

Learning to Read in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic

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Few would deny the centrality of reading to modern society. Since the nineteenth century a growing proportion of the population has been taught to read at an early age in preparation for a life of reading. The expanding fare has included primers, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, books, advertising text, mail, government forms, and recently mail of the electronic kind and the wide array of texts made available by the internet, all of which, and many others, have become increasingly central to contemporary life. The prevalence of reading stands in marked contrast with premodern society with its restricted literacy and reliance on oral transmission and aural reception. But this centrality presents a paradox: reading is both extraordinary for the crucial role it has played in modern society and has been so accepted and apparently natural that it is routinely taken for granted. Modern education—and the reading and proliferation of texts upon which it depends—is universally credited with ushering in a number of momentous changes integral to the formation of the modern world. Yet reading has generally not received attention commensurate with its importance in underpinning contemporary social practices. While reading is universally credited for its role in such phenomena as upward social mobility, the universal franchise, the greater cohesion of a variety of political units, and the increase in mass communications and markets, the precise ways in which reading has affected these developments is still relatively unexamined.

In recent years the study of reading has become a field unto itself, but one which has focussed almost entirely on the history of reading in the West.¹ While some attention has been given to the Islamic world,² until very recently almost none has been devoted to the late Ottoman Empire,³ where, presumably, to use Roger Chartier's phrase, "reading has a history," just as much as it does anywhere else.

For all of its obvious importance, what we know about the processes and even the materials involved in the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican periods is actually quite limited. The subject of literacy has received some attention from a quantitative perspective.⁴ But even here we have severe disagreement, largely stemming from differing definitions over—and the problems of measuring—what constitutes a literate person. This is especially problematic in the case of "traditional" Islamic education where lessons were taught in Arabic, not always the students' mother tongue and, indeed, where the entire purpose of education was radically different from its "modern" alternative. Perhaps due to the fact that so much surrounding literacy and its social effects is generally taken for granted, we confront a serious imbalance between the assumptions covering the ways in which literacy and education are thought to have affected any number of social, political, and economic transformations, on the one

hand, and the flimsiness of the underlying evidence, on the other. Despite considerable recent attention to education in the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, the main assumption still operative here is, of course, that the Republic emancipated its population from the retarding effects of the *ancien régime*, by building schools, eliminating the supposedly outmoded Arabo-Persian script, and generally teaching the nation to read, with Mustafa Kemal playing the role of national instructor-in-chief.

The lack of evidence underpinning such assumptions suggests both that we need to think about them more critically and that we need to take another look at the question of reading in this context. In this article, I try to address the various ways in which learning to read and reading were depicted in texts relating to late Ottoman and early Republican children. These are mostly children's magazines, primers, and textbooks, (from roughly the 1880s until the first years of the Republican period) along with a few memoirs written later in the Republican era.⁵ Unlike my previous research on state education,⁶ this project is aimed at understanding the role of individual and market forces that had much less to do with the state bureaucracy.

Due to the growth of new-style schooling and the increasing demand for texts to be consumed by the burgeoning ranks of its students and graduates, a massive amount of literature intended for young readers is available. I should make clear from the outset that I am merely presenting what I think is a representative sample in order to show the range and nature of this under-utilised material. These sources—often combining texts and images—provide a sense of the overall shape of reading as represented in some of the literature of this period. I hope to demonstrate that reading meant many things; it was represented in a variety of contexts; it performed a number of different functions; and it revealed a multiplicity of messages that do not always sit easily with the still more or less one-dimensional trajectory assigned to literacy in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods. In what follows, I first discuss the process of learning to read, guided by descriptions of reading found in children's literature, textbooks and memoirs. Then I turn to the different contexts and modes of reading discernible in this literature. Finally, I offer a taxonomy of the types of reading material available to children in the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican period.

Learning to Read

First let us turn to the practical matter of deciphering text. Here we are reminded that reading is first and foremost a physical activity. As Robert DeMaria, Jr. has shown in his illuminating work on Samuel Johnson, there are many types of reading, ranging from perusal, to hard reading, study, curious reading, and so forth.⁷ But we know little about the process of

learning to read in the late Ottoman Empire. For all of its importance as a transformative factor in the modern period, little attention has been paid to the mechanics involved in crossing the increasingly crucial barrier separating literacy from illiteracy.

Seen from the perspective of the un- or only partly-initiated, reading could indeed seem a puzzling if not a highly frustrating endeavor. Consider the example of a story taken from a late Ottoman children's primer called *Çocuklara İstifade[?] Tebziib-i Ahlak ve Malumat-ı Nafia* (For the benefit of children: moral improvement and useful information), which provides an instructive example of how the author, a prolific but largely unknown writer of children's texts in the late Ottoman period, envisioned the role of reading in the lives of Ottoman children.⁸ This book, which according to the author's memoirs was written while he was still in school himself and published in the mid 1880s,⁹ is a compendium of advice, bromides, and stories for children. Among the contents devoted to reinforcing the importance of such subjects as distinguishing between good and evil, effort, and respect for one's parents, comes a story called simply "The Book." The story revolves around a dutiful boy, aptly named Zeki (which means intelligent, clever) and his mother. One day when they are at home together, Zeki becomes bored and, coming to sit beside his mother, asks her to tell him a story. The mother obliges, relating her account of Fatih Sultan Mehmed, the conqueror of Istanbul, whom she describes as "brave, intelligent, and merciful." Then the child asks, "Mother, do you know Fatih Sultan Mehmed?" The mother replies with surprise that he has been dead for many, many years. The child then asks, with a logical directness befitting his age, "If he is dead, [then] how do you know that he was an intelligent and merciful sultan?" Forgoing the universal temptation of parental omniscience, the mother explains that she read it in a book, and cites a number of such useful and informative publications.

The story continues. One subsequent day the mother leaves the child alone at home while she goes out shopping. Zeki again becomes bored and wonders at the realization that his mother's books seem to contain a trove of beautiful stories. He takes one down and opens it but is unable to see anything apart from some very small black scribbles. He puts the book back, only to try another with the same unhappy result. When his mother returns, he relates his frustrating experience with the printed word to her and asks, "Dear Mother what must I do to understand the beautiful stories that are in your books?" "My son," she replies, "these stories can only be understood by reading them. One cannot do it any other way." The following day he begins school with the desire to learn, and within two or three years, the reader is told, he makes such progress that he is able to read not only his mother's books, but also much more difficult ones as well.

Now, this story does not reveal terribly much about the process of learning to read, but it does tell us something about attitudes toward reading in this period. First, it acknowledges the practical difficulties involved. This text confronts what is usually glossed over, namely, the actual problem one faces in learning to work out a correspondence between oral and written language. For the majority of children in the late Ottoman Empire this meant learning to read the Turkish to which they had been exposed since birth in the Arabic

script. In this story, this attempt is represented by Zeki's stab at deciphering those funny looking scribbles on the printed page. Secondly, it suggests that, in spite of the presence of a literate mother, by no means the norm in this period, the way to attain the all-important ability to read is through formal education, away from home. As in many texts produced during this period, the home is the place where the child ought properly to receive the first inclinations towards the world of literacy, but, in general, the task of actually teaching him or her to read is deemed to be far too important to be left to the family.

Another example, from the memoirs of the writer Halide Edip (1882-1964), gives us a different take on the way reading could look from the one trying to learn. In her case, we also catch a glimpse of the ways in which different languages and styles could compound the problem of learning to read and also of the situational relationship between language and type of text, whether religious or secular. Being from a well-to-do Istanbul family, Halide Edip was educated privately; a moonlighting *boca* would come to her family's house in the evenings.

Two candles therefore were placed on the table under green shades, while I struggled with the Arabic writing of the holy book. [Her footnote: All Moslem children used to learn to read from the Arabic Koran, of which not a word would naturally be understood by a Turkish child. In the higher classes they would go on applying their alphabetic knowledge to reading their own language.] Of course it was difficult to go on without understanding the meaning of the words one read, but the musical sound of it all was some compensation.¹⁰

This sing-song quality, together with the physicality of rocking back and forth that accompanied learning to read in the Quran schools, would be scorned by some, not just in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, including famously by Halid Ziya Ushakligil¹¹ but also by the British in Egypt, as Gregory Starrett has shown,¹² and remembered fondly by others. Further down the page, Halide Edip recounts her attempts to decipher books that she found in her aunt's library. The physicality of the solitary act of reading—or in this case of trying to read—comes through clearly:

As often as I could now, I went up-stairs to Teizé's apartment when [the maid] Fikriyar was dusting her books. I would beg her to take out the book of African travels and open it for me on the floor. It was too large for me to handle, and when she had laid it down I stretched myself on the floor and tried to decipher it. In this position, resting on my elbows, I would struggle on till my eyes ached. It was so different from the Koran, and the words, even when I could make them out, were such that I did not understand. [Her footnote: Literary Turkish of those days was a thing apart from the spoken language, and largely unintelligible except to the initiated.]

A few pages later we learn that her autodidactic efforts were paying off; she "was beginning to decipher the book of African travels," which seems to have served as a counterbalance to the folktales she had until recently been told by a now-deceased relative.¹³ An account such as this indicates that children of this period were faced with a wide

variety of reading contexts, not to mention languages. This would prepare them well for the equally wide variety in the types of texts they would come to encounter as they became more proficient readers, as we shall see shortly. What comes through clearly from these varying experiences is the fierce determination to read, both as projected or modeled by adults and as remembered afterwards by the readers themselves.

Such conspicuous demonstrations of the zeal for learning to read were naturally not limited to the late Ottoman period, but rather spanned the divide between empire and republic. A third example reveals that modeling the enthusiasm of would-be readers was another area of continuity between the periods. The children's reader published by Celâl Nuri [İleri] in 1930, just after the adoption of the Latin alphabet, displays a similar penchant for showcasing the correct behavior of the ideal child reader. The book was called, *İlk Okumak ve Yazmak Kitabı* (The First Book of Reading and Writing) and was intended for students in the first year of primary school once they had learned the alphabet. The title of the book's first lesson "Let me read the stories too" (*Hikâyeleri ben de okuyayım*) appears under a rough line drawing, which features a vaguely modern-looking mother and her son Gültekin (a conspicuously old-Turkish name, combining the word for rose with an ancient Turkish word for prince). In contrast with the example of Zeki, this child has been given an old Turkish name, marking him as a child of the Republic.¹⁴ The pair's clothing is consistent with this modern image; the mother wears a v-neck dress and is seated on a striped sofa holding a book, while Gültekin, dressed in a sailor's suit with short trousers and knee socks, is depicted rising out of his chair to grasp the book. The short text reads:

Gültekin's mother is telling him stories. The stories that please the child most of all take place in other countries. After listening carefully to one story, he asks:

Mother, when did you go there? His mother replies:

My son, it is very far away...I read this story from this book. Gültekin says:

In that case let me start school immediately so that I can read these beautiful stories.¹⁵

Naïve perhaps but clear, this lesson leaves no doubt but that the path to reading, source of both fun and necessity, runs through school. This text also seems aimed at expanding the geographical horizons of young readers; the references to "other countries" and "places very far away" mark a growing internationalization in children's readings in this period, which was surely part of their appeal.

Taken together these three examples show us that reading was opening up new worlds, with different languages and styles appropriate to the different types of text available. They also reveal reading to be a multivalent, situational activity, but one which in all cases necessarily relied upon the direct physical contact between individual and text.

The basic physicality of reading could be treated in different ways. For some, there is a workmanlike approach to reading, with books and journals appearing as the appropriate tools of the trade. Students in one textbook were encouraged to think of the stuff of reading and writing—books, pens, copybooks—in the way that farmers, miners, and blacksmiths approached their plows, picks, and anvils.¹⁶ Other treatments

depict reading as a far more ethereal, almost dreamy or sensual experience, in which the young readers were transported into another land, for example, Halide Edip to Africa, or the realm of imagination; space travel is one that recurs again and again, symptomatic of the, at times, radically novel dimension of this literature. As we shall see, illustrations were increasingly employed to this transformative end. If even the basic, physical aspects of learning to read were presented in distinctly different ways, depending on the context, then it is not surprising that the underlying reasons for and depictions of reading should be variously interpreted.

Contexts of Reading

As we shall see in the final section, young readers were faced with a wide variety of reading material, and these types suggested different milieux, different settings for reading. It is to these contexts that I would now like to turn. Over time we can see a clear trend of a movement from a religious to a national ethos surrounding learning to read. It should be emphasized that this national ethos was not entirely secular, especially given the religious overtones that the "nation" continued to evoke. We can nevertheless trace the movement of an archetypal experience from one of *boca-mektep-Quran* to one of lay teacher-state school-reading primer. This transition was not always abrupt, but rather was often blurred by overlap in staff, in the use of religious material in state schools, and so on, but the trend clearly runs in this direction.

It is perhaps useful to think of the different contexts of reading in terms of a series of tensions: between reading as religious endeavor and reading as imperial or national duty; between reading as public activity and reading as a private affair; between reading for personal improvement and for the betterment of society as a whole; between reading for economic benefit (either for the common wealth or to enhance the publishers' profits) and reading as something beyond such crass material concerns, as transformational.

Turning to the first of these tensions, it is noteworthy that the existing literature encourages us to treat reading as an alternatively religious or secular pursuit, given both the primacy of holy scripture in education in most periods of Islamic history and the emblematic quality, which education eventually assumed under the secular Turkish Republic. In this pairing the divide has typically thought to have been very abrupt, so prevalent has been the notion of bifurcation in the study of late Ottoman and Republican society. The literature tells us that late Ottoman society was deeply divided along a fault line dividing the religious from the secular.¹⁷ Yet, examples of contexts that seem to combine some aspects of both the secular and the religious spring readily to mind for example, the reading of religious texts in state schools, which also provided instruction in such subjects as French, chemistry, and geography. Furthermore, the free and easy juxtaposition of religious instruction, stories adapted from sacred history, and religiously imbued moral admonition together with overtly nonreligious material in children's literature encourages us to rethink the utility of the dichotomy between the categories "religious" and "secular" for the analysis of this period.

In this light it is not unrealistic to suggest that certain modes of reading, which might at first glance be seen as purely secular, should be considered as holding a position

somewhere along the spectrum between secular and religious. Consider, for example, the case of a child standing to read aloud to his or her class in an early Republican school as illustrated on the cover of a reading primer from just after the language revolution of 1928.¹⁸ This illustration provides a clear idea of the school environment operating here: conspicuously coeducational, Republican, and modern. But even in this context we are never far from the sacred, especially when we consider that one of the underlying objectives of reading was elevating and serving the homeland (*vatan*), which itself has clear religious connotations as was emphasized repeatedly in late Ottoman children's texts. In fact, it had only been a few years before the illustrated scene of the early Republican school that Mustafa Kemal himself had played on Islamic sentiment to rally the Turks of Anatolia—and their Kurdish coreligionists—to defend their soil against an invading Christian force.

This was a period of flux on many fronts, but especially along the religious-secular continuum. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, there was much that was explicitly religious in the impetus, curricula, staffing, and daily life of late Ottoman schools, which we have been conditioned to think of as secular.¹⁹ It was quite natural, therefore, for a late Ottoman reading text to combine what its preface described as the most important social and moral matters—concerning both this world and the next (*dünyevî ve uhrevî*)—such as patriotism (*hubb-ı vatan*), general education (*maarif*), agriculture, trade, prayer, piety, and so on.²⁰ All were to be taught through the medium of a reading primer.

A few pages into Ali Irfan's text, the link between reading and the fatherland becomes even clearer. In the first lesson, called "the Fatherland" (*vatan*), an explicit connection is made between "our first Padishah" Osman Gazi, the eponym and founder of the Ottoman dynasty, represented by a medallion-shaped and turbaned portrait, and the current sultan, "his highness Sultan Mehmed Reshad."²¹ Mehmed Reshad appears wearing a frock coat and fez on the next page surrounded by Ottoman flags and weaponry. The next sentence offers a forthright definition of the connection between the Ottomans and their territory: "We Ottomans, wherever we are born and raised and wherever the word and rule of our beloved Padishah and our glorious government is law, that is our fatherland. Therefore, all of the Ottoman dominions are our fatherland."²² This Ottoman notion of a flexible fatherland contrasts sharply with the decidedly more fixed Republican conception.

Returning to the presumed tension between religious and secular, the representations of reading reveal a wide spectrum of purposes and contexts, ranging from the conspicuously religious—hearing the rhythmic cadences of Quranic recitation—to the more mundane, such as reading to prepare children to make their way in the world, material benefit, and so on—as well as places somewhere in between, for example, reading for the fatherland (*vatan*).

Such patriotic appeals took different forms. For a writer of children's texts such as Ali Irfan, what was needed was to restore the empire's religious foundation. In a pamphlet that he published in the Young Turk period for free distribution, the author, who adds the sobriquet "patriotic" (*vatanperver*) to his name, laments the sorry state of the empire. "We have destroyed our material and spiritual power. We have fallen

helpless... All because we did not embrace the path (*shariat*) of Muhammad, the path of our security and felicity."²³ His proposed solution is that he and his fellow countrymen should wrap themselves up in the *shariat* and strive to preserve our constitution, which with God's help we were able to secure in the face of countless abasements and miseries...and to correct our morals, and to look after our Islamic customs and Ottoman practices." This is followed by a long list of optatives with which the author enjoins his fellow Ottomans to undertake such things as saving much and spending little, improving education, industry, and so on. The defining message is for hard work, effort and sacrifice, with guidance from the Quran and Islamic and Ottoman tradition.

The centrality of the book, whether holy or profane, and of reading in Ali Irfan's exhortation is nearly constant. Whether in the late Ottoman or the Republican context, reading is frequently linked with patriotic appeal, one of the many continuities between the Ottoman and Republican approaches to teaching children to read. Both periods reveal a strikingly similar emphasis on patriotism. Notions of what constituted the borders of the nation clearly changed—contrast the open conception of the imperial borders in a very late Ottoman text where the "*vatan*" is defined as being "wherever we Ottomans are born and raised and wherever the word of our beloved Padishah is law,"²⁴ with the fixed notion of Republican borders as represented in the maps so prevalent in the readers published after 1923—but there are numerous examples of continuity, ranging from the layout of the texts to the focus on the person of the political figurehead. Indeed, the transition from emphasis on the political leader, from Padishah to Mustafa Kemal Pasha is remarkably fluid. The way had been prepared by the practice, begun in the late Ottoman period, of introducing images of the Ottoman coat of arms and portraits of the sultan in children's texts.²⁵ From here the step to the appearance of Mustafa Kemal Pasha was hardly revolutionary.

In the late Ottoman period children were presented with the message that reading was crucial to saving the Ottoman Empire. Acquiring knowledge and learning was, as we have seen, depicted as a patriotic duty. In the early Turkish Republic the students' task was rendered more complex because of the disparaging tone manifested towards the Ottoman past. While reading and learning generally continued to be held up as a national necessity, it was now required to read material that reflected the young state's pejorative view of the immediate Ottoman past. Thus one textbook presents the need to learn to read history as important so as not to repeat the mistakes of the Ottoman past.²⁶ Another text published in the first years of the Republic, by the noted historian Mehmed Fuat Köprülü, went even further, depicting the Ottoman sultans as enslaving the Turkish nation and sucking its blood.²⁷ These early Republican texts seem to anticipate the tone established by Ankara with the *Primary School Instruction* of 1929, which reads, "The teacher's first task is to establish affection between the pupil and his subject and by annulling children's old knowledge to create new information in its place."²⁸ Readers of such a text inevitably imbibed a negative view of their immediate past, which would be reinforced by the Republic's multifaceted assault on the Ottoman legacy. Yet even if what was being read could change dramatically within the space of a few years across the divide of 1923, the overall

necessity of reading and learning remained a constant.

Here I should like to draw attention to some of the other modes and contexts of reading. Apart from being an activity that could be marked somewhere along the spectrum between religious and secular activity, reading could also be seen to fall along a public-private continuum. Many examples suggest that reading was an increasingly public activity. For one thing, as we have already seen, reading was depicted, both in prose and in pictures, as something that was done out loud, usually at school. There are numerous examples, both textual and illustrative, of reading as publicly practiced. It is notable that a large number of children's textbooks and magazines featured illustrations depicting children reading in a variety of poses: in school; at home; or in the abstract, as if to encourage the young by the power of depicted suggestion.²⁹ As with the textual accounts that ran parallel with these demonstrational images, many such readers were depicted as individuals, emphasizing perhaps the solitary nature of modern reading, as opposed to the chanted reading of the traditional context.

Yet these individual readers were not alone. Frequent references made to the broader community of readers, simultaneously capable of reading the same sorts of printed material, very much like Anderson's "imagined community" linked by print. This public notion of reading was reinforced and duplicated by the competitions; coupon offers; puzzles; and prizes, including books and having one's name printed in a future issue of the offering magazine. As if to render tangible the imagined community of fellow readers, many children's periodicals of this period employed posed photographs of school classes. Generally speaking, illustrations appeared more and more frequently and were increasingly important in reinforcing the message of the texts in which they appeared. The children's press encouraged its young readers to participate in contests and to submit their own stories and articles.

What was conveyed by the term "reading" could also be extended to reading more than words. Apart from learning to "read" a variety of illustrations, children were also encouraged to read music.³⁰ By 1915, music was made part of the Ottoman state curriculum, and in 1917 a Turkish music school was established, with a branch dedicated to Western music added in 1923. It was abolished in 1926, a year which saw the end of instruction in modal music in schools.³¹ As I have shown elsewhere, map literacy was increasingly important to Ottoman (and later Turkish) education.³²

But for all of the collective representations of reading, it was also depicted as a private activity. Reading was frequently represented as something done in solitude, in contrast with the aforementioned depictions of reading as a public endeavor. An example from a children's periodical from the early Republican period offers an account of unsupervised children selecting texts and retiring to read for half an hour on their own.³³ Halide Edip's autobiographical account describes the author alone and stretched out on the floor with her aunt's large volume of African travels. Visual materials also modeled reading as an individual effort. A number of children's periodicals and texts contained images of children alone with their books. Some of these featured a reading child or two on their mastheads, for example, *Haftalık Resimli Gazetemiz* (Our weekly gazette) of 1924, which featured a boy and a girl in the upper corners of the illustrated cover. Photographs taken during this period present reading as private act

rendered public by the presence of the photographer and the interest in preserving scenes of reading for posterity. The work of photographer Ali Sami's (1866-1936) captures readers in a variety of contexts. Whether in the case of a member of the ulama posing in a photographer's studio, school girls taken outside their house, military officers at work, or the photographer's own family, seemingly arrayed to display as many newspapers as possible;³⁴ reading is central to the scene in every case.

The notion that reading was also an activity to be practiced at home was approached somewhat cautiously by both official and private publications. Both in the Ottoman and Republican periods home reading, although valued as a supplemental activity, placed a clear second to reading as a public and essentially school-related phenomenon. This tension reflected the underlying competition between teacher and parent. Most publications intended for young readers tend to encourage more respect towards the readers' teachers than towards their parents. Since schooling was continually presented as the key to life, it was perhaps natural that the teacher should be elevated in this fashion throughout the late Ottoman and early Republican periods.³⁵ But as we shall see, with time and the increasing intrusion of market forces into the world of reading, privately produced publications would begin to undermine the official stance.

Reading was an activity with tremendous, if largely unstated, economic consequences. First of all, the production of texts depended upon a range of economic relationships and transactions. Thanks to Palmira Brummett's fascinating work on the press in the Second Constitutional period, we have reliable information about many of the practical aspects of publishing, including production, pricing, layout, and the growing readership in this period.³⁶ But there are other areas about which we know much less, such as the economic situation of the writers, editors, and distributors of these publications. What seems clear, however, is that reading was becoming a big business in this era, with the number of publishing houses, publications, and readership all on the rise. Although the precise outlines of this print economy are largely inchoate, it seems clear that a growing sector of the population was able to earn its livelihood by writing for, producing, and distributing the growing number of publications.

Secondly, the presence of a text in the hands of young readers meant that they, or more likely their parents or schools, had made the decision to buy the book or magazine in question. But the economic consequences were not yet complete once this purchase had been made. The pages of such books and magazines, once opened, presented the readers with a secondary range of considerations, many of which had clear economic connotations. For example, the readers were confronted with advertisements for other books, were encouraged to take out subscriptions to the magazines; and were tempted by competitions offering prizes (often more books) and knowledge contests to develop "brand loyalty" to the publishers. Eventually, such advertising grew more blatant, to the point where young readers were encouraged to think about feeding more than their minds; a textbook produced in the 1950s hawked a particular brand of spaghetti.³⁷

In the late Ottoman and early Republican periods commercialism, while never quite so blatant, nevertheless was palpably on the increase. As the number of publications grew,

their editors sought ways to distinguish their products from all the others. The first issue of the children's periodical *Bizim Mecmua* (Our Magazine) which appeared in 1922, claimed that it offered "things not found in other journals." The trend towards differentiation increased as the competing presses sought to establish their own niche in the market. This trend further reinforced the varied nature of reading material, especially, as we shall see, as companies tried to cater to a wider range of tastes. It also introduced a rising level of tension between the agenda of the state, which had previously enjoyed a fairly firm control over the printed word, and those materials intended especially for students. As the size of the press sector grew, the imperative for publishers to distinguish their products from all the rest could produce newly discordant voices in the increasingly diverse body of literature available for children.

Space does not permit exploration of the full range of the many facets and contexts of reading here. Suffice it to say that reading could also appear from the literature of this period as a mental activity, plagued by the problems associated with memorization or parroting that were frequently derided as an obstacle to cognition. Or it could appear as a physical phenomenon, to be accomplished in a variety of positions and moods, and as an activity that produced a variety of physical reactions, for example, shivering with fright.

Mostly, though, reading was depicted as a school activity. As we have already seen, the school was presented as the natural place to learn to read. Once there, students were, naturally enough, encouraged to read materials that would promote obedience and patriotism and engender positive feelings for school. The authors of these materials generally laid it on pretty thick. Consider only the first verse of the poem entitled "The School," which appeared in a children's magazine in the late 1890s:

Wellspring of prosperity and giving is the school
 Manifestation of the light of enjoyment is the school
 An obvious light descended from the heavens
 A migrant to the eye of the heart is the school
 Giving light to the horizons of progress
 A gift of radiant sun is the school.³⁸

Equally cloying is a fairly typical item found in a Republican reader. It is written in the form of a letter devoted to the school that the child will be missing terribly over his summer vacation!³⁹ "Dear School," it begins "We are parting. There are tears in our eyes and a strange feeling of sorrow in our hearts. . ." Children's magazines paid considerable attention to school—usually in a supportive role but not always—largely because school was the one common denominator that almost all reading children shared. Indeed some children's magazines justified their existence in terms of assisting what was taking place at school. The first issue of *Çocuklara Kiraat* (A Reader for Children), founded in 1883, states that the suggestion for its creation came from "one of your teachers," promised to keep children busy during their holidays with "puzzles and questions written for the lessons in your curriculum."⁴⁰

So far, state efforts and the agenda of private press seem to have been in lock step, with children's publications mimicking or at least taking their cue from the state's agenda. Consider the cover illustration of *Gürbüz Türk Çocuğu* (The

Healthy Turkish Child), which features two young children in Western dress before a blackboard. One of the children is holding a piece of chalk and the following passage is written on the blackboard in Ottoman script: "The civilizational level of every nation depends upon the importance and attention it pays to it children."⁴¹ The artificial nature of the composition provides a good example of the extent to which the children's press generally echoed the official line. But as we shall soon see, the pressure of the growing print market was already at work undermining this seemingly united front.

Types of reading material

What sorts of things were the children of this period actually reading? The answer is an eclectic mixture of sources and genres. If one were to choose almost any of the late Ottoman children's journals and to note the references made to the geographical and chronological provenance of the reading material they contain, one would quickly accumulate a long and varied list. For example, a single issue of *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* (The Children's Own Gazette), the longest lived children's periodical from the late Ottoman period (1896-1908) reveals the following combination of materials: there is a story of "Malik ibn Dinar" and his encounter with a small child; a reference to Prophet Muhammad's advice on social interaction; an illustration of children in contemporary Germany fording a river in a horse-drawn cart; news from Brussels and Japan; an illustration of an orphanage in San Francisco; instructions for eating at table in *alafiranga* mode; and all of this alongside more conventional fare, emphasizing correct moral behavior, the importance of working hard, the family, and so on.⁴²

A glance at children's publication from a slightly later period reveals a similarly wide range of influences. The first year of *Çocuk Dünyası*, which was published from 1913-1926, includes references to the Old Testament, the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the 1001 Nights, the legend of the Japanese warrior Oeyama, Goethe, Tolstoy, William Tell, the Wright brothers and the first airplane, the Ottoman writers Ahmed Midhat Efendi, Ziya Gökalp, and Mehmed Emin, references to "national" stories (*millî masal*) as well as correspondence from readers in Baku, Kazan, and Bulgaria.⁴³ Thus even within one genre—here I have limited myself to children's periodicals but textbooks often yield the same result—we find a wide range of sources, types, and geographical exposure.

The dominant characteristics among these varied items in the literature being made available for children could be described as serious, moralizing, and above all, didactic, all of which made Ottoman children's reading material strikingly similar to that which was being produced in other parts of the world.⁴⁴ We can observe a general trend toward increasing the levels of responsibility foisted upon young readers. The children's reading material emphasizes the connection between their own progress in education, on the one hand, and a range of first imperial, later national desiderata on the other. For instance, the children's literature underscores the necessity for technological progress. Numerous articles are devoted to such subjects as the machine gun, the airplane, and the dreadnought. The very presence of newspapers and magazines as evidence of the fruits of the printing press is held up as sign of civilization and progress.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the economic independence and advancement of the country is implicitly linked to children and their progress as students, as readers,

and as healthy and productive members of society.⁴⁶ Likewise, there were suggestions that the very political system, be it imperial Ottoman or Turkish Republican, was dependent on the young readers. Articles devoted to such topics as the sultan, his Friday prayer ceremony, and the concept of “Ottomanness” all speak to the expected role that the young were to play in society.⁴⁷ From the attention given to the figure of the sultan and the slogan “Yashasın Osmanlılık” (Long Live Ottomanness),⁴⁸ there was not much distance to be travelled to the “Yashasın Cumhuriyet” (Long Live the Republic) and the personality cult of Mustafa Kemal that became ubiquitous in the years after 1923.

Naturally enough, perhaps, the responsibility being placed on the readers’ collective young shoulders seems to become even more intense during such periods of national stress, such as World War I and the War of Independence. In the aftermath of the Greek invasion, the children’s periodicals stressed the need for children to act. After describing the devastation of Western Anatolia, one such publication wrote, “The eyes of the thousands of miserable people living among these ashes are today upon you, for you are the ones who will rebuild the country.”⁴⁹ The tone was increasingly desperate, as if to suggest that children’s actions could really alter the fate of the nation, which was perhaps not all that farfetched when we consider that many of the soldiers were little more than children themselves.

The pressing weight of responsibility stands in stark contrast to another aspect of the children’s press, namely the patronizing tone increasingly adopted toward young readers. These publications, often in the very issues that call for the students to save the nation, exhibit many examples of condescension toward those they patronizingly refer to as “my little readers” and “little darlings” with their “tiny minds,” and other such terms of endearment, which are clearly at odds with the responsibility being thrust upon children.

If child readers thus received mixed messages about their role in society, the political messages imparted by their texts were increasingly clear. With time, as we have seen, there is clear evidence that young Republican readers were being made to disparage the Ottoman past. Ahmed Cevad [Emre] was a transitional late Ottoman and early Republican author of textbooks, including a series of readers entitled *Cumhuriyet Çocuklarına Türkçe Kıraat* (A Turkish Reader for Republican Children) which was quite typical in this regard. The first in this series features a skit entitled “Yashasın Cumhuriyet.”⁵⁰ It featured Osman, a bossy would-be Padishah, and the heroic Turhan (an old Turkish name meaning chief or nobleman). The names are not chosen by accident, but rather to accentuate the difference between Ottoman imperial past (Osman is the eponym of the Ottoman [Osmanlı] dynasty) and the Turkish nationalist aspect of the Republic. Naturally enough it is Turhan who emerges as the guardian of Republican values against this reactionary Ottoman usurper. Each protagonist is surrounded with a crowd of anonymous partisans, who seem to represent factions in broader society. Here is a taste of the dialogue from the opening lines:

Osman: (rifle on his shoulder, with a contingent of children behind him, sternly): Look sharp! Come here all of you and let me see you.

(The children stop their playing and look on in astonish-

ment.)

Turhan: (bravely): Are we supposed to come on your order?

Osman: Yes, on my order. Leave your games and come here! (He aims his rifle at them, and so do his confederates.)

Turhan: What do you want from us?

Osman: You will give me all of your toys and all of your playthings.

Turhan: Vay beyim vay! Who do you think you are? You are acting like the evil padishah who robbed the nation. That day has gone, my dear. (O zaman geçti, yavrum.)

Eventually the battle is won by Turhan and his faction of Republicans. Turhan’s last line is: “Let’s all shout together, ‘Down with the Sultan; Long live the Republic!’”

So far, the content of the children’s literature is about what we might expect of late Ottoman and early Republican approach to reading among the young. What was wanted in both eras was the cultivation of politically loyal, appreciative even, economically contributing, and civilized subjects and citizens.

What is unexpected is the extent to which reading was also depicted as a source of fun. In a marked departure from the serious, didactic tone in most literature for children, publications from this period began to present reading both as something enjoyable for its own sake, independent of the weighty responsibility of the larger society, and as a means of parodying various aspects of contemporary life. This juxtaposition seems to reflect a tension between the patriotic and the profit motives. An increasing market-orientation in the publishing industry seemed to influence choices of subject matter as competitors tried to find a niche that would set themselves apart. Sometimes this was attempted by recourse to generic sources of humor. There are numerous instances of articles that seem to have been included purely for their risible nature, for example a story about a horse that could write or a lamb who came to school. Sometimes the search for laughs could assume a darker tone, producing what today would immediately be labelled politically incorrect. The magazine *Yeni Yol*, particularly notable in this regard, ran cartoons ridiculing one character for being overweight or making jokes about an African woman depicted in full racist caricature with her two children, named Daylight (Gündüz) and Cotton (Pamuk).

Sometimes this fun could be taken at the expense of the official line, actually encouraging disobedience. Children’s journals eventually targeted schools and teachers as objects of derision, poking fun at them in an apparent attempt to form a closer bond with the students. Thus schools and teachers were portrayed as silly or irrelevant. Thus, like their contemporaries in Western Europe in this period, publishers were attempting to cater to the tastes of younger readers.⁵¹ The result was a shocking departure from the serious, duty-laden tone and material of the earlier texts. The new trend was toward the comic and the satirical. Naturally, the old *bocas* and their *mektebs*, or Quran schools, were a prime candidate for this abuse, but interestingly the new style schools were targeted as well. Consider the cover illustration of an edition of *Yeni Yol* dating from 1925.⁵² It features a member of the ulama teaching in a “new style” school, with the children seated in rows of desks. The scene resembles one of those

children's games where the object is to spot all of the things that are wrong in the picture. The *boca* looks on aghast over his charges; some of the boys are snickering and whispering to each other; some are busy folding paper into origami-like shapes; one is standing to give an apparently unconvincing answer while a fist punches him in the back while others pore over a copy of *Yeni Yol*. The message is clear: the teacher has clearly lost control of the class, and none of the props of classroom teaching—the map on the wall or the blackboard with its Arabic declensions—can hold the boys' attention the way the magazine can.

Other examples show that this sort of satire was not only reserved for members of the *ulama*. A humorous piece in *Bizim Mecmua*, founded just prior to the establishment of the Republic, has some fun at the expense of a new-style teacher when the math problem he gives the class is converted into a joke by a cheeky retort: "The teacher: 'What do five kurush bread, five kurush tea, five kurush cheese make?' Student: 'Breakfast, Mr Teacher.'" ⁵³ A final example, accompanied by an illustration provides more evidence that the fez- and frock coat-wearing teacher is equally subject to ridicule. In this scene, another math lesson, the teacher is again made to look ridiculous:

The Math Lesson:

My son, what is ten take away ten?

!!

Why are you silent. For example, a man buys ten apples. He throws two away because they are rotten; he drops five; three are stolen by vagabonds; so now how many are left?

A pear [slang for idiot]. ⁵⁴

The crudely drawn illustration makes it clear which side the magazine is on; one of the boys has a copy of *Yeni Yol* sticking out of his jacket pocket.

Conclusion

Several conclusions are clear from even this relatively cursory study. First, reading emerges as extremely varied, both in terms of practice and materials. It was portrayed, variously and often paradoxically, as an activity that reinforced individual exploration as well as group identity, secular as well as religious pursuits, utilitarian as well as transformational agendas, local as well as national and international awareness, sociopolitical cohesion as well as division, and it was depicted both as an activity of deadly seriousness and unalloyed entertainment. Secondly, it is clear that the similar preoccupations and concerns in children's texts on both sides of the 1923 divide encourage the view that the late Ottoman and early Republican period should be seen as one of transition, in which many of the sharp lines we have been taught to expect appear blurred, with some disappearing entirely. Thirdly, and somewhat more speculatively, it is important to emphasize the role of the market as a factor that encouraged the production of texts not necessarily informed by the same concerns as official pedagogy. Increasingly visible—here in books on shelves of Halide Edip's aunt, there in children's magazines—the market's expanding role seems to have produced a growing tension between state-sponsored reading and its message, on the one hand, and private, commercial tendencies on the other.

In this transitional period, reading was presented as a

new world offering a new identity based on the distinction between literacy and illiteracy. We should perhaps look at the category of reading as we look at other important markers in human history, such as class, sex, religion. Of these, literacy is the one that could be changed most easily, especially the closer one is to the present. It is also the category that we tend to take for granted as necessary for inclusion into the culturally and politically relevant segment of the population that most historians are concerned with. It is my contention that, instead of being taken for granted as a precondition for admission to historical relevance, the ability to read should be treated as yet another useful gauge or marker of human endeavor and one, that like, say, class or gender, has its own advantages and disadvantages as a means of studying historical activity.

NOTES

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¹ For a recent collection of essays and further bibliography representing this field, see Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). A recent issue of the *American Historical Review* featured a Forum on the effects of printing in the West, attesting to the persistent—and lively—debate surrounding this issue, 107, no.1 (2002): 84-128.

² There has been a fair amount of attention devoted to the subject of the book, but much less to the question of its reception and reading in general. For examples of scholarship devoted to the book and printing, see George Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, ed., *The Introduction of the Printing Press in the Middle East, Culture and History* 16 (1997). More recently, see Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) and Huda Smithshuijzen Abifares, *Arabic Typography: A Comprehensive Sourcebook* (London: Saqi Books, 2000), as well as the animated exchange on H:TURK <<http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~turk>> devoted to "the conspicuous absence of Turkish sources" in both of these works.

³ On the book and printing in the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, see Paul Dumont, ed., *Turquie Livres d'hier livres d'aujourd'hui, Études Turques* (1) 1992; Klaus Kreiser, *The Beginnings of Printing in the Near and Middle East: Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001). On the question of reading, see the excellent volume: Frédéric Hitzel, ed., *Livres et lecture dans le monde ottoman*, REMMM 87-88 (1999).

⁴ For a review of attempts to quantify late Ottoman and early Republican literacy, see François Georgeon, "Lire et écrire à la fin de l'Empire ottoman: quelques remarques introductives," in *Oral et écrit dans le monde turc-ottoman*, Nicolas Vatin, ed., REMMM 75-76 (1995), 170-173.

⁵ I have found the work of Cüneyd Okay in cataloguing and analyzing late Ottoman children's literature has been particularly helpful. See his *Osmanlı Çocuk Hayatında Yenileşmeler, 1850-1900* (Istanbul: Kırkambar Yayınları, 1998) and *Eski Harfli Çocuk Dergileri* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1999). I am grateful to Mehmet Ulucan for bringing these works to my attention.

⁶ See, for example, Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, Education and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷ Robert DeMaria, Jr., *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

⁸ Ali İrfan, *Çocuklara İstifade[?] Tezhib-i Ahlak ve Malumat-ı Nafta* (Istanbul: Şirket-i Murettibiye Matbaası, 1304), 21-25.

⁹ Ali İrfan, *Shiven Yahud Hatirat-i Shebabim* (Mourning, or the memoirs of my youth) (Izmir: Ahenk Matbaası, 1315), 3.

¹⁰ *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (London: John Murray, 1926), 88-9.

¹¹ Halid Ziya Ushaklgil, *Kırk Yıl* (Istanbul: İnkılap ve Aka Kitapları, 1969), 17.

¹² Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 35.

¹³ *Memoirs of Halid Edib*, 97.

¹⁴ The name chosen for the child in this text fits nicely with Richard Bulliet's essay on naming patterns in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic. Assuming that this hypothetical child would have been about five or six years old, his "birth" would have coincided with a period of sharp rise in distinctly Turkish names (as opposed to the selection of Muslim names in Bulliet's sample) in the very early years of the Republic. "First Names and Political Change in Modern Turkey" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 4 (1978), 489-495.

¹⁵ Celâl Nuri, *İlk Okuma ve Yazma Kitabı* (Istanbul: İleri Kütüphanesi, n.d.), 3.

¹⁶ Ahmed Cevad [Emre], *Güzel Kiraat* (İkinci sene) (Istanbul: Kütüphane-i İslam ver Askeri İbrahim Hilmî, 1335), 3

¹⁷ For a critique of this tendency, see my *Imperial Classroom*.

¹⁸ Kreiser, *Beginnings*, 54-5.

¹⁹ See "Islamic Morality in Late Ottoman 'Secular' Schools" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000), 369-393.

²⁰ Ali İrfan, *Birinci Kiraat* (First reader) Istanbul: Shems Matbaası, 1328-1330, 1.

²¹ İrfan, *Birinci Kiraat*, 4.

²² İrfan, *Birinci Kiraat*, 5. The lesson then goes on to enumerate Ottoman territory, by continent and then by province.

²³ [Vatanperver] Ali İrfan Egribozu, *Vatani seven okusun*. [Let he who loves the nation read it] Dersaadet: Mahmud Bey Matbaası, 1324.

²⁴ Ali İrfan, *Birinci Kiraat* (First reader) (Istanbul: Shems Matbaası, 1328-1330), 4-5.

²⁵ See, for example, *Çocuklara Rehber* 20 (1315) and *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* 15 (1897).

²⁶ Ahmed Rasim, *Doğru Usûl-i Kiraat* (Istanbul: İkdâm Matbaası, 1926), 61.

²⁷ Mehmed Fuad Köprülüzâde, *Yeni Millî Kiraat* (Istanbul: Kanaat, 1926), 3-4.

²⁸ T.C., *İlkemektepler Talimatnamesi* (Ankara, 1929), 18.

²⁹ See, for example, the cover of *Çocuk Dnygusu* in Okay, *Eski Harfli Çocuk Dergileri*, 124, for a late Ottoman example and Kreiser, ed., *Beginnings*, 55, for an early Republican version.

³⁰ See the children's periodical *Yeni Yol* 67, 134.

³¹ Matthew Elliot, "A Music Revolution in Turkey," SOAS Seminars on the History of the Near and Middle East, 11 March 2002.

³² Fortna, *Imperial Classroom*, Chapter 5.

³³ *Yeni Yol*, 50.

³⁴ Engin Çizgen, *Photographer/Fotografçi Ali Sami* (Istanbul: Hashet, 1989). See plates 32, 25, 42, and 30, respectively.

³⁵ For a late Ottoman example, see Ali İrfan [Egribozu], *Rehber-i Ablâk* (Istanbul: A. Asaduriyan, 1317 [1899-1900]); For an early Republican example, see *Yeni Yol* 10 (8 November 1923), 153.

³⁶ *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 25-47.

³⁷ Münir Hayri Egeli, *İlk Okuma Kitabım* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayma Salonu, 1957). The pasta in question, Nuh Makarnası, was advertised with full-page advertisements, facing the title page and again on the last page of the book.

³⁸ *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* 14 (17 Rebiülevvel 1314), 7.

³⁹ Muallim Cevdet [İnanç], *Çocuklar için... Hayat bilgisine uygun yazıklar ve temsiller* ([Balıkesir:] Türk Dili, 1943), 24. Similar letters devised to model the children's love for their teachers and even their textbooks are fairly common in this literature.

⁴⁰ *Çocuklara Kiraat* 1 (1883), 1-2.

⁴¹ *Gürbüz Türk Çocuğu* 23 April 1927. The text reads: "Her millet'in medeni seviyesi çocuklarına verdiği ehemiyet ve itina ile alakadar dır."

⁴² *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* 3 (29 Zilhicce 1313).

⁴³ *Çocuk Dünyası* 1 (1913).

⁴⁴ For Western Europe, see Martyn Lyons, "New Readers in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers," in Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 324-331. For a Southeast Asian example, see David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University

of California Press, 1981).

⁴⁵ *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* 1, 1.

⁴⁶ Hygiene was an important theme of many of these publications. Often the young readers were given explicit instructions on such matters as how to wash their hands before eating, how to chew their food, what to eat, etc., as if to reinforce the point, mentioned above, that their families could be counted upon for very little. For an example, see *Yeni Yol* 50, 415.

⁴⁷ See for example *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* 2, 1.

⁴⁸ Tüccarzâde İbrahim Hilmî, *Altın Kitab: Çocuklara İlk Kiraat* (Istanbul: Kitabhane-i Askeri İbrahim Hilmî, 1327), 22.

⁴⁹ *Yeni Yol* 10 (8 November 1923).

⁵⁰ *Cumhuriyet Çocuklarına Türkçe Kiraat* 1:1 (Istanbul: Hilmî, 1929).

⁵¹ Lyons in Chartier and Cavallo, eds. *A History*, 332.

⁵² *Yeni Yol* 57 (1 January 1925).

⁵³ *Bişim Mecmuası* 2 (12 April 1922), 4. The term of address for the teacher, Muallim Bey, marks him as a secularly trained teacher, and not a member of the ulama.

⁵⁴ *Yeni Yol* 66 (5 March 1925).