



## From the New Order to the Benevolent Event – Making Children’s Education Compulsory in the Ottoman Empire, 1808 – 1826

*Nizam-ı Cedit'ten Vaka-i Hayriye'ye Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Çocukların Eğitiminin Mecburi Hale Getirilmesi, 1808-1826*

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#### Abstract

Sultan Mahmud II's era witnessed a gradual transition of the centuries-old classical Ottoman education system that was controlled by the ulama into a state administration by the announcement of an imperial decree in 1824. Although this significant change was the third in Europe, it has not been a specific topic for academic research so far. As the documents from the Ottoman archives confirm, the Sultan's efforts concerning children's basic education began almost a decade earlier. He was concerned about the deteriorating quality of the education system. Based on the primary sources, this study aims to portray the historical background and the official transfer of children's education under state control. This decree did not only make children's education compulsory but also displayed families' bad habit of letting little children work instead of sending them to school. According to the imperial decree, children started working at a very early age and did not learn the basics of their religion, and when they grew up, they did not go and educate themselves either. Sultan instructed authorities to prevent child labor and ensure children attended schools learning the basics of their religion. In effect, children's education became the collective responsibility of not only the families but also imams, school teachers, neighborhood administrators, and judges.

**Keywords:** children’s education, compulsory education, Ottoman education, Turkish history of education.

#### Öz

Sultan II. Mahmud dönemi, ulama tarafından kontrol edilen klasik Osmanlı eğitim sisteminin 1824’te ilan edilen ferman ile devlet yönetimine kademeli bir geçişin başlangıç dönemidir. Bu büyük deęişim tarihsel olarak Avrupa’da Prusya ve İsviçre’in ardından üçüncü olmasına rağmen, şimdiye kadar bir akademik araştırma konusu olmamıştır. Aslında Osmanlı arşiv belgeleri, Sultan’ın çocukların temel eğitimi konusundaki çabalarının neredeyse on yıl önce başladığını göstermektedir. Kendisi eğitim sisteminde kalitenin bozulması ile ilgili endişeler taşımaktaydı. Bu çalışma birincil kaynaklara dayanarak çocukların eğitiminin devlet kontrolü altına geçmesinin tarihsel arka planını tasvir etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu ferman sadece çocukların eğitimini zorunlu hale getirmekle kalmamış, aynı zamanda ailelerin kötü alışkanlıklarından olmak üzere küçük çocuklarını okula göndermek yerine çalıştırdıklarını da ortaya koymuştur. Fermana göre çocuklar çok küçük yaşta çalıştırılmaya başladığından temel din eğitimi almamakta, ileri yaşlarda da gidip kendi eğitimlerini tamamlamamaktaydılar. Sultan, yetkililere çocuk işçiliğini önlemeleri ve çocukların okullara giderek dinlerinin temel ilkelerini öğrenmelerini sağlamaları talimatını vermiştir. Sonuç olarak, çocukların eğitimi sadece ailelerin değil, aynı zamanda imamların, okul öğretmenlerinin, muhtarların ve kadıların ortak sorumluluğu haline geldi.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** çocuk eğitimi, mecburi eğitim, Osmanlı eğitim, Türk eğitim tarihi.



## Introduction

Since the second ruler of the Ottoman Empire, Orhan Gazi, opened the first madrasa/medrese in the town of Iznik (Nicaea), education, predominantly in Islamic curriculum, had been under the jurisdiction of religious scholars, the ulama. Throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire, the sultans demonstrated a keen interest in expanding the teaching and learning system; as a result, numerous large and small medreses were built. These medreses were mainly concentrated in larger towns and administrative capitals, such as Bursa and Edirne, and attracted many individuals who perceived them as the path to a promising career, while others pursued a traditional religious education. For the same reasons, the capital, Istanbul, became an attractive center of education for centuries, with little organizational change after Sultan Mehmed II and Sultan Suleyman built grander medrese structures in Istanbul in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire underwent a substantial modernization process that was often in parallel with the changes occurring in continental Europe. In this era, the military was redesigned, armies were restructured, bureaucracy was reshaped, and new bureaucratic institutions were established. The changes were seen as indispensable, and the state apparatus was reformed under a totally new concept. However, at times, some sectors of society perceived the transformations as an existential threat and moved to strengthen their opposition. Sultan Selim III's *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Order) reforms are a good example of a widespread opposing reaction, as the Janissary army merged their power with certain powerful ulama and eventually started an uprising. The Sultan was not able to cope with the scale of the rebellion or to counter the revolt; hence, he was dethroned and, a year later, was executed by his Janissary opponents. His successor, Sultan Mahmud II, inherited an empire in 1808 in which reforms were detested, and most sections of the army were on alert. Having witnessed his ill-fated predecessor who was unable to escape beheading, the Sultan must have been vigilant about the potential consequences of certain decisions on reforms.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Sultan Mahmud II must have been well aware of the cost of inaction.

Sultan Mahmud II was persistent and issued repetitive instructions in the form of imperial decrees announcing compulsory basic education for children and introducing new regulations prohibiting child labour. Aiming to prevent 'parents' unscrupulousness' and send young children back to school, this imperial decree served as an important cornerstone in the Ottoman Empire's history of education. Overall, the decree highlighted a serious social problem, as families were letting their children work as apprentices with artisans at a young age instead of sending them to school. Thus, children grew up without learning the basics of their religion, and later in life, they did not develop an interest in going back to school to receive an education. Sultan Mahmud II's earlier warnings regarding this subject evidently seem to have been largely ignored, and the situation had not changed in Ottoman society. As this paper will demonstrate below, ten years earlier, in 1814, the Sultan issued an imperial decree instructing the authorities to open schools for children and to report back to Istanbul on the conditions of the waqfs, which were explicitly founded to take care of schools and mosques. In the same decree, he interestingly demanded people to pray five

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<sup>1</sup> Ibrahim Vehbi Baysan, "State Education Policy in the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat Period (1839-1876" (Ph.D. Thesis, U.K., Manchester University, 2004), 37.

times a day together at mosques, as well. Apparently, this was because some people did not fully comprehend their own religion, abandoned its practices, and continued deserting mosques.

This paper will rely on a series of previously less-known imperial decrees concerning children's basic religious education between 1808-1826. These decrees signify Sultan Mahmud II's long-term planning, persistence, and continuous efforts to regulate children's education. The focus of this research, however, will be on the decrees announced in late 1824 and early 1825, respectively, that eventually set the foundations of state intervention over basic primary education. These decrees prohibited children's employment both by artisans and at the government offices within the Ottoman state. As will be demonstrated below, these announcements were not circumstantial but rather final versions of proclamations making structural changes in the field of education. The research is mainly based on studying, in its original language, the manuscripts of imperial decrees from the Ottoman archives. Following extensive searches both in the Directorate of State Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey/T.C. *Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı* (henceforth BOA) and in the Istanbul's Mufti Court Records Archives/*Istanbul Müftülüğü Şer'iyye Sicilleri Arşivi*, the author of this research has successfully located the original content of the imperial decree issued in late 1824. Hence, this paper is built on to study official documents found in the Ottoman archives and the interpretation of related official texts focusing on the fragmented records in the archives related to the announcement of compulsory basic religious education during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II. As to critically approach the sources, a systematic content analysis methodology is used in this study. This is to say that in order to determine the administrative and/or political message(s), the structure of official communication language and thematic, as well as symbolic references in the text, have been scrutinized together with the surrounding political climate.

Furthermore, based on the archival information gathered, this paper emphasizes that the system of basic religious education, which was traditionally under the jurisdiction of the ulama, was not successful and was in drastic decline. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it seems the ulama were not efficiently conducting educational services, as was expected of them at the primary level. Hence, this paper demonstrates that the subject of children's basic religious education was a decade-long campaign by the Sultan, who most likely intended to restructure the educational system to establish control over society as a strategic policy. Here, the basic argument is that these imperial decrees highlighted certain problems and attempted to correct them. Additionally, they also aimed to establish state authority over the educational system gradually.

The announcement also represents a major step towards taking children's basic education under state control. However, as will be seen below, this particular subject somehow did not reasonably attract the attention of researchers in the field. It is worth mentioning that the decree was also in line with remarkable developments in Europe in the field of education. It is worth emphasizing that historically, only a few states introduced compulsory education before the declaration of the imperial decree in 1824. In 1763, Prussia was the first state to declare 7-8 years of compulsory primary education for children between the ages of 6 and 13 or 14. Frederick the Great 'sought to raise the quality of instruction' and described 'the methods of instruction to be used and the subject

matter to be taught',<sup>2</sup> and the 'system was managed by the Lutheran clergy until the beginning of the twentieth century'.<sup>3</sup> In December 1774, the General School Ordinance (*Allgemeine Schulordnung*) was announced, thus making schooling compulsory for all children between the ages of six and twelve in Austria.<sup>4</sup> In 1814, Denmark introduced seven years of compulsory three-day-per-week education for children between the ages of 7 and 14.<sup>5</sup> After the Ottoman Empire's announcement, compulsory education was introduced by Sweden in 1842, Norway in 1848, and Austria in 1869. Most dominant powers, such as England and France, resisted the concept of 'mass schooling'.<sup>6</sup> during this period.<sup>7</sup>

However, early academic works in the European field of the history of education focused on 'transnational similarities', especially paying attention to the institutionalization of mass schooling and the creation of rules and regulations for compulsory education. In this new concept of making schooling compulsory, education emerged as one of the most important social rights<sup>8</sup> and it was encouraged.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. A Brief History of Education in the Ottoman Empire

Since the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, Sultans traditionally valued education and demonstrated fairly considerable interest in offering their support for its further development and expansion. The 15<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman chronicle Aşık Paşazade reported that the successor to the founding father of the Empire, Orhan Gazi (d. 1362), opened the first Ottoman medrese in 1331 in Iznik (Nicaea) after declaring the city to be the capital of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>10</sup> After the formation of the first medrese, there were two major turning points in the Ottoman Empire's history of education; the first turning point was during the time of Sultan Mehmed II (d. 1481), the Conqueror, who made a major investment in central Istanbul and built a complex of eight medreses called *Sahn-ı Seman* between 1463 and 1470.<sup>11</sup> Although different from today's understanding, these medreses represented earlier examples of the class system. As was the custom, the age among adults was irrelevant for attending these medreses. Education was based on the complexity of the texts in the curriculum; students went to upper levels after successfully learning easier texts or books.<sup>12</sup> The second turning point came almost one hundred years later, between 1550 and 1557. Sultan Suleyman

<sup>2</sup> I.N. Thut and Don Adams, *Educational Patterns in Contemporary Societies* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 80–81.

<sup>3</sup> Yasemin Nuhuğlu Soysal and David Strang, "Construction of the First Mass Education Systems in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Sociology of Education* 62, no. 4 (1989): 278.

<sup>4</sup> James Van Horn Melton, "The Theresian School Reform of 1774," in *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria*, ed. J. Collins and K. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 57.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Larsen, "A Diversity of Schools: The Danish School Acts of 1814 and the Emergence of Mass Schooling in Denmark," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 4, no. 1 (2017): 3–28.

<sup>6</sup> F.O. Ramirez and J. Boli, "The Political Construction of Mass Schooling: European Origins and Worldwide Institutionalization," *Sociology of Education* 60, no. 1 (1987): 4.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Flora and et al, *State, Economy, and Society in Western Europe 1815-1975 a Data Handbook Volume I: The Growth of Mass Democracies and Welfare States* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Marshall, *Alfred Marshall's Lectures to Women: Some Economic Questions Directly Connected to the Welfare of the Laborer*, ed. Tiziano Raffaelli, Eugenio Biagini, and Rita MacWilliams Tullberg (UK: Edward Elgar, 1995), 158.

<sup>10</sup> (Derviş Ahmed) AşıkPaşazade, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarihi*, ed. Kemal Yavuz and Yahya Sarac (Istanbul: İstanbul Koç Kültür Sanat Tanıtım, 2003), 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Fatih Mehmet II Vakfiyeleri*, Türk Vakfiyeleri No.1 (Ankara: Vakıflar Umum Müdürlüğü Neşriyatı, 1938).

<sup>12</sup> Murat Belge, *Osmanlı'da Kurumlar ve Kültür* (Istanbul: Bilgi University, 2008), 215.

(d. 1566), the Lawgiver, had the vast Suleymaniye Mosque complex built, in which specialist medreses offered higher education in the fields of medicine and several branches of Islamic studies.<sup>13</sup>

It is notable that education was also seen as an essential instrument to administer restraint and social order in the Ottoman Empire. Through education, obedience to authority and respect for rules and regulations were inculcated, and morality was a foundational element. Educating children, in general, served two major purposes: teaching them the basics and essentials of religion (*ta'lim*) and teaching them manners (*terbiye*). Although there was no centralized authority, as mentioned earlier, education had long been viewed as the responsibility of the Ottoman religious scholars, the ulama. The number of medreses increased dramatically in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries; for example, the total number of medreses in Istanbul almost doubled.<sup>14</sup> The curriculum was primarily based on religious scholarship, which the ulama were authorized to develop and implement. Entirely under the ulama's jurisdiction, courses were designed; the upper-level theological seminaries called the medreses, were regulated; books for teaching were selected; and the appointment of teachers was organized. In this system, student admission to higher levels depended not on age but on merit; students were expected to demonstrate their learning of appointed books to pass successfully. The difficulty of these books increased significantly at upper levels.

Prior to attending medreses, children would go to primary-level schools for basic education. It is worth mentioning that legally, there was no standard age restriction for starting to attend these schools; however, the average age was estimated to be 5 or 6 years old. Usually, one-room elementary schools were given various names, such as '*mahalle mektepleri*/neighbourhood schools', '*mekteb-i sıbyan*/children's school', '*daru's-sıbyan*/house of children', '*muallim-hane*/house of teachers', '*mekteb-hane*/school house', '*daru'l-ilm*/house of knowledge' and '*daru't-talim*/house of learning'.<sup>15</sup> In these primary-level schools, along with learning the Kuran, children would also study simple religious texts, such as *İlmihal*, *Mızraklı İlmihal*, and *Durr-i Yekta*, to begin learning the basics of Islam. Children would study *Subha-i Sıbyan* and *Tuhfe-i Vehbi* to memorize vocabulary and learn the meanings of religious terminology. *Karabaş Tecvidi* would also be studied to read the Kuran according to some basic methods.<sup>16</sup>

The medreses were attached to local mosques or masjids, which charitable establishments, the waqfs supported. The waqfs would be established for various pious causes and be supported by voluntary donations. Although the waqfs had to be non-profit organizations, depending on the charter, these establishments could be involved in commercial activities, such as renting out properties. Moreover, so far as the finances were concerned, the ulama controlled the income of the waqfs and were financially independent in the implementation of their teaching and learning policies.

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was a major shift in the perception of education. The repeated defeats of the Ottoman Janissary army in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the

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<sup>13</sup> Kemal Edip Kürkçüoğlu, ed., *Suleymaniye vakfiyesi* (Ankara: Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü, 1962).

<sup>14</sup> Madeline Zilfi, *The Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulema in the Postclassical Age (1600-1800)*, Studies in Middle Eastern History 8 (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), 205–20.

<sup>15</sup> Faik Reşit Unat, *Türkiye Eğitim Sisteminin Gelişmesine Tarihi Bir Bakış* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1964), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Abdülaziz İbn Cemalettin, *Osmanlı Adet, Merasim ve Tabirleri* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1995), 62.



advancement Europe had achieved in war technology and tactics forced the Ottoman Sultans to restructure their policies strategically. The Sultan's attention was directed toward the establishment of military-technical schools in the Empire with the aim of strengthening the army. In Europe, technical advancements came with the Industrial Revolution and its applications to warfare technology, which gave distinct advantages and superiority to its armies. Once among the strongest military powers in Europe, the Ottoman Empire had decayed internally, and a 6-year-long war with Russia ended with a diminishment of both prestige and territory in 1774. Thereafter, the Ottomans had to wage war in defense against attackers, contrary to their formerly offensive policies. Thus, Sultan Mustafa III (d. 1774) ordered establishing a military technical school, and in November 1773, a marine school called *Mühendishane-i Bahri-i Hümayun* was opened.<sup>17</sup> The French officer, François Baron de Tott, who spent several years in Istanbul as a military adviser to Sultan Mustafa III, offered a detailed account of the formation of technical military education during that period in history.<sup>18</sup> A few years after the formation of the marine school, the reformist Sultan, Sultan Selim III, established a war school called *Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayun* in May 1795.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Start of a New Era – Sultan's Interest in Children's Basic Religious Education

Sultan Selim III (d. 1808) came to the throne in April 1789 during the war with Russia (1787-1791), and soon afterward, he announced a program of reforms known as the *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Order). The reform package included regulating provincial administration, new taxation to finance the reforms, and, more importantly, forming a new Western-style military corps. However, the *Nizam-ı Cedid* did not have widespread recognition, and it was not well received, particularly by the traditional Ottoman Janissary army. This reform package was so unpopular that, ultimately, in 1807, the Janissaries joined their power with religious scholars, the ulama, and local notables, the *a'yan*, and triggered a rebellion in Istanbul. Days of unrest led to the dethroning of Sultan Selim III in May 1807, and he was replaced by his cousin Sultan Mustafa IV. Almost a year later, in July 1808, during the counter-revolution, the Janissary rebels executed Sultan Selim III in the courtyard of the Topkapı Palace. After a brief period of turmoil, and with the help of loyal army General Alemdar Mustafa Pasha, Sultan Mustafa IV was removed, and Sultan Mahmud II (d. 1839) was enthroned. A few months later, Sultan Mahmud II ordered the execution of Sultan Mustafa IV, and he became the sole representative of the Ottoman dynasty. However, Sultan Mahmud II and his supporters within the military and the bureaucracy were unable to initiate the necessary structural reforms that the state apparatus urgently needed. This was due to the dominance and continued pressure as well as threats received from strong members of the Janissary army and a portion of the ulama, who resisted the 'change'. Nevertheless, the Sultan continued his interest in further improving conditions of primary education and facilitating young children's access to basic religious learning.

In the meantime, Sultan Mahmud II focused his efforts on developing policies to tackle chronic fiscal problems in order to rescue the treasury in crises. This was because, with the formation of the *İrad-ı Cedid Hazinesi* (Treasury of New Revenues) in 1793, the Ottoman fiscal system entered a

<sup>17</sup> Mehmed Esad, *Mir'at-i Mühendishane-i Berri-i Hümayun* (Istanbul: Karabet Matbaası, 1895), <https://kutuphane.ttk.gov.tr/resource?itemId=243587&dkymId=60466>.

<sup>18</sup> François Tott, *Memoirs of the Baron de Tott on the Turks and the Tartars*, vol. 1 (Dublin: L.W., J.C and R.M, 1785), 172.

<sup>19</sup> T.H. Abdullah, *İstanbul'un uzun dört yılı (1785-1789): Taylesanizade Hafız Abdullah Efendi Tarihi* (Istanbul: Tatar Tarih ve Tabiat Vakfı Yayınları, 2003), 237–39.

‘transitional period’, which lasted until the declaration of major reforms, the *Tanzimat Fermanı* in 1839. The Ottoman administration tried desperately to find ways to acquire new revenues for the treasury.<sup>20</sup> During this phase, independent treasuries were set up to support military expenses as part of the reform policy. This era had ‘multiple treasury systems’ until the *Defterdar* (Director of Finances) was replaced by the *Maliye Nezareti* (Ministry of Finance) in 1838.<sup>21</sup>

Decades of protracted wars, military defeats, coups d’état, and the Serbian, as well as Greek revolts, combined with financial and political crises, inevitably created an economic downturn. These factors turned Sultan Mahmud II’s reign into a highly challenging period for the Empire and the central government.<sup>22</sup> It is safe to say that during the first half of Sultan Mahmud II’s reign, the Ottoman bureaucracy critically suffered from fragmentation and ineffectiveness. Ottoman provincial administrators and the provincial notables, the *a’yan*, took advantage of this state of weakness in the central administration, as they were reluctant to send their tax revenue contributions to Istanbul. After a series of meetings with the *a’yan*, the grand vizier was able to strike a deal called the *Sened-i İttifak* (the Charter of Alliance) in October 1808. Although signing the charter was a success, whether the *a’yan* fully complied with it in the years that followed is debatable.

Despite all these difficulties, Sultan Mahmud II continued the philanthropic tradition of supporting teaching and learning, as well as demonstrating personal support for children’s basic education. At certain events and occasions, the Sultan customarily distributed pocket money and various gifts amongst schoolchildren and their teachers. For example, in February 1809, the distinctive tradition of serving *pilav ve zerde* (rice dish and rice turmeric pudding) at the Sublime Porte (*Babıali*) was organized, and school children were invited to the occasion.<sup>23</sup> In another instance, the birth of Sultan Mahmud II’s son Murad in January 1812 was celebrated and turned into a public event. On this occasion, assorted presents were distributed to teachers and students at schools in Istanbul.<sup>24</sup> In some instances, the Sultan also distributed gifts and pocket money in support and promotion of learning and teaching without waiting for a special occasion. In December 1815, as beneficence, the Sultan ordered the distribution of one kuruş to each pupil and 15 kuruş to each school teacher at 186 primary schools within the districts of *Eyüb*, *Galata*, *Kasım Pasha*, *Tobhane* and *Üsküdar* in Istanbul.<sup>25</sup> Certain political incidents were also turned into public events, such as in November 1817, when gifts were distributed at schools as a symbol of Sultan’s generosity on the occasion of capturing the rebel leader Abdullah bin Sa‘ud in the town of *Dar‘iyya*, in today’s Saudi Arabia and bringing him to Istanbul.<sup>26</sup> Even on the occasion of the prayer for rain (*istiska*) after a drought in September 1820, some pocket money was distributed amongst schoolchildren in Istanbul and its districts of *Eyüb*, *Galata*, and *Üsküdar*.<sup>27</sup> The Court Historian (*Vak‘a-nivis*) Esad

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<sup>20</sup> Yavuz Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi (XVIII. yy dan Tanzimat’a Mali Tarih)* (Istanbul: Alan yayınları, 1986), 236–43.

<sup>21</sup> Erol Özvar, “‘Finances and Fiscal Structure,’” in *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, Facts on File Library of World History (New York, NY: Facts on File Publishing, 2009), 218.

<sup>22</sup> Sevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 188–200.

<sup>23</sup> BOA, *C. MF*, 80/3987.

<sup>24</sup> BOA, *C. MF*, 105/5223.

<sup>25</sup> BOA, *HAT*, 668/32602, *HAT* 411/21391.

<sup>26</sup> BOA, *HAT*, 1351/52796.

<sup>27</sup> BOA, *C. IKTS*, 39/1906.

Efendi informed us that after suppressing the Janissary uprising in June 1826, the Sultan gave away 75 thousand kuruş to be equally distributed among 3 thousand school children.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, it took years for Sultan Mahmud II to gradually establish his authority and begin taking effective control of the state administration, as well as gain the confidence and support of his Ottoman subjects. During this years-long strategy, an important part of the Sultan's policy was to demonstrate the ulama's ineffectiveness and incompetence in regulating the system of basic education as well as religious foundations, which were the pillars of Islam and Ottoman culture. However, scrutinizing areas that were under the ulama control for centuries was a delicate and potentially provocative task. He must have been aware of his predecessor's failed attempt to restore order in courts and schools, which attracted the ulama's fierce reaction and ended with the dismissal of the highest religious authority, Şeyhülislam Mustafa Efendi, in March 1791. Thereafter, no attempt had been made to regulate the fields under the ulama control.<sup>29</sup> In order to tackle the problem, it appears that Sultan Mahmud II relied on careful planning and support of his most trusted şeyhülislams as the highest religious authority in the Empire. For example, when the harshly critical imperial edict was sent to provinces in 1814, underlining the poor condition of the mosques and schools, Dürrizade Abdullah Efendi was serving his second term as the şeyhülislam.<sup>30</sup> He belonged to a family of şeyhülislams for generations: his father (Arif Efendi) and grandfather (Mehmed Efendi) were both former şeyhülislams remained in the post for years. During his successful career, Abdullah Efendi served in high-level positions as a judge, the *kadı*. But more importantly, in July 1808, he was privileged to lead the traditional coronation ceremony at the *Eyüb* Mosque, celebrating the Sultan's ascending to the throne. This was the religious site at the *Eyüb* district of Istanbul, where the new sultans girded with the sword of Osman. It was not a coincidence that he became the şeyhülislam four months later and stayed in the post until September 1810. Abdullah Efendi was reappointed to the post on June 1812 and he remained in this post until his dismissal on March 1815.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. Instructing Opening of Schools for Children in 1814

In 1814, Sultan Mahmud II sent a momentous imperial decree to the provinces, underlining the worsening situation of children's basic education. Despite the author's efforts, the original copy of this imperial decree could not be located in the Ottoman and the Religious Court (*Meşihat*) Archives to establish the exact issue date. However, an Ottoman bureaucratic tradition of quoting the contents of imperial decrees while responding back to the capital, Istanbul, proved useful in this regard. Various official communiques<sup>32</sup> have been validated beyond a reasonable doubt; these contain instructions and have cited approximately the same content. According to these communiques, the imperial decree was sent to the provinces on a date before July 1814. The authorities responded to

<sup>28</sup> Mehmed Esad, *Uss-i Zafer* (Istanbul: Süleyman Efendi Matbaası, 1827), 188.

<sup>29</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III 1789-1807* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 84-85.

<sup>30</sup> Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, ed. Nuri Akbayar, trans. Seyit Ali Kahraman, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), 68.

<sup>31</sup> Shaw, *Between Old and New: The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Selim III 1789-1807*, 68.

<sup>32</sup> The Court of Yenice-i Karasu (today's Genisea, in Greece) on July 12, 1814, (*C.MF.* 9/448); the Court of Vudine (Edessa in Greece) on July 31, 1814 (*C.MF.* 85/4225); the Court of Kandiye (Crete) on September 14, 1814 (*C.MF.* 67/3319) and the Court of Zile (Tokat) on January 2, 1815 (*C.EV.* 457/23103).



the Sultan's office in Istanbul, informing the administrators about receiving the abovementioned imperial decree, reading it to the public, and confirming that they would abide by the new instructions.

Based on the responses in the communiques to the 1814 imperial decree, it is known that the Sultan expressed his concerns about the failing conditions of neighborhood schools (the *mektebs*), where young children ought to have been learning the basics of their religion. The Sultan instructed the authorities to read and explain the new rules to the public, as summarized below:

- 1) Inform all Muslims to pray together in congregation at mosques and masjids five times a day; those who did not comply with this rule would be disciplined.<sup>33</sup>
- 2) Open schools for the children of Islam, where they would be educated.<sup>34</sup>
- 3) Inspect endowments belonging to mosques, masjids and schools and report to Istanbul (*Dersaadet*) about their conditions in case they were inactive or had been taken over by unqualified individuals.<sup>35</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the statement in the decree 'open schools for the children of Islam' is not entirely clear even in its original language, as it can denote opening new schools as well as reviving already closed schools. As the endowments were taken under inspection by this decree, it is possible to interpret that priority to open schools might have been given to the already closed schools. This was due to the mishandling of the waqfs that were established to finance these schools.

It is rather unusual for the Sultan to instruct his subjects in the provinces to pray together five times a day at mosques when it is not an obligation in Islam. It must be emphasized, however, that almost a decade later, in a visit to the Sublime Porte, Sultan Mahmud II repeated his instruction to the senior government officials to pray in congregation. He said<sup>36</sup>, "From now on, those who have the imam at home, and others at masjids and mosques continue praying in the congregation!"<sup>37</sup> This may be because the mosques, together with imams and hocas were important instruments for spreading news and government propaganda until publication of the first official newspaper, the *Takvim-i Vekai* in 1831.<sup>38</sup>

One of the official response communiques mentioned above<sup>39</sup> dated July 31, 1814, sent to Istanbul from the Court in Vodine (Edessa in Greece) included additional quotations from the Sultan's original decree. In this document, the Sultan explained the reasons behind the decision and sounded concerned, stating: "For a while, people completely abandoned the obligatory praying, and

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<sup>33</sup> "Kaffe-i ehl-i İslam evkat-ı hamse salatını cevami ve mesacidde cema'atle eda eylemeleri ... evkat-ı hamsede namazların cevami ve mesacidde cema'atle eda ve devam eylemeyenlerin te'dib olunması"

<sup>34</sup> "Ehl-i İslam sıbyanına mahsus olan mektebler açılarak ta'lim ve ta'allum eylemeleri"

<sup>35</sup> "Cevami ve mesacid ve mektebler vakıfları telef olmuş veyahud na-ehl üzerlerine geçmişleri var ise"

<sup>36</sup> Mehmed Esad, *Vak'a-nüvis Es'ad Efendi Tarihi: (Bahir Efendi'nin zeyl ve ilâveleriyile): 1237-1241/1821-1826*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2000), 492.

<sup>37</sup> "Fima ba'd imamı olanlar hanelerinde ve sairleri cevami u mesacidde cema'atle mudavemet etsunlar!"

<sup>38</sup> Uriel Heyd, "The Ottoman 'Ulemā and Westernization in the Time of Selīm III and Maḥmūd II," in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization Scripta Hierosolymitana*, vol. IX (Jerusalem: Publications of the Hebrew University, 1961), 66.

<sup>39</sup> BOA, *C.MF*, 85/4225, July 31, 1814.

mosques and masjids remained empty five times a day during prayer times."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the Sultan stated that people did not attend mosques because of some religious authorities' (*meşayih*) misbehavior: "Some of the *meşayih* have disregarded explaining and teaching ordinary people the principles and obligations of Islam accurately."<sup>41</sup> Here, it seems that some of the local religious authorities, instead of complying with their actual job responsibilities and teaching people the essentials of their religion, were interested in preaching matters other than their duties. As the Sultan further stated: "Once they were on the rostrum, they began narrating old stories, and they started concluding the sessions with statements that are not among their duties."<sup>42</sup> It may safely be assumed that they could be challenging the central authority and criticizing the actions of the government that they were not satisfied with.

Sultan Mahmud II was determined to press ahead with the bureaucratic modernization and restart the reform program that had to be abandoned two decades earlier. First, he had to make the hard decision, and in 1822, to order the execution of one of his long-serving and most trusted senior bureaucrats, Halet Efendi (1760-1822).<sup>43</sup> Apparently, he was a notoriously vicious person against his rivals and was also pivotal in adjourning the Janissary army reforms by misleading the Sultan for years.<sup>44</sup>

Thereafter, the Sultan made two critical appointments at the level of grand vizier in the 1820s, both of which must have played an essential role in the announcement of compulsory basic education in 1824. The first appointee for the post of grand vizier was a career diplomat, Mehmed Said Galib Pasha (1763-1829); the second was an army general, Benderli Mehmed Selim Sırrı Pasha (1771-1829).

Mehmed Said Galib Pasha was a strong supporter of Sultan Selim III's reform program and served as the grand vizier for ten months between December 13, 1823, and September 14, 1824, under Sultan Mahmud II.<sup>45</sup> It is safe to state that Mehmed Said Galib Pasha was one of the key figures who influenced Sultan Mahmud II's policies in line with bureaucratic changes. He had a successful career as Sultan Selim III's special envoy to Paris for peace negotiations. During his stay in Paris, Mehmed Said Galib Pasha was an active diplomat; he was in contact with foreign ambassadors and sent detailed reports updating officials on the latest developments back to Istanbul. He also prudently followed news about Turkey in the French press, and he wrote in French newspapers in an effort to correct misconceptions about his homeland.<sup>46</sup> During his short time as grand vizier, he successfully ended the chronic Morea question, an insurrection that started in 1770. It is widely believed that his inability to act swiftly against the unrest started by the Ottoman Janissary Army's logistics and arms supply units (*Cebeci*) caused his dismissal from the post of grand vizier. However, the Ottoman court historian Ahmed Cevdet/Cevdet, relying on 'insider

<sup>40</sup> "Bir müddetden beri salat-i mefruzu cümle nas indinde külliyyen metruk olmak rütbesine varub evkat-ı hamsede cevami ve mesacid cema'atden hali kalmış"

<sup>41</sup> "Meşayihden dahi avam nasa akayid-i sahiha ve şerayit-i İslamiyeyi beyan ve ta'limden sarf-ı nazar ile..."

<sup>42</sup> "Kürsülerde heman hikayat-ı sabıka nakli ve vazifelerinden olmayan bazı sözler ile teknil-i meclis etmeye başlamış olduklarından..."

<sup>43</sup> Howard A. Reed, "The Destruction of the Janissaries by Mahmud II in June 1826" (Ph.D. Dissertation., USA, Princeton University, 1951), 52.

<sup>44</sup> Ahmed Cevdet, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 12 (Istanbul: Takvimhane-yi Amire, 1885), vol. 12, pp. 62–67.

<sup>45</sup> Cevdet, 12:235–36.

<sup>46</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "Amedi Galib efendinin murahhaslığı ve paris'ten gönderdiği şifreli mektuplar," *Belleten* 1 (1937): 408.

information' notified his readers about the main reason. Apparently, the grand vizier declined the Sultan's request to punish the entire Janissary army and suggested Benderli Mehmed Selim Sırrı Pasha as the more appropriate person to punish them.<sup>47</sup>

As a tactical and strategic move, Mehmed Said Galib Pasha was dismissed and replaced by Benderli Mehmed Selim Sırrı Pasha as the grand vizier, who served for four years until 1828. With this replacement, Sultan Mahmud II seems to have actually initiated a major structural reform program. In this position, the new grand vizier played a crucial and active role in a significant turning point in Ottoman history. One month after the appointment, in November 1824, the unique imperial decree, which is the subject of this paper, together with the decree announced in January 1825, was issued, making basic education compulsory for children in and around Istanbul. Benderli Mehmed Selim Sırrı Pasha, as a career army general, gained experience fighting in the Russian, Syrian and Tripoli fronts and had a strong commanding position within the Janissary army.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, he was instrumental in the total destruction of the Janissary army in 1826, thus eliminating the armed wing of the opposition. This occasion is known as the Benevolent Event (*Vak'a-i Hayriye*), after which a new, modern army was formed and was named Muhammed's Victorious Soldiers (*Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye*). The şeyhülislam, Kadi-zade Mehmed Tahir,<sup>49</sup> was also involved in assisting the Sultan on his reforms over the military but also supported him in his efforts for reorganizing basic education in the provinces. This event can be considered final blow to the *Bektaşî* a non-Sunni *sufî* order and replacing it with Nakşibendi – Khalidi, a Sufî order in the new political setting.

#### 4. Officially Announcing Compulsory Basic Education for Children

Similar to the announcement in 1814, the imperial decree announcing compulsory basic education for children a decade later was declared during the time of Mekki-zade Asım Mustafa Efendi's second appointment as the şeyhülislam. He was known to be supportive of Sultan Mahmud II's reforms and was one of the most trusted şeyhüislams as his father, Mekki Mehmed Efendi, was one of the şeyhüislams during the time of the previous ruler, Sultan Selim III. After a successful career as the high ulama, he was appointed to the top position as the şeyhülislam in January 1818. He was dismissed from the position in September 1819, but was reappointed in September 1823 again, where he served until his dismissal in November 1825<sup>50</sup> (he became şeyhülislam for the third time in February 1833 and remained in the position until his death in November 1846).

The extensive research conducted by the author of this study has demonstrated that the secondary sources cited by researchers in the field did not go beyond self-referential evidence and did not explore the authenticity of the 1824 imperial decree. Previous scholarship has mainly relied on one source, the 'Cevded's History', and has not explored the original source of the quoted decree document. That is, researchers did not return to the original imperial decree and study the actual

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<sup>47</sup> Cevdet, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 12, vol. 12, p. 114.

<sup>48</sup> Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume II: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>49</sup> Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmani*, vol. 1, vol. 5, pp. 1614–1615.

<sup>50</sup> Süreyya, vol. 1, vol. 1, pp. 327–328.

wording of the Sultan. The advantage of this research is that it goes beyond the quotation of Ahmed Cevded's work by actually locating the decree itself and studying it in greater detail.

The popular primary source of reference for other researchers is the Court Historian (*Vak'anivis*) Ahmed Cevded's (d. 1895) 12 volumes *Tarih-i Cevded/Cevdet's History*. Ahmed Cevded started writing this comprehensive history book in 1851,<sup>51</sup> and his work was extensively based on recounting major historic events year by year, according to the Hijri calendar, that took place in late Ottoman history. In addition to the topics covered and the details of the events explained, Cevded also provided copies of some Ottoman official documents at the end of the book. Ahmed Cevded introduced Sultan Mahmud II's imperial decree within the events of 1240 A.H., which can be during any month and day between August 1824 and August 1825. Although he included the exact dates for events before and after this particular imperial decree, somehow, he did not add the date of this particular document.<sup>52</sup>

The exact date of the imperial decree was left blank, and a new paragraph started straightforward as follows:<sup>53</sup>

“Because ignorance is the main cause of all sorts of problems, although previous great Sultans and philanthropists built many schools and medreses, for a while, no importance was given to educating and teaching children manners among Muslims, and people were occupied with ignorance and vulgarism. Hence, an imperial decree addressed to the judges of Istanbul and the major three districts providing some cautions had been issued”.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, Ahmed Cevded informed the readers that a copy of the *Ferman* was attached in the appendix, saying, “Its copy has been added to the end, number 7”.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, the copy of the text had been supplemented with the heading “The Imperial Decree on Children's Education / *Ta'lim-i Sıbyan Hakkında Ferman-ı Ali*” in two pages.<sup>56</sup> The attached text in the Cevded's History does not include the exact date of issue of the imperial decree, nor does the author provide any sort of information on the source of the document.

The second popular source for the citation of the imperial decree is the work published by Mahmud Cevad titled *Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti Tarihçe-i Teşkilat ve İcraatı/Ministry of Public Education: History of its Establishment and Activities*.<sup>57</sup> However, this book begins by sharing the

<sup>51</sup> Christoph K. Neumann, *Araç Tarih Amaç Tanzimat; Tarih-i Cevdet'in Siyasi Anlamı*, trans. Meltem Arun (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 2000), 21.

<sup>52</sup> For example, the section before the imperial decree is as follows, ‘...Esad Efendi rabiulevvelin yirmi üçüncü günü memuriyet-i mahsusa ile canib-i Bağdad'a izam kılındı.../...on November 15<sup>th</sup> (1824) Esad Efendi has been sent to Baghdad with a special appointment...’.

The section after commenting on the imperial decree is as follows, ‘...Cemaziyelahirenin yirmi üçüncü günü yeniçeri ağası Süleyman Ağa azl ile.../... on February 12<sup>th</sup> (1825) the Janissary commander Suleyman Ağa has been dismissed...’.

<sup>53</sup> Cevdet, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 12, vol. 12, p. 123.

<sup>54</sup> “Cehl her dürlü fenalığın başı olduğundan eslaf-ı selatin-i izam ve sair ashab-ı hayrat bunca mekatib ve medaris inşa eylemiş oldukları halde bir müddetden beru ehl-i İslam içinde ta'lim ve terbiye-i sıbyan hususuna ehemmiyet verilmez olduğundan halkı cehl ve nadanı istila etmekle ve bu esnada ta'lim-i sıbyan hakkında İstanbul ve Bilad-ı Selase kadılarına hitaben bazı tenbihati havi ferman-ı ali isdar buyurulmuşdur.”

<sup>55</sup> “Suret-i zirde (7) rakamıyla ilave kılınıyor”

<sup>56</sup> Cevdet, 12:277–79.

<sup>57</sup> Mahmud Cevad, *Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti Tarihçe-i Teşkilat ve İcraatı* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire, 1920).

full text of the imperial decree directly copied from the abovementioned *Tarih-i Cevded/Cevded's History* and referenced accordingly.<sup>58</sup> The author introduced the imperial decree as follows:<sup>59</sup>

“A study of Sultan Mahmud the Second’s *ferman* copied below and dated 1241, that is, making primary education compulsory and containing the purpose statement, offers us plenty of historic information over comprehending the nature of acquiring knowledge in the country and [as well as] the level of people’s desire for education, prior to the date of 1241, which is the start of the Ottoman revolution.”<sup>60</sup>

Mahmud Cevad did not provide further information about the exact date of the imperial decree; thus, it can be safely assumed that he most likely did not view the original copy of the decree. Instead, he seems to have relied entirely on the copy of the text provided by Cevded’s History.

Studies generally known in the field of Turkey’s history of education have quoted the imperial decree of 1824 from the Cevded’s History as the main source mentioned above, such as *Türkiye’de İlk Öğretim 1839-1908/Primary Education in Turkey 1839-1908*<sup>61</sup> and *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908 Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline*.<sup>62</sup> Others, such as *Türkiye’de Modern Eğitimin Doğuşu ve Gelişimi (1773-1923)/Emergence and Development of Modern Education in Turkey*;<sup>63</sup> *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi/Abdulhamid Era System of Education*;<sup>64</sup> *Türkiye Eğitim Sisteminin Gelişmesine Tarihi Bir Bakış/A Historic View to the Development of Turkey’s Education System*;<sup>65</sup> and *Türkiye Maarif Tarihi Hakkında Bir Deneme/An Essay on the History of Turkey’s Education*,<sup>66</sup> quoted the imperial decree from Mahmud Cevad. *Türk Eğitim Tarihi M.Ö. 1000-M.S. 2007/Turkish History of Education 1000 BC - A.D. 2007*<sup>67</sup> referenced both Ahmed Cevded and Mahmud Cevad as the source. Osman Nuri Ergin’s *Türk Maarif Tarihi/Turkish History of Education* (first published in 1943 in five volumes), one of the most comprehensive books that has a recognized place in the history of Turkish education, cited part of the 1824 imperial decree without giving a reference.<sup>68</sup>

As demonstrated above, scholars in the field are familiar with this imperial decree, and a number of academics in the field have written and/or mentioned it to varying degrees. However, despite scholars’ different opinions about the function of the announcement, there are gaps in the literature and the way it is portrayed. Researchers have included this imperial decree in their works and have commented on it in a similar fashion. Perhaps because historians were aware of the unwelcoming

<sup>58</sup> Cevad, 1–3.

<sup>59</sup> Cevad, 1.

<sup>60</sup> “Mebde-i inkilab-i Osmani olan 1241 tarihinden mukaddem memleketde tahsil-i maarifin neden ibaret, ahalinin tahsil-i uluma arzuları ne derecede olduğunu tayin için Sultan Mahmud Han-i Saninin tahsil-i ibtidaiyi mecbur kılan ve esbab-ı mucibeyi havi olan sureti atıdaki 1241 tarihli fermanın mütalaası bize bir çok malumat-ı tarihiye verir.”

<sup>61</sup> Aziz Berker, *Türkiye’de ilk öğretim 1 (1839-1908)* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1945), 3.

<sup>62</sup> Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908 Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline*, The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 31.

<sup>63</sup> Hasan Ali Koçer, *Türkiye’de Modern Eğitimin Doğuşu ve Gelişimi (1773-1923)* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1991), 35–37.

<sup>64</sup> Bayram Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1991), 3.

<sup>65</sup> Unat, *Türkiye Eğitim Sisteminin Gelişmesine Tarihi Bir Bakış*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Nafî Atuf, *Türkiye Maarif Tarihi Hakkında Bir Deneme* (İstanbul: Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1930), 55–57.

<sup>67</sup> Yahya Akyüz, *Türk Eğitim Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 1997’ye* (İstanbul: İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1997), 151.

<sup>68</sup> Osman Nuri Ergin, *Türk Maarif Tarihi* (İstanbul: Eser Kültür Yayınları, 1977), 394.



political climate, they did not see it as part of a history of progress, nor did they view it in line with new educational trends. To a great extent, the announcement of compulsory basic education was observed as an insignificant (even strategic) attempt that did not have actual expectations for success. In other words, the decree was doomed to failure; this set of new regulations indeed produced massive challenges for the implementation. For example, Akyüz argued that the instructions of the decree were not appropriately implemented until 1839 due to the abolishment of the Janissary army and because of wars with Russia and Egypt.<sup>69</sup> Somel discussed that the main aim of announcing the decree was related to ‘social disciplining’. He distinguished this particular document from others, referring to its focus on education in particular and ‘its relatively detailed content’.<sup>70</sup> Kodaman argued that Sultan Mahmud II’s interest in education began in 1824 and added that the decree did not introduce anything new to the field of education; thus, it merely announced to the public the ulama’s views in the form of a decree.<sup>71</sup> After briefly describing the decree, Unat emphasized that this official document primarily focused on children learning the basics of religion.<sup>72</sup> Berker underlined the decree’s focus on the capital Istanbul, stressing that it was not intended for the rest [of the Ottoman territories]. In addition, referencing this imperial decree, he argued that in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the *sıbyan* schools, ‘writing’ was not taught.<sup>73</sup> Ergin cited the imperial decree within the context of the inadequate training of the civil servants employed by the government offices and the government’s efforts to regulate this field.<sup>74</sup> Fortna did not mention the decree directly but instead referred to earlier reforms in the field of education as being initiated ‘despite formidable financial constraints’.<sup>75</sup>

### 5. The 1824 Decree and its Multi-layered Messages: Banning Child Labour

Before examining the details of the imperial decree, it is worth highlighting two critical points that are related to this research. The first point is the process of establishing the exact date of the decree. As demonstrated above, secondary sources seem to have based their research on the text provided by the Cevded’s History as their primary source. These sources relied on the Hijri year of 1240, which corresponds to the dates between August 1824 and August 1825, for establishing the announcement date of the decree. This reliance resulted in the scholars quoting Cevded’s work without examining the original document and the actual dating of the decree. Researchers have not confirmed whether the text quoted by Ahmed Cevded was accurate, original and/or complete.

Accurately establishing the exact date of the announcement of the imperial decree was a complex and lengthy undertaking in this study. Following dedicated research, the original content of the imperial decree was successfully located in the Istanbul’s Mufti Court Records Archives, namely, the *Istanbul Müftülüğü Şerhiye Sicilleri Arşivi* in the Suleymaniye district of Istanbul. The Ottoman bureaucratic tradition of registering the entire content of incoming official correspondence in their record book certainly helped identify the imperial decree. The full text of the decree had

<sup>69</sup> Akyüz, *Türk Eğitim Tarihi: Başlangıçtan 1997’ye*, 131–32.

<sup>70</sup> Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908 Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> Kodaman, *Abdülhamid Devri Eğitim Sistemi*, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Unat, *Türkiye Eğitim Sisteminin Gelişmesine Tarihi Bir Bakış*, 38.

<sup>73</sup> Berker, *Türkiye’de ilk öğretim 1 (1839-1908)*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Ergin, *Türk Maarif Tarihi*, 394.

<sup>75</sup> Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

been registered in the official record book of the Court of the Judge of Istanbul (*Istanbul Kadılığı Mahkemesi*) under registry number 154 on pages 25b and 26a, respectively. The registered text in the record book was addressed to the Chief Judge (*Kadı*) of Istanbul as well as to the offices of the three Judges in the Three Provinces (*Kadıs of the Bilad-ı Selase: Üsküdar, Eyüb, and Galata*), and at the end of the registry, it was dated as ‘fi 17 R.A. sene 1240’, which corresponds to November 9, 1824. This date most likely indicates the actual date of registering the content in the record book and may also be the same date the decree arrived at the *Kadı*’s office. Thus, it can be safely assumed that the date of issue of the imperial decree was no later than November 9, 1824. However, the court historian Mehmed Esad cited the entire *Ferman* in his book called the *Tarih / History* within the *hicri* date of 23 *Rebi’ülevvel* 1240, which corresponds to November 15, 1824.<sup>76</sup>

The second point is related to Mahmud II's public image, which was most likely created by opponents of his reforms during his lifetime and even after his death. In this image, the Sultan was portrayed as a non-believer and the enemy of Islam. However, according to people who met him, the Sultan was highly religious and a pious person. For example, former French ambassador to Istanbul, Antoine-François Andreossy described the Sultan’s character in 1818 as “zealous observer of his religion, faithful to his word, sober and respectful”.<sup>77</sup> The Sultan’s devotion to Ottoman Islamic principles manifested itself in his long-term interest in the subject of children’s basic education. It is important to stress that Islam had always been the primary guide to forming the Ottoman identity.<sup>78</sup> Earlier decree sent to Ottoman provinces in 1814 focused on children’s schools and scrutinized failed waqfs, which were established for the purpose of supporting these schools. According to this decree, children did not properly learn the basics of religion; as a result, they did not practice their religion, and mosques were deserted.

Ten years later, in 1824, children's education was still a cause of concern, and the Sultan was discontent with the ongoing situation. Hence, he took the leap to assert his power and address this problem. He declared this imperial decree fulminating against the wrong-doings while exposing the failures in children's education, which had always been under the ulama's complete control. Hence, the carefully worded imperial decree is a forthright criticism of the ongoing situation conflicting with Islamic and Ottoman traditions as well as over children's lack of access to basic religious education. The Sultan was adamant about integrating children's basic Islamic learning into the civil as well as military system of education. When the new army called Muhammed's Victorious Soldiers (*Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye*) was established, a Victorious Soldiers’ Code of Law (*Asakir-i Mansure Kanunnamesi*) was drafted in 1826. The Code of Law included building schools at each of the military units and appointing imams to teach the Holy Kuran and *ilmihals* to young soldiers. These imams would be examined, selected, and appointed with the knowledge of the *Kadıs* in Istanbul. All senior officers were instructed to pay utmost attention so that the imams would observe communal prayers and teach religious topics.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Esad, *Vak'a-nüvis Es'ad Efendi Tarihi: (Bahir Efendi'nin zeyl ve ilâveleriyle): 1237-1241/1821-1826*, 1:361–64.

<sup>77</sup> A.F. Andreossy, *Constantinople et Le Bosphore de Thrace* (Paris: Théophile Barrois et Benjamin Duprat, 1828), 26.

<sup>78</sup> Frederick Anscombe, *State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>79</sup> Cevdet, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, vol. 12, vol. 12, p. 317.

The decree also symbolizes the Islamic nature of the Sultan's new policies as it was addressed to the chief judges in Istanbul with a direct reference to a hadith quoted by a well-known hadith scholar Ibn Mace (209-273 A.H.): *Ṭalab al-ilm farizatun ala kulli Muslimin/Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim.*<sup>80</sup> The decree begins with a firm reminder of the importance of learning religious obligations: 'It is known to everyone that according to all those people of Islam who say 'I am of Mohammad's ummah,' the priority is to learn and know the obligations of Islam and principles of their religion...'. One of the most respectful Islamic scholars, Al-Gazzali (d. 1111), also cited this hadith in his famous multi-volume book *The Revival of the Religious Sciences/Ihya Ulum Al-Din*.<sup>81</sup> Al-Gazzali devoted a volume on 'learning and knowledge (*al-ilm*)' and made this particular hadith a central topic, explaining the benefits of the knowledge extensively.<sup>82</sup> According to Al-Gazzali, knowledge was one of the most important things as it would guide the faithful towards the afterlife "*al-ilm allazi yutawacchah ila al-ahira*".<sup>83</sup>

The Sultan emphasized that after fulfilling the obligation of acquiring the essentials of the religion as a priority and complying with the practices of Islam, the faithful '... would then follow whichever path they choose in order to earn their living...'. Furthermore, he stressed that '...before everything else, learning the compulsions of the religion should be prioritized over worldly affairs as a whole...'.<sup>83</sup>

The Sultan bitterly complained about parents' ongoing and unacceptable behavior, as most parents sent their children to work with artisans as apprentices at a very young age. He emphasized that instead of sending children to school to learn the basics of their religion, hurrying children into earning money under the pretext of allowing them to learn a craft was unacceptable behavior. Apparently, parents with the intention of creating extra income for the household ceased their children's education. The Sultan stated:

...For a while, the unscrupulousness of the majority of mothers and fathers, who do not consider their children, caused them to remain uneducated, the same as themselves... and they are motivated by earning money quickly; they take their children out of school at the age of five or six and give them as apprentices to craftsmen.

This practice had long-term undesirable consequences and was the main contributor to the widespread ignorance of the basics of religion.

According to the decree, this kind of attitude demonstrated that families did not have a strong faith in God as the sole provider of their livelihood. The decree also stressed that parents were not considerate enough about their children's upbringing and were ignorant of the basics of their religion, as the parents themselves were raised. The decree went on to state that '...these children grow up in ignorance at an early age, and thereafter, they do not show interest in education and learning'. The Sultan warned that this situation would eventually lead to God's punishment, not only for the individuals responsible, such as parents but also for society as a whole. Learning the essentials of religion was an obligation for all Muslims; hence, the decree emphasized that it was

<sup>80</sup> Abu Abdalla Muhammed bin Yezid El-Kazvini Ibn Maca, *Sunenu Ibn Māca*, ed. Muhammed Nasır El-Din Al-Albānī (Riyad: Maktaba Al-Maarif, 1996), 56.

<sup>81</sup> El-Imam Ebi Hamid Al-Gazzālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm Al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Lebanon: Dar Al-Sha'ab, 2005), 21.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Gazzālī, 1:21–38.

<sup>83</sup> Al-Gazzālī, 1:10.

never too late to take immediate action and learn the basics of religion. People could do so while continuing to practice their profession and earn their living.

Thus, the decree imposed the following new set of regulations with immediate effect:

1- Children cannot be taken out of schools under any circumstances until they reach the age of adolescence and until they adequately learn the *ilmihal* (catechism) and absolutes of Islam.

2- Once children comply with the above conditions, to work, they have to obtain a sealed legal permit (*izin tezkeresi*) by personally appearing before a local judge together with their schoolteacher.

3- Without this legal permit, artisans were not allowed to accept adolescents as apprentices in their workshops.

4- After completing their schooling and obtaining official permission from the judge, adolescents could only work with the Chief of Artisans' (*Kethüda*) knowledge and approval.

5- Schoolteachers were commanded to do their job and adequately educate children at schools. They were to teach children the Holy Kuran, and subsequently, depending on each child's aptitude and competence, make them read classical religious booklets, such as *tecvid* (methods of Kuran recitation) and *ilmihal* (catechism).

6- The decree repeatedly advised and warned schoolteachers to fully commit themselves to guiding children to learn the principles and obligations of their religion so children could learn their religion and its practices adequately.

The decree also issued a series of punitive actions if a child was found to be working as an apprentice despite warnings and in violation of the imperial decree's instructions:

1- If an artisan accepts a child to work without a valid permit but with the parent's consent, the schoolteacher or the imam in the neighborhood has to immediately inform a judge (*Kadi*).

2- After an investigation, if a child was confirmed to be working without a valid permit, then the judge had to summon all those responsible as identified by the decree to the *Babıali* (Sublime Porte) for punishment (*li-ecl-i te'dib*).

3- The same rules applied to orphans under exceptional conditions; in case an orphaned child had to work for whatever reason, it was their custodian's responsibility to ensure the child attended school at least twice a day and completed their education.

Furthermore, the imperial decree instructed the judges in Istanbul to summon neighbourhood imams, schoolteachers and the Chiefs of Artisans to explain these new regulations and to ensure their accurate compliancy with the new procedures. Thereafter, the judges were instructed to distribute sealed copies of the decree to the imams and guild masters (*Kedhüdas*). Therefore, the imams would read and explain the new regulations to the residents in their neighborhood, and the guild masters would do the same with artisans at their work compounds. In addition, the decree emphasized that schoolteachers were especially charged to learn all about the new regulations and act accordingly as the imperial decree instructed.

## 6. Officially Banning Children Working at the Government Offices

Preventing children's employment by the artisans was certainly one crucial component of Sultan Mahmud II's strategy. In a historic move, the Sultan issued another announcement, an edict in the form of a circular (*ta'mim*), approximately two months later, on January 5, 1825 (15 *Cemaziyülevvel* 1240 A.H.). This relatively shorter official document is rare and unique in terms of representing a drastic change so far as the Ottoman traditional bureaucracy concerned. The document further confirmed how seriously the Ottoman administration took compulsory basic education for children and prevented children's employment. This decree that carried critical instructions was delivered to government offices within the Ottoman bureaucracy, including various branches of the military.<sup>84</sup> However, the academic interest in this field of research, to a great extent, did not pay the same attention to this particular ruling. A notable exception is Ergin's comprehensive book titled *Türk Maarif Tarihi*/Turkish History of Education first published in 1943 (two volumes).

In this circular, the emphasis was directed towards children who were sent to work as apprentices at the government offices (the *Kalem*) by the age of seven or eight. Parents developed this habit (the same as the ones who allowed their children to work with artisans) so they would gain experience in the hope that they would be employed within the Ottoman bureaucracy. According to the edict, some people let their children become apprentices at the government offices because they thought, 'as if spending long years there was useful'. The edict criticized these parents' behavior and highlighted the perils these children would be exposed to. First and foremost, by sending them to work at an early age, these children would be denied the chance to learn the holy Kuran as well as the basics of their religion, namely the *ilmihal* (catechism). In addition, young children would be exposed to potentially more damaging consequences during their time at the offices. They would be dismissed from their junior positions, especially when they did not demonstrate the aptitude or necessary skills required in these government positions. This way, the edict stressed, these children would be harmed twice, and in the words of the edict, they would be 'lost in all directions'. They would miss the chance to learn the basics of their religion as well as they would miss the path to their future career.

The decree, referring to the decree announced two months earlier, reminded the senior officials that the judges (*Kadis*) in Istanbul had previously been officially instructed about this issue. They were told that everyone was obliged to properly learn and be informed about the essentials of their religion. Once people achieve that, they would be free to choose their life path. The Sultan announced strictly preventing child employment at government offices and emphasized that job applications would be reviewed and taken into consideration only if the candidate was over the age of adolescence. The announcement reiterated the previous imperial decree sent to the judges in Istanbul three months earlier and stressed that the same rules regulating the artisans were also applied to the employment procedure at the government offices. In other words, the edict ruled that before everything else, the basic essentials of the religion had to be properly learned. Cutting their education short, taking children out of schools, and employing them before the age of adolescence were strictly banned. Furthermore, underage children and those children who did not adequately learn about their religion would not be allowed for employment. In addition, the decree aimed

<sup>84</sup> B. Safvet, *Bahriyemiz Tarihinden Filasalar* (Istanbul: Bahriye Matbaası, 1911), 21–22.



redesigning the employment procedure for civil servants. The government offices ought to select candidates according to their needs that were properly identified and set as the regulations. These conditions and regulations had to be set as the *modus operandi* (*Dusturü'l amel*), and civil servants had to be selected and employed according to these valid and applicable conditions.

## 7. Announcing Compulsory Education at the Ottoman Provinces

Last but not least, another imperial decree added in this research to demonstrate continues efforts of the Sultan on children's education. As demonstrated above, the Sultan's persistence on children's basic education continued as part of his personal interest that was reflected in his policies. Shortly before the Janissary uprising that led to their destruction (known as the Benevolent Event / *Vak'a-i Hayriye*), the Sultan sent an imperial decree to provinces urging authorities to take immediate action<sup>85</sup>. The decree was issued towards the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> month (*Şevval*) in the year 1241 A.H., which corresponds to any date between May 28 and June 6, 1826. It was registered in the official record book of the Court in the town of *Burdur* on November 20, 1826<sup>86</sup>. As to indicate that the new instructions were concerning all sectors of the society, the decree started directly addressing a long list of senior authorities as well as teachers, officers, imams, masters and professionals around the Empire.

It is worth underlining that this imperial decree bears similarities in terms of style and content with the decree sent to provinces in 1814. Both decrees instructed call-for-prayers (*ezan*) to be performed from the minarets and requested all Muslims to pray in congregations at mosques and masjids, saying, "obligatory prayers should be performed in mosques and masjids together in the congregation, and the Muhammed's call-for-prayers should be read from the minarets".<sup>87</sup>

However, there was a crucial difference between the two decrees; the latter urged people to stay in the mosques longer after performing the obligatory prayers and not to vacate the mosques immediately. After performing the prayers, they were expected to pray with all their goodwill for the victors of the religion and condemn the infidels.<sup>88</sup> The decree also urged the faithful to completely refrain from all sorts of religiously banned (*muharramat*) and generally forbidden acts that were against the Book and Sunnah. Overall, the decree emphasized that people apparently lost interest in religious practices. According to the decree, for a while (*bir vakitden beri*), the majority of people (*ekser nas*) were living in heedlessness and ignorance (*gaflet ve cehalet*). They were not following the necessary responsibilities of their religion, let alone performing the obligatory five-times-a-day prayers.<sup>89</sup> As a result, in many towns, mosques and masjids were abandoned, no call-for-prayers could be heard, and those who performed their prayers were kept away from the congregations.

The Sultan portrayed the situation as the ulama's failure and complained that the ulama disregarded grimness of the situation. The decree stressed that the ulama did not take the initiative

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<sup>85</sup> A draft copy of the Ferman can be found at Ottoman archives registered as BOA, A\_{DVNSMHHM\_00242\_00063, no 352 dated avahir Za (Zilkade) 1241 A.H. (26 June-6 July 1826)

<sup>86</sup> Meşihat, *MŞH ŞSC D*, 02399 0009, dated November 20, 1826, pp. 15-16.

<sup>87</sup> "Evkât-ı mefruze cevami ve mesacidde cema'at ile eda ve minarelerde beş vakitte ezan-ı Muhammediye kıraatle".

<sup>88</sup> "Akib-i sala-i mefruzede mansurin-i din ve makhurin-i keferi-i müşrikin için ezel u can-ı hayr ile dua"

<sup>89</sup> "İmad-ı din-i mübin olan beş vakit namazı bile terk..."

to teach people the basics of their religion.<sup>90</sup> Overall, this situation reflected negatively on people's daily behavior and practices.

This negative atmosphere, the decree stated, led to a more complicated public response to the degree that the parents either did not send their children to school at all or those who sent them to school took them out at the age of five or six and sent them to work.<sup>91</sup> The Sultan emphasized that he continuously received information about little children growing up ignorant of their religion, and they did not show interest in learning about the basics of their religion at a later age. Hence, they committed acts that were religiously banned.

The decree repeated the same instructions and urged people to keep their children at school and not to let them work unless they reached the age of adolescence and learned the essentials of their religion adequately.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the decree reiterated that all faithful, "young and old", should prioritize learning more about their religion and practice accordingly.

This particular imperial decree is rare in supporting the arguments, where relevant, giving references to the Quranic verses. For example, referencing verse (38:26) "indeed We have made you a successor (caliph) upon the earth (*inna cealnake halifeten fi'l arz*)", the Sultan reaffirmed that he was the caliph (*zat-ı hilafetme'abım*) and it was his duty to warn and protect the Muslims. He instructed authorities all around the Empire (*cümle memalik ve bilad*) to properly teach Islamic duties and caution them for their wrongdoings. The decree warned the authorities that they have to act on this as referenced in another Quranic verse (4:59), "obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you (*Ati'u Allaha ve ati'u al-Rasul ve uli al-amr minkum*). The Sultan cautioned that those who did not obey this verse and did not comply with it, after investigation, would be punished accordingly. The Sultan firmly instructed senior authorities, including the ministers, local leaders, judges, and the ulama, to explain public messages the imperial decree carried. They were told to make the public understand the real intentions, in particular, learning the essentials and basics of the religion. The authorities were also instructed to continuously observe implementation of the new regulations, and if necessary, warn and punish those who did not comply with the new rules. These senior authorities were also instructed to make sure and always pray five times a day together with other fellow Muslims. The local administrators were specifically told to assess the level of religious information people had and organize events to attract people to learn more about their religion. The Sultan unusually informed the authorities that teams of secret inspectors (*hafi me'murlar*) would be checking on the implementation of the decree and report back to the capital. He also warned that if in case a sort of negligence was reported, those responsible would be questioned. The decree made it clear that if they insisted on behaving contrary to the instructions and warnings, necessary disciplinary action would be taken without hesitation.

<sup>90</sup> "Ulemadan bulunanlarca da onlara ta'lim-i din ve diyanet edeyim demeyub..."

<sup>91</sup> "Çocuklarını mektebe vermeyub verenler dahi beş altı yaşına geldiği gibi alub san'ata verdiklerinden..."

<sup>92</sup> "Evladlarını murahik derecesine varmadıkça ve ilmihal ve şerait-i İslamiyesini layıkıyla öğrenmedikçe mekteblerden alub başka san'ata vermekliğe..."

## Conclusion

Sultan Mahmud's decade-long strategic announcements and his determination so far as children's basic education is concerned can be attributed to his pious personality, as pointed out earlier. His desire to teach children basics of Islam and the imperial edicts issued in this regard highlights also gradual state interference in teaching and learning process. It is possible to conclude that educational matters were seen as too important to be left in the hands of certain religious groups. These edicts also signify a turning point for establishing *de facto* control over primary school policy in the Ottoman Empire. The waqfs that were responsible for keeping the mosques and schools in good condition, as well as ensuring that the faithful learned about their religion and practiced the basic requirements of their religion, also became under state control and inspection. The formation of state authority during Sultan Mahmud II's era applied draconian measures; although it was not an obligation by Islam, all Muslims were ruled to pray five times a day at mosques. Social disciplining through religious practices was not only applied to the ordinary public; senior civil servants were not immune from the new regulation and were instructed to lead the way and were requested to set an example for others.

In 1808, Sultan Mahmud II ascended to the throne after barely surviving the Janissary army uprising. Initially, the political climate was not in his favor; he suspended the reform program his predecessor, Sultan Selim III, initiated and was discouraged from building his own initiative for years. In this respect, Sultan Mahmud II chose to postpone the reforms instead of creating an immediate confrontation with the opposition. Thus, he tried to find effective ways to re-establish his authority as a ruler. In his lengthy battle to defeat the opposition, exposing their misconduct seemed to be one strategy. For example, presenting the ulama's failures in the system of basic Islamic education appears to have been a crucial element of this policy.

Traditionally, the ulama were considered the custodians of education in general and held responsibility over religious affairs, including full control over the religious endowments' (waqfs') income. Children's education had been nominally under the ulama's sovereignty, and they were the undisputed masters of this field for centuries. However, Sultan Mahmud II's relationship with the *ilmiye* class (religious scholars) was the most strained throughout the entire history of the Ottoman Empire. This was because some senior members of the ulama had sided with the Janissaries in opposition to the previous Sultan, which led to the execution of Sultan Selim III. Nonetheless, despite the tense political climate, Sultan Mahmud II continued the dynastic tradition of supporting schools; he kept close contact with educational activities and turned public events into occasions to celebrate with schoolchildren and their teachers.

In 1814, by instructing the authorities in the provinces to open schools for children and check on the status of the waqfs, the Sultan was, in effect, publicly displaying the failures. Through this imperial decree, he emphasized that schools were not functioning adequately; children did not learn the fundamentals of their religion, and as a result, they did not participate in religious communal practices. He drew attention to the importance of children's education, implied grave delinquency on the local authorities' part, and ordered them to take immediate action. The inability of those who were responsible for sustaining and delivering obligatory basic Islamic education to children was publicly exposed.

The imperial decrees issued in late 1824 and early 1825 were and still are remarkable decrees as well as a major step towards establishing state authority over basic education. Announcing compulsory education signified the beginning of a slow process in which centuries-long traditional education was turned into a modern system of public education that was henceforth controlled by the state. Among other things, the decree aimed to send children back to school to acquire the essentials of their religion, prevent child labor, and change parents' attitudes on this subject. By this decree, new rulings were introduced for the first time in the Ottoman Empire's history of education, thus demonstrating the absence of legal regulations governing children's basic Islamic education. In this context, announcements of these decrees mentioned above should be considered a landmark and the basis of the public schools (*mektebs*). In addition, these new regulations were the area where the Ottoman administration increasingly took on overall control and responsibility.

Furthermore, the decrees symbolize a representation of continuous efforts to provide young children with basic religious education, and it is also an official manifestation of concern for the Ottoman subjects and their seemingly weakening interest in religion and religious practices. Children had to learn the fundamentals of Islam and reach the age of adolescence before they were allowed to work as apprentices. To ensure this, according to the new regulations, the child with his teacher had to appear before a local judge to be examined. In addition to their judicial duties, the decree assigned Istanbul and district judges to verify the educational level of every child. This ruling was quite extraordinary in the history of the Ottoman judicial system, too, and must have been practically difficult to apply at courts with respect to the large numbers of children. In effect, the decision about whether to let graduation of a pupil shifted from school teachers or school principals to the court judges. According to the decree, this was crucial for the 'revival of the glorious religion / *ihya-yı din-i mubin*'.

These new rules and regulations would have, without doubt, bureaucratically taken longer to integrate, and the political elite of the time must have been aware of the difficulties and obstacles around the full implementation of this imperial decree. Nevertheless, they chose to officially start the process even with a minimal chance of success. This move qualifies the Ottoman administration to be amongst the first three countries in Europe to announce compulsory education after Prussia and Denmark. The announcements also came at a time when governments of the major European powers avoided making primary education compulsory, perhaps because of the immense budgetary allocation required for such a decision to succeed. Compulsory education was introduced 18 years later by Sweden in 1842, Norway in 1848, Italy in 1869, and France in 1882.

One of the critical tasks of this research was, among other aims, to trace the success and/or failure of these new regulations. It is worth mentioning that despite our efforts, it was not possible to find official documents in the Ottoman archives confirming the implementation of these imperial decrees. There is no proof that children attended schools on a regular basis. Nor is there evidence that parents changed their minds and prioritized children's education.

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## APPENDIX 1 – ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE IMPERIAL DECREE ANNOUNCED IN 1824

It is known to everyone that according to all those people of Islam who say, ‘*I am of the Muhammad’s ummah*’, the priority is to learn and know the obligations of Islam and principles of their religion. Thereafter, they would then follow whichever path they choose in order to earn their living. In essence, before everything else, learning the compulsions of the religion should be prioritized over worldly affairs as a whole. However, for a while, the unscrupulousness of the majority of mothers and fathers, who do not consider their children, caused them to remain uneducated, the same as themselves, and instead of having trust in God as the sole provider for livelihood, they are motivated by earning money quickly; they take children out of school at the age of five or six and give them as apprentices to craftsmen.

These children grow up ignorant at an early age and thereafter do not show interest in education and learning. First, the blame will be on their mothers and fathers; at doomsday, they will be held responsible, and they will greatly regret it. Other than that, God forbid, by remaining ignorant, the majority of people will be oblivious to religion. This situation is going to be one reason for not receiving God's mercy. If the situation continues in this way, God forbid, it is obvious that He will severely punish us. Therefore, it is necessary to save faithful Muslims from this worldly and heavenly undesired punishment. Hence, in religious order, shyness and embarrassment are not permitted. Based on this, all young and old, the entirety of Muhammed's ummah that has remained uneducated until now, should consider the gravity of this situation both here and in the afterlife. In this respect, they should not feel embarrassed by each other but should feel embarrassed by God. In addition to making their living and practicing their crafts, they should immediately learn the religious subjects and Islamic obligations they do not know. They should make all effort to educate themselves, as this ensures their well-being both here and in the other world and is also an obligation of their religion.

From now on, before reaching the age of adolescence, as well as adequately learning catechism (*ilmihal*) and the obligations of Islam, no one should take their children out of school and give them to an artisan master. When a child reaches the age of adolescence and needs to be placed with an artisan master, his father, or if he does not have a father, then the person acting as his custodian should go to a judge with the teacher. The father and teacher should bring the child and show the judge the child to obtain a sealed legal document of permission (*izin tezkeresi*) demonstrating that the child is an adolescent. The father and teacher can obtain this legal document if they are residents of Istanbul from the *Kadı* (judge) of Istanbul; if they are residents of Eyüb, Üsküdar, and Galata, then they can obtain this legal document from the local *Kadı*. Artisans should not accept apprentices without the permission document and the Chief of Artisans’ (*Esnaf Kethüdası*) approval, and knowledge is a necessary regulation when accepting apprentices.

Suppose an artisan accepts a child as an apprentice without the abovementioned permission document, and his father and mother allow him to work. In that case, the teacher at his school or the imam of his neighborhood should immediately inform a judge (*Kadı*). The *Kadı Efendi*, as this issue is based on the revival of the glorious religion, should personally conduct an investigation. If a child is caught working in order to learn a craft without permission, those who accepted him and those who allowed him to work, as well as the teacher of the school who did not inform the Chief of Artisans, should be sent to the Sublime Porte (*Babıali*) for discipline. If a child is found working

with an artisan or a caretaker because he has been forced to work since he is an orphan and does not have a mother or father, then the artisan or caretaker should not confine him to only learning a craft or labor. Instead, twice a day, he should send the child to school and educate him until he is an adolescent. Likewise, the children already working under these conditions with master artisans are also included in this regulation. The mother, father, or custodian of these children should take them out of work and send them to school; the master artisans should also send orphans to school and make sure that they do not remain ignorant.

Schoolteachers should properly educate children at school. After teaching children the Holy Kuran, depending on each child's aptitude and capacity, the teachers should make them read booklets, such as *tecvid* and *ilmihal*, and make an effort, and provide guidance to teach them the obligations and essentials of Islam. For the purpose of admonishment and cautioning, this imperial decree has been issued, and the new regulations have been sent to the judges one by one at the *Bilad-ı Selase* in the form of imperial decrees.

You should invite all neighbourhood imams, schoolteachers, and Chiefs of Artisans in *Asitane* (Istanbul) to your office and convey to them the aforementioned admonitions and make them understand them. In addition, you should hand them a sealed copy of this imperial *ferman* so that the imams can read it to the people in their neighbourhood and the Chiefs of Artisans can read it to their artisans and explain it to them. The schoolteachers should also know [the new regulations] and act accordingly. You should take the initiative, caution, and confirm with everyone.

It has been instructed that with the help of God, the continuity and implementation of these regulations and admonitions should be personally taken care of, and utmost attention is given by yourselves!

November 9, 1824 (17-03-1240 A.H.)