparatory school resembling a kindergarten as well as dormitories for students.¹²³ This comprehensive network underscores

¹¹⁹ *Salnâme-i Nezâret-i Maârif-i Umumiye*, 1318, p. 1340.

¹²⁰ *Salnâme-i Diyarbekir*, sene 1319 (1901-1902), defa 18; sene 1321 (1903-1904), defa 19; İzgöer, *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 203, 307.

¹²¹ BOA. DH. TMIK. 131/6, 1 Cemaziye'l-âhir 1320 (5 Eylül 1902).

¹²² BOA. İ.MF. 16/38, 9 Ramazan 1328 (14 September 1910).

¹²³ Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97; *The Eighty-Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, New York, 1921, pp. 446-447; *The Missionary Herald*, 74.11 (1878), p. 394.

the scale and ambition of Protestant missionary educational efforts in Mardin at the turn of the twentieth century (Figs. 11-12).

Instruction in these schools was delivered in both English and the vernacular languages of local communities, Armenian, Arabic, and Syriac, allowing pupils to gain access to Western curricula while maintaining linguistic and cultural continuity.¹²⁴ Although the initial teaching staff consisted entirely of American missionaries, by the late 19th century many educators local people who converts to Protestantism who had themselves been trained within the mission system.¹²⁵ These individuals went on to serve as teachers, preachers, pastors, and catechists, further embedding missionary influence within the community.

These missionary schools were subject to inspection by Ottoman authorities dispatched from Constantinople. According to *The Missionary Herald* (1884), the official publication of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), one such inspection was carried out by a government-appointed official in the company of the head instructor of the Kasımiye Madrasa. The inspection spanned several days and included attendance at various academic examinations. The inspector observed examinations in subjects such as geometry, algebra, and zoology, and expressed high praise for the institution, describing it as the finest educational establishment he had encountered in Mardin.¹²⁶

By the 1890s, Ottoman authorities had become increasingly apprehensive about missionary activities, viewing them as encroachments on imperial sovereignty and as potential instruments of foreign political influence. In response, the state implemented a series of regulatory measures aimed at curbing missionary autonomy. These included mandates requiring missionary schools to incorporate Ottoman Turkish into their curricula, employ Muslim inspectors, and

¹²⁴ Selçuk Akşin Somel, "The Religious Community Schools and Foreign Missionary Schools", *Ottoman Civilization 1*, ed. Halil İnalcık and Günsel Renda, İstanbul, 2003, p. 388.

¹²⁵ Aktürk, *ibid*, p. 158.

¹²⁶ *The Missionary Herald*, 80.1 (1884), p. 25.

submit educational programmes for official review. Public events, such as graduation ceremonies and examination celebrations, were likewise subject to prior state approval. Despite these restrictions, missionary schools often continued to operate with minimal supervision, particularly in peripheral provinces such as Mardin.¹²⁷ Although the Ottoman government occasionally issued warnings, such as those sent to the Mardin Educational Council, prohibiting the operation of unlicensed schools, archival records indicate that some institutions persisted in offering instruction without formal authorisation.¹²⁸

An Ottoman official document dated 14 Ramadan 1328 (18 September 1910) indicates that a request was submitted for a permit to expand an existing school run by American missionaries. This school, originally constructed on a plot owned by the American missionary Mr. Andrus, had previously received formal recognition by the Ottoman authorities. After administrative review, the proposed expansion was deemed unobjectionable, provided that the new sections be subject to taxation. This condition was accepted by the American Embassy, and the expansion was subsequently authorised on the basis of tax compliance.¹²⁹

While the number of missionary schools in Mardin was modest compared to major centres such as Harput or Diyarbakır, their impact was considerable. They introduced new pedagogical methods, expanded access to modern sciences, and created pathways for social mobility within minority communities. At the same time, they functioned as instruments of religious reform and cultural reorientation, reshaping the internal dynamics of Christian communities and contributing to broader geopolitical tensions between the Ottoman state and Western powers.

Conclusion

The 19th century marked a pivotal transformation in the educational landscape of the Ottoman Empire, shaped by the centralising reforms of the Tanzimat period and further reinforced

¹²⁷ Şamil Mutlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Misyoner Okulları*, İstanbul, 2005, p. 300.

¹²⁸ BOA. DH. TMIK.M. 131/6, 01 Cemaziye'l-âhir 1320 (5 September 1902).

¹²⁹ BOA. İ.MF. 16/38, 16 Ramazan 1328 (21 September 1910).

during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. As part of the Empire's broader efforts to modernise state institutions and assert control over its diverse population, education became a key instrument of both governance and identity formation. In the provincial city of Mardin, this broader imperial agenda played out in strikingly pluralistic terms: traditional Islamic instruction, newly established state schools, community-based educational initiatives, and foreign missionary institutions coexisted and at times competed in complex ways. This layered coexistence underscores the complex dynamics of educational reform and cultural negotiation at the imperial periphery.

The establishment of *ibtidâî*, *rüşdiye*, and *idâdî* schools in Mardin reflects the central state's ambition to produce loyal and capable bureaucrats while extending its authority into the provinces. At the same time, traditional education, through *madrâsas* and *sıbyan mektebs*, remained deeply rooted in the urban fabric, sustaining intellectual and religious continuity even amidst change. Pre-Ottoman *madrâsas* such as the Kasımiye, Şehidiye and newly constructed *madrâsas* in the second half of the 19th century, Hamidiye and Sheikh İbrahim *Madrâsas*, for instance, continued to function well into the 20th century, adapting to shifting pedagogical contexts while preserving medieval legacies.

Parallel to state-led modernisation, minority schools, Armenian, Chaldean, and Syriac Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant schools, provided education grounded in confessional identity, often in the community's own language and with support from church institutions and international networks. The example of the Mar Behnam and Saro Syriac School, which offered a multilingual and multidisciplinary curriculum until its closure in 1928, highlights the pedagogical richness and organisational autonomy of these schools, even as they came under increasing Ottoman state scrutiny. The activities of missionary schools, particularly those supported by American and French missions, added a further layer of complexity, as education became a site of both cultural influence and imperial rivalry.

Ultimately, the educational institutions of 19th-century Mardin cannot be viewed solely through the lens of centralisation or secularisation. Rather, they reveal a plural and contested educational

topography, where state, religious, ethnic, and foreign actors all contributed to shaping new generations. Through its architectural expressions, curricular innovations, and institutional diversity, the city offers a microcosmic view of how education in the late Ottoman Empire was both a means of modern statecraft and a field of negotiation between tradition and transformation.

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