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“THE RELIGION OF MUHAMMAD”:
EARLY TURKISH REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY AND THE OFFICIAL VIEW OF
ISLAM IN 1930S HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract: Shifts to structurally new political formations or at times even governmental changes usually engender new representations of the past. This process generally involves the creation of official national histories or revisions to the existing narratives. These histories are ultimately tied to collective memory engineering and identity building to legitimize the new political formations and to ensure loyalty to them. Public education mostly provides a vital channel for the dissemination and the validation of the collective memory sanctioned by the ruling elite. The rise of the Turkish Republic as a nation-state and the national historiography and educational system it established during the 1930s exemplify one of such cases. The consensus opinion in current scholarship argues that the early official historiography virtually circumvented the Ottoman and Islamic eras by curbing or even repealing their role by favoring strong accent on a remote pre-Islamic Turkish past. Although this view is warranted with regard to the state's primary ideological emphasis on Turkishness, this approach at the same time misses the intricate subtleties involved in the official national narrative and potentially indicates a total exclusion or denunciation of these subjects. This article aims to assess the new national historical narrative reproduced in the new history textbooks in a more nuanced way with an exclusive concentration on the ideology, religion and history education triangulum. It aspires to unveil what it articulated about the supposedly avoided topic of the Islamic past and especially focus on the officially endorsed view of Islam as a religion.

Key Words: Turkey, modernization, textbooks, history, ideology, Islam, Kemalism, 1930s, identity, nationalism

"Each age tries to form its own conception of the past. Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time"

Introduction

Shifts to new political structures that legitimate themselves on drastically different grounds than their immediate predecessors almost inevitably entail new representations of the past. In the modern age of nation-states such political entities also created their own official national histories as part of their institutionalization processes² and history became "the principal mode whereby non-nations were converted into nations."³ These histories were ultimately linked to collective memory engineering and identity building for purposes of legitimizing the new political structures and engendering allegiance to them. Public education as part of a newly rising national education system generally provided an invaluable venue for the popularization and the inculcation of the desired collective memory. The formation of the Turkish Republic as a nation-state and the national historiography and educational system it created during the 1930s represent one of such cases.

Although this article is not a comparative study, for purposes of providing a contextual sense within the larger Muslim geography of the time, it should be noted that the imperialist presence and domination of expansionist Western powers in diverse spheres defined the parameters in most parts of the Islamic domain. Territories such as parts of the Indian Subcontinent (including present-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), Central Asia and Africa were still experiencing the direct impact of imperialism not only in political and economic areas, but also in socio-cultural realms. Since these geographies lacked a nation-state as their political structures and national sovereignty as the basis of the regimes, the formation of related aspects such as an official national ideology or a national educational system did not exist either.⁴ The most comparable case to Turkey in the Muslim geography could probably be Iran under the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi when his modernization efforts are taken into account.⁵ To a degree Afghanistan under the rule of Amanullah Khan could be mentioned as well. Both Reza Shah and Amanullah Khan were admirers of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and many policies implemented in the early Turkish Republic inspired them; however, their efforts were abruptly interrupted due to internal dynamics.

Within this context, the early Turkish Republic of the 1930s stands rather apart from the Muslim geography in general with respect to the above-mentioned paradigm about shifts to new political structures. The formulation and propagation of an officially sanctioned version of history during the 1930s almost immediately followed the founding of the Turkish

Republic in 1923 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. With the 1930s the regime turned its attention to ideological issues and implemented a program of cultural change and identity transformation within the framework of an extensive modernization project that defined the supreme target of the ruling elite. This decade witnessed at the same time the gradual shift to a concentration on ethno-cultural elements as the core constituent of the Turkish nation.⁶ The state adopted this newly developing Turkish nationalism – named *Kemalism* after Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) – as its official ideology and attempted to spread it among the masses in a top-down fashion through a number of vehicles and far-reaching reforms with the goal of creating a homogenous nation and a nation-state.⁷ From an ideological perspective, the ruling cadres sought to transfer pre-existing loyalties to an allegiance to the new nation-state, its ideology and Turkishness, which was envisioned as superseding all identities for the new citizen.⁸ Dissociation from the recent past and the Islamic tradition as dominant reference points in the collective memory of the people rested at the crux of this endeavor.

This state-desired ideological dissociation resting on a rupture model and the parameters of the envisioned new identity found direct expression in the regime’s perspective on and articulation of history.⁹ The basis of the early Turkish Republic’s official history came to be known as the *Turkish History Thesis* (*Türk Tarih Tezi*) and its “manifesto” was a manuscript named *The Outline of Turkish History* (*Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*)¹⁰ completed in 1930 by the Turkish Hearths Board for the Research of Turkish History (*Türk Ocağı Türk Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti*) founded in the same year.¹¹ Education in general, public schooling in particular, became one of the most valuable tools available to officials in the process of identity building through the propagation of the newly created national historiography. The new regime explicitly mirrored its ideologically motivated assertions in educational content through the writing of new history textbooks for all levels of education based on *The Outline of Turkish History*.¹²

The widely accepted view in present-day scholarship is that the early official historiography practically sidestepped the Ottoman and Islamic periods by downplaying or even nullifying their role in favor of a strong emphasis on and glorification of a distant pre-Islamic Turkish past. It follows that elements related to the Ottoman Empire and the religion of Islam had no place in the official ideology and the envisioned identity of the new nation by any means. Although this view seems warranted in terms of the state’s primary ideological emphasis on Turkishness, it also appears that this approach “reduces (the national historical narrative) to the migration of the Turks from Central Asia and their spread into the world”.¹³ An almost exclusive focus on what it had to say about the *Urgeschichte* of the Turks who were deemed *Urvolk* and overlooking the allegedly ignored areas carries the potential danger of indicating a total

omission or rejection of these themes and hence creates a partial picture of the account.

This article aims to assess the new national historical narrative reflected in the new history textbooks in a more nuanced way with a specific focus rooted in the ideology, religion and history education triangulum.¹⁴ It hopes to uncover what it voiced pertaining to the allegedly avoided subject of the Islamic past and especially dwell on the officially sanctioned view of Islam as a religion.¹⁵ *The Outline of Turkish History* and the new history textbooks of the 1930s that were virtually copies of that volume did treat these subjects and the national historical narrative did have things to say about Islam. The presentation of the Islamic past, especially Islam as a religion, transpired in a reinterpreted or remolded way which was extremely unorthodox and diametrically opposed to preceding eras – to considerable extent even the following ones. Therefore, it seems justified to consider the national historical narrative’s treatment of Islam in this period as unique. Hence, instead of a clear dismissal or a subtle omission, one rather observes the definition of a new perspective on Islam that the state would deem appropriate to teach the young generation. While trying to bring the ethnic roots of the nation to center stage, one witnesses at the same time the establishment (not disestablishment) of a nationalized version of pristine Islam as seen fit to comply with state ideology.¹⁶

Although not directly the subject of this article, it should be mentioned in passing that the analysis of the theme of Islam in the new history textbooks also reveals issues beyond matters of identity that are related to historiographical/methodological considerations and the nature of history teaching. The cultural transformation of the 1930s placed scientific knowledge completely outside the sphere of faith and purged Islamic history of its religious and divine dimension.¹⁷ Hence, if viewed from a wider historiographical/methodological angle, the new Turkish national narrative in a way “caused a revolutionary change”¹⁸ in history writing in the early Turkish Republic. A positivist attitude inherited from the diverse intellectual climate of the late Ottoman Empire was mostly responsible for this phenomenon.¹⁹ This attitude developed into an even sharper vein and broke down the union of the heavenly and earthly resulting in a clear-cut split between the sacred and the profane in the approach to history. The roots of this understanding can be traced back to the influence of Western sources on the Ottoman, later Republican intelligentsia that mostly operated as an adoption of Enlightenment concepts and principles through the French model. In relation to the place of religion in society, French deism played a significant role in the formulation of the categories of personal sphere versus public sphere, i.e. inner faith and institutionalized religion. “The first commandment of this worldview was a reverence for science and its quasi-religious role in modern society.”²⁰ Accordingly, the ideal was the redefinition of Islam

(not its dismissal) according to the standards determined by the Enlightenment’s rationalism and positivism.

Ideology, Religion and History Education

Most theories of nationalism and education reserve a place for education in general and schooling in particular as tools which introduce the young members of a given society to new sets of worldviews.²¹ The selection process of what to teach obviously involves, deliberately or intuitively, ideological convictions as a criterion and the significance of the decision maker(s) is self-evident. In cases of directly state-delivered or even merely state-supervised education, the role of the ruling elites and their ideological outlook comes to the forefront as setting the criteria for deciding on educational content. In the end, “all national education systems indoctrinate the oncoming generation with the basic outlooks and values of the political order.”²² In this respect, schools can also be regarded as entities performing political functions that include helping transmit the ideological norms of the group(s) in power.²³

The importance of school textbooks, among many other factors within the educational system, becomes manifest in this picture. Textbooks contain a representative set of values directly imparted to students through formal education. Particularly history textbooks are the arena in which the ideology of the state is projected²⁴ and history as a school subject plays an essential role in inculcating or reinforcing national identity, national consciousness and national values.²⁵ Accordingly, “the philosophical point underlying schoolbooks is that there is no ideologically neutral stance that can be taken towards the past or for that matter our social and political institutions of the present. This means history and social studies textbooks must be evaluated also as ideological tools.”²⁶

These arguments resonate with the case of Turkey which started building a centralized national education system already during late Ottoman times and thanks to its increasing monopoly on education the state used it as a tool to achieve the desired changes in the process of modernization.²⁷ One of the most controversial aspects of modernization efforts since the late Ottoman times in the nineteenth century has been – and remains indeed thus far – the choice of approach to paving the path to modernity, and more specifically from an ideological angle, the direction modernization should take pertaining to matters of identity. Since state-initiated modernization policies demanded and signaled considerable changes in one’s self-perception, the main concern regarding identity issues boiled down to the question of how to modernize and remain one’s self at the same time? This concern calling for a self-definition generated different interpretations which pointed to alternative understandings of a

proper way to modernize. The dominant characteristic of the self was first and foremost “Muslim” for the population at large.²⁸ However, with the rise of political Turkish nationalism and its ultimate manifestation in the Republican era, the ruling elite and the intelligentsia replaced the question of “how to become modern and remain a Muslim” with “how to become modern and remain a Turk”, thereby elevating titular national identity based on an ethnic name into a position of primary identity and the main determinant of the self. Depending on various stances among the ruling elite and the intelligentsia, the religion of Islam could still be regarded as a substantial ingredient of the makeup of the self and national identity (though now mostly secondary to the national/ethnic one) or almost completely left aside.

The challenge of submerging religious identity went obviously hand in hand with the corresponding challenge of raising a new awareness among the population at large for promoting national/ethnic identity into a primary position. In this respect, state-introduced measures went to every length to create a Turkish identity and eclipse, not eradicate, the influence and presence of Islam. Thus, the question of “how to become modern and remain a Turk” also included debates about religion’s role in the newly forming official ideology based on a version of Turkish nationalism and labeled *Kemalism*. In a way, the 1930s attempted to name its modernizing/civilizing agenda “national culture” and the regime embarked on inventing it. Hence, *Kemalist* nation-building as part of the republican modernization project came to be based on the creation of this new culture, which promoted itself as a nuanced and selective delegitimization of the Islamic (as well as Ottoman) heritage and the reformulation of its legacy while concentrating on building a national identity based on Turkishness.

It should be briefly noted that the nature of the desired effect was not secularization *per se* in the sense of a separation of state and religion, but reforms and measures rather operated to provide the state a secure grip on religion in the modernization process. The relationship between Islam and the state in Turkey has been defined as *laiklik* after the French word *laïcisme* and in this context the regime implemented a series of reforms that were all *secularizing* moves. However, *Kemalism* did not remove religion from the state.²⁹ It did not separate religion from the state as advocated,³⁰ but envisioned a society in which religion was confined to the private sphere and controlled by the state.³¹ The establishment of the General Directorate of Religious Affairs³² in 1924, which functioned directly under the Office of the Prime Minister and oversaw all cases concerning the Islamic faith, is an outstanding proof of this situation. Hence, in actuality the state wanted to create an “official Islam”³³ which it could interpret, oversee and administer. “The *Kemalist* understanding of Islam may have been weak and/or at odds with the vast understandings found among the people at large, but it was still an understanding of

Islam.”³⁴ To regard laicism as “antireligious secularism” would be to ignore the regime’s religious policy and its intent to control religion.

An agent deemed especially important in achieving the above-depicted identity transformation was public education and the regime attributed great importance to schooling in terms of the interrelated processes of modernization and nation/nation-state building. Hence, from an ideological viewpoint, schools in the early Republican era have been mostly considered as centers for raising the state-sanctioned type of Turkish national. This effort took many forms ranging from extensive curriculum related specifications to the creation of a school environment packed with nationally emblematic activities and images. One of the most comprehensive and powerful methods was undoubtedly the content related approach. Daily instruction and textbooks, particularly subjects outside the realm of positive sciences,³⁵ provided an invaluable arena for propagating the tenets of the newly forming state ideology to the young generation. History education³⁶ in particular functioned as a tool to justify the rule of the existing regime and curricula and content were revised depending on the aspirations of the dominant power.³⁷ Accordingly, the Turkish state utilized textbook content to advocate a particular point of view and the Turkish history textbook represented both how the state ideology portrayed national values at a given time and changing interpretations of what it is to be a Turk according to the regime.

New History Textbooks of the 1930s: preparation and highlights

As “textbook content is by and large carefully shaped to reflect the prevailing political ideology,..., sudden political shifts can render a nation’s stock of textbooks obsolete, requiring massive and expensive rewriting and production.”³⁸ In much the same spirit the early Turkish Republic set out to produce new history textbooks³⁹ suitable to the new regime’s ideological outlook and the cultural transformation movement following radical structural reforms.

It was mentioned that the cultural engineering efforts of the 1930s opened up with the emergence of a national historical narrative formulated in a volume named *The Outline of Turkish History* and rested on a new understanding of Turks’ place in history that came to be labeled *The Turkish History Thesis*. The *Thesis* was a combination of the reaction against perceived European perceptions of the Turks as an inferior people and the need for nation-building.⁴⁰ It first attacked the idea that Turks were incapable of creating a civilization by asserting the very first human civilization was the achievement of them in Central Asia and all civilizations of the world derived from this proto-civilization due to outward migrations. Second, it took Turkish history out of the limits of an Ottoman-Islamic framework and emphasized the existence of Turkish people since time immemorial, pointed to eighteen states they had established

prior to the Ottomans and stressed pre-Ottoman/Islamic identity. Third, the *Thesis* argued for a continuous Turkish presence in Asia Minor since the Bronze Age and established this geography as the homeland of the Turks. Fourth, the *Thesis* strongly argued Turks belonged to the “white race”. Fifth, it declared that Turkish language had preserved all the necessary elements to turn the Turks into a modern nation with a shared memory and common cultural traits. Sixth, the *Thesis* discarded Ottoman rule as a reference point in matters related to Turkish political and cultural identity and denied Islam the role of constituting the social glue.

The effort to popularize the new national historical narrative during the 1930s drove the republican regime to produce new history textbooks⁴¹ based on the above-mentioned work *The Outline of Turkish History* which was printed by the state publishing office towards the end of 1930 as a 606-page volume and contained 11 chapters. Two remarks added to the front of the book stand out and present an initial idea about the nature of the work. The first one was printed on the inner cover under the title and the names of the authors: “Only 100 copies have been printed for distribution among the other members of the Board of Turkish History and parties interested in the subject for their comments and criticisms.”⁴² This is a clear indication that the volume was not intended for large scale distribution yet; it rather represented the proto-type of an elite formulation of history to be first discussed within an exclusive forum before the ideas were popularly disseminated. Second, the book expressed its self-proclaimed objective in a two-page statement added to the front of the volume with the title “why has this book been written?”⁴³ The manuscript was compiled with “a certain purpose in mind”: deliberately or not, the role of the Turks in world history had been diminished in the majority of domestic history books as well as French ones which served as a source for the former. The principal aim of the book was to correct such “harmful errors” that hindered the development of a sense of Turkishness and consequently the formation of an identity based on it. Hence, this would be “the first step towards writing the long needed national history for the Turkish nation.” According to the foreword, the second aim was to stop the spread of misguided conceptions about the formation of the universe, the materialization of mankind and its pre-historical existence. The authors identify their target audience as the population in general, but especially the youth. This strengthens the idea that the ultimate intent was to popularize the ideas in *The Outline of Turkish History* after consultations within the elite circles. The first step in realizing that goal materialized with the preparation of new history textbooks that were directly derived from the content of *The Outline of Turkish History*.⁴⁴ They were first compiled for high schools (four volumes, each approximately 400 pages) and within a few years simplified or abridged versions appeared for middle (three volumes) and elementary school levels (two volumes). Thus, in 1931 high school students and by 1933 students in all

levels of public education had the textbook versions of *The Outline of Turkish History* in their hands and they remained in use until 1941-42 when new editions were produced with some revisions.⁴⁵

New History Textbooks of the 1930s: *History I-V (Tarih I-IV)*

The overall picture that transpires from an analysis of the complete set of history textbooks reveals a perspective rooted in ethno-linguistic Turkish nationalism that reflects the ideology propagated by the ruling state elite. First of all, the four-volume textbooks serve to exalt the Turks as a people by presenting them as civilization-builders since time immemorial, underlining their invaluable contributions to other civilizations in general, and attempting to create a history of the Turks free from the confines of the Ottoman Empire and Islam with a strong emphasis on a Turkish existence that goes far back beyond these.⁴⁶ Secondly, and related to the previous point, the books depict the Turkish Republic as the epitome of all Turkish accomplishments and thus function to justify and legitimize the new Republican regime and its ideology. The textbooks frequently use paragraphs of high praise exclusively about the Republic, which specifically function to instill the idea that it is the pinnacle of Turkish achievements and their appearance in the text is completely independent of any kind of relevance in terms of the timeline or the subject matter.

Although the textbooks frequently use nationalistic terms and concepts, the exact meanings of these are almost never clear. For instance, in a very primordialist way, the textbooks assign the Turks an ever-present existence as a nation and claim that thanks to the Turkish Revolution this nation has now come together with the ties of Turkishness as opposed to religious affiliations, which bonded them for centuries. Yet, what the book precisely means by a nation or who exactly is a member of the Turkish nation remains rather vague. On the one hand, the books mention common denominators such as shared language, culture and ideals, but on the other hand they do not shun occasional racial arguments either. Again, although religious ties seem to be discarded as a cementing factor, non-Muslim citizens still receive a different treatment. It should also be mentioned that the envisioned nation is presented as a homogenous one without any conflicts of class or interests in general. Conceptual vagueness is not limited to nationalistic terminology. Similarly, the term civilization that the books almost overuse is also quite nebulous. In some instances it is used to refer to merely technology or scientific achievements, at others it can denote the complete culture of a given society excluding or including its scientific/technological aspect.

The textbooks also reflect the traumas of the recent decades clearly and arrive at the conclusion that the Turks have no friends other than

themselves. European powers are accused of having preyed on the Ottoman Empire for decades and then having used the seemingly fair Wilson principles as a tool to partition it; the Muslims – especially Arabs – are severely blamed for not helping with the “Great War”; and, the non-Muslim elements of the Empire are vilified for either pursuing nationalist separation movements or siding with the enemy.

Another recurring claim is rooted in the positivistic outlook of the textbook writers which is related to method and denoted with the word “scientific”. The books display an open reverence for science, so much so that they ironically regard any explanation deemed scientific almost as another dogma, i.e. absolutely true and uncontestable. In order to prove the validity of the arguments provided in the texts, the books often resort to the claim that they are scientific explanations. Yet, most of the time, the word “scientific” acts as a magic adjective that is supposed to render every argument accurate once inserted in front of it, rather than really corresponding to such an effort or inquiry. The sources of these allegedly scientific explanations are almost never there. A positivistic outlook and a complete deference for science automatically result in the rejection of any “non-scientific” account and in this respect, religion – here primarily Islam – becomes an easy target. Religious faith is treated as a socio-cultural construct that can at best be a source of individual spiritual fulfillment rather than a system, which can provide answers for worldly affairs.

History Textbooks and the Subject of Islam

The second volume of the textbook set covers information related to Islam and Islamic history. This volume’s most striking features about the history of Islam gather around two basic themes, namely the arguments about Islam as a faith and the effort to present a history of Islamic societies that is geared towards highlighting the Turks’ contributions to Islam. The tone and language are completely distanced devoid of any association with the subject. The narrative is presented from an outsider’s view external to the reference frame of the religion itself.

The textbook’s pivotal arguments about Islam as a faith and its emergence

The basic premises used in giving an account of the emergence and the spread of Islam as a faith are very unorthodox and entirely outside the reference framework of the Islamic belief system both with respect to terminology and creed. Most statements are essentially in direct opposition to the fundamental assumptions of Islam and are a first in comparison to any previous textbooks used. The text treats Islam as just another religion and the reader cannot detect any association with it in tone. The Prophet of Islam, Mohammad, is portrayed as a sincere and

concerned man who acted out of a desire to change society for the better; the holy book of Islam, the Koran, is considered to be a piece of literature made up of Mohammad’s sentences; and the Islamic pilgrimage, the Hajj, is depicted merely as some sort of an economic fair that only much later acquired the nature of a religious gathering. Hence, instead of the theological explanation of revelation that is central to the faith, Islam is regarded as the outcome of historical forces at work and in no way divinely connected with a supernatural being.

Throughout the narrative, none of the usual exalting titles in front of the name of Mohammad are used, which is very atypical in terms of terminology. For instance, among others, the most common title word “*Hazret-i*” connoting an exalted status in front of Mohammad’s name is completely absent.⁴⁷ One does not encounter other phrases that are customarily used to refer to him either. Instead, from start to finish, the text simply refers to him as Mohammad and nothing else. The same point about using typical praising words or phrases is valid for the Koran – they don’t exist. The name of the religion itself receives the same treatment: “Islam” is used interchangeably with the expression “the religion of Mohammad”. Indeed the same is true for other religions, Judaism is named “the religion of Moses” and Christianity “the religion of Jesus”. This very distanced and neutral language about Islam that would be offensive and even blasphemous in the eyes of a believing Muslim denotes a narrative that has been constructed outside the framework of Islamic dogma with complete dissociation.

The appearance of Islam starts with the call of Mohammad, who had been raised in a polytheist (*müşrik*) setting and was preoccupied with religious matters. Thus the text states,

“when Muhammad reached the age of forty, he started to invite his fellow inhabitants to accept a new religion that he himself devised and believed to be right. Because of the resemblance of this new religion to the [teachings] of *hanifs*⁴⁸ of the time, it was called ‘the religion of Abraham’ or ‘Islam’ meaning the submission of one’s self. (p.89)”⁴⁹

The idea of preaching a self-devised religion without even an indication of any kind of divine connection – let alone direct revelation – is completely contrary to the foundation of Islam, and all monotheistic religions for that matter. According to the textbook, the idea of revelation and divine inspiration transpired in Mohammad as the result of his sincere enthusiasm to improve social conditions and his declaration of prophethood was not impulsive. He had understood that the morals and customs of Arabs were primitive and decadent and had spent years thinking about ways to improve them. As a result of this intense pondering, the idea of revelation and divine inspiration had cropped up. These ideas were al-

ready present in Arab culture; like all primitive societies, they believed in (evil) spirits, which could reveal the future to seers. Additionally, Mohammad’s knowledge of the “religions of Moses and Jesus” reinforced in him the concept of such kind of communication since these belief systems also mentioned the existence of spirits and angels. Thus, Mohammad sincerely believed that his inspiration came from a divine source, a supernatural being (p.91) Hence, he acted out of a sincere enthusiasm to improve the morals, religion and social life of his environment. Mohammad was first a preacher (*vaiz*), then a messenger (*nebi*) until he finally turned into God’s messenger (*Allah’ın Resulü*). (p.92)

The spiritual aspect of the religion preached by Mohammad is not very much emphasized; there are only allusions to some parts of it. The acceptance or rejection of Islam is rather explained in terms of interests regarding political, economic and social matters. For instance the textbook states that after twelve years of preaching in Mecca, only 150 people had converted to the new faith. (p.89) Additionally, there is stress on the suggestion that one should especially examine his military activities to understand the nature of the religion and leadership of Mohammad. Otherwise,

“one could not escape the mistake of reducing Mohammad to the level of an illiterate, ignorant, numb and motionless idol that took everything from an angel and passed it on exactly to others. (p.93)”⁵⁰

Hence, the textbook once more confirms that instead of the dogmatic understanding of revelation, Muhammad’s actions are regarded to be the result of his own agency and initiative.

The rejection of the idea of revelation automatically affects the eminence and the authority of the Koran, which is according to Islamic doctrine categorically and unquestionably God’s word. According to the textbook, the Koran is not divine and the premise of its verses been revealed to Mohammad by God through the agency of angel Gabriel is regarded as a belief, not a fact.

“The *Koran* is a book in which the fundamental principles set by Mohammad are collected together. The sentences expressing these principles are named *ayats* and the sections comprised of several *ayets* are referred to as *surahs*. Islamic tradition accepts these *ayets* to have been divinely inspired, that is *revealed* to Mohammad by God through an angel named *Gabriel*. (p.90)”⁵¹

Additionally, other parts of the text refer to the Koran as a piece of Arabic literature, underpinning the sense that it is made up of Mo-

hammad’s words, not God’s. For instance, while describing pre-Islamic Arabia under the subheading “language and literature,” the insignificance of Arabic works are presented and this sub-section is completed by the sentence “these were the works of Arabic literature preceding the Koran. (p.86)”⁵² In a similar manner, while depicting the contributions of the Turks to Islamic civilization during the Abbasid era, the Koran is reduced to the level of a religious journal by asserting that “Muslims agree that the most reliable *hadith* journal after the Koran is “*Sahih Bukhari*”, which was written by a Turkish scientist named Mehmet İsmail from Buhara.”⁵³ (p.163) This again bolsters the message that the Koran was comprised of the words of Mohammad as the term *hadith* refers to the record of the deeds and words of the Prophet. Moreover, the presentation of the Koran not as a unique piece, but only the best among other such accounts – more precisely journals – is a remark that reduces its authority even further. Finally, to support the argument, this comment is displayed as a consensus among Muslims. It would be categorically impossible for a believing Muslim to affirm it without stepping out of the tenets of Islam.

In addition to rejecting the Koran as the word of God, the textbook also presents it as outdated arguing “the evolution of social life gradually modifies and broadens the canons then made by Mohammad.”⁵⁴ (p.92) The text maintains that the content of the Koran could be divided into three main topics: first and foremost, the belief that there is only one God – no other God exists and Mohammad is his messenger; second, judicial provisions; and third, historical accounts. The following explanation is given as the grounds for the necessary changes:

“As judicial provisions change along with transformations in social bodies due to temporal and contextual circumstances, new laws and practices inevitably replaced the principles which were satisfactory and essential for the requirements of time and place fourteen centuries ago. The new laws are also not eternal and they are bound to change with time.

When it comes to historical knowledge: facts discovered thanks to new sciences shake even the most recent historical information at its foundations.

The first principle about faith is very important due to its austerity. It is not difficult to explain this principle depending on the abilities of the person addressed.” (p.92)⁵⁵

As the above cited quotation illustrates, the textbook points to history as a process during which certain structures and entities are

bound to change and these transformations require the adaptation and aligning of other elements for compatibility. Additionally, this perception of constant change is not only future-oriented, but past-directed as well. This attitude clearly shows a faith in the concept of progress and science: advancements in science make it possible to discover new facts that alter current paradigms and re-interpret existing bodies of accumulated knowledge. Therefore the understanding of the past can also not be static. The Koran is not immune to changes either; most of its content has become outdated on many levels as it was only a product of its age. Such an outlook is again completely against Islamic doctrine according to which the Koran is timeless and permanently valid. The last point about the oneness of God is very ambiguous: “the principle that is not difficult to explain” remains simply untouched. While religion is openly discussed as a socio-cultural construct, the subject of God is cautiously avoided and left out of the discussion.

The textbook’s pivotal arguments about Islamic History

The overarching theme in presenting a history of Islamic societies is that the Arabs were uncivilized people and remained the same after Islam because they did not draw on the various civilizations they came into contact with – on the contrary, they were rather interested in destroying them. Islam did not turn into a major religion and civilization until the conversion of non-Arab ethnic groups to this religion, especially Turks who elevated Islam into a prominent level as a religion and created an advanced civilization around it. In this way, the textbook tries to shatter any existing explicit or implicit monopoly over Islam and actually attempts to establish a new dominance. Additionally, Islam is regarded just as an episode within the totality of Turkish history and a secondary one with respect to its national and civilizational aspects.

According to the textbook, Islam was established in the Arabian Peninsula which was populated by the Arabs who were Semitic primitive nomadic people. The most advanced social structure that they had achieved was limited to tribal organization. (pp.79-80) Only the inhabitants of Mecca, Medina and Taif were relatively civilized. (p.82) After their conversion to Islam and especially during the time of the “Four Rightly Guided” Caliphs, they came into contact with Turkish, Persian and Byzantine civilizations, but they benefited from those marginally at best due to their narrow-minded contention that Islam had obliterated everything that preceded it. (p.124) Therefore, when they invaded Persia, Syria, Egypt and later Turkic areas, they did not hesitate to destroy works written in Turkish, Persian and Greek languages along with religious texts and monuments.

The Umayyad period is portrayed in an especially unfavorable light. The Arab aggression and territorial expansion by the Umayyads could by no means be ascribed to a religious ideal of spreading Islam as most of

their Caliphs had not taken Islam seriously as a belief or had even shown contempt for it. On the contrary, the only motive behind their invasions had been the exploitation of rich countries in order to find new sources for their increasingly growing expenses. Islam had been for them rather a tool for political domination until non-Arab Muslims got the upper hand in terms of political power. (p.93) Arab-Turkish relations in this framework are also portrayed as very strained. According to the book, the Arab policy concerning Turks during the Umayyad period had been one of cruelty, oppression and mass murder. (p.146) For almost a century, they had looted cities in *Türkeli*, thereby destroying a flourishing civilization and turning these cities into ruins, but the Turks had still resisted. The harsh language in expressing these points is noteworthy:

“The Turks had been living as sovereign people for centuries and could certainly not enter the domination of these looters. They could not accept the religion of Islam and degrade themselves from the status of masters to slaves. Therefore, despite almost a century long efforts, the Umayyads had no success in spreading Islam among the Turks and could even not dominate small Turkish principalities.

The Turks converted en masse to Islam only after their decision to become the masters of the Arabs who wanted to turn them into slaves (p.146-147)”⁵⁶

Thus, it was in the Abbasid period when most of the Turks converted to Islam and became the real power holders (p.157) and primary contributors to Islam.

The textbook asserts on numerous occasions that it was the non-Arabs who created an Islamic civilization. (pp.86,93,162) This civilization took root thanks to the contributions of Turks and then Persians. For instance, most of the members of scientific and educational fields are claimed to be of non-Arab origin. Turks produced a number of prominent figures in legal studies, philosophy, geography, linguistics, politics, economy, and positive sciences who created and dominated Islamic centers of culture not only during the Abbasid era but for a long time afterward. (pp.162-64) Among others, Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Al-Biruni, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) are argued to have Turkish origins. Major works that lie at the foundation of western science starting in the sixteenth century are asserted to have been produced by scholars of Turkish descent. The final statement on this point is very forward and is as follows:

“Depending on historical documents, it can be asserted with certainty that an Arab civilization before Islam did not exist. In the Islamic era, it was not the Arabs who created civilization, but people from other races and especially Turks. (pp.165)”⁵⁷

Concluding Remarks

*“He who controls the present, controls the past.”*⁵⁸

History is to society what memory is to an individual”.⁵⁹ The ruling cadres of the young Turkish Republic created that social memory for the people at large in form of a new national history during the 1930s and hoped to “substitute patriotism for religion”.⁶⁰

In this decade Turkey witnessed the formation and propagation of a Turkish national culture within the framework of a crystallizing Turkish nationalism. These efforts were rooted in the elite’s supreme goal of becoming part of modernity through a wholesale socio-political transformation and modernism operated as an overarching ideology that defined the parameters in the course of nation-state building. The official perspective of the Turkish Republic focusing on these targets was termed *Kemalism* and it provided the ideological substructure for the process by increasingly becoming an all-encompassing discourse.

In this context, the creation of an officially sanctioned national culture concentrated chiefly on the issue of identity transformation. The new Turkish identity envisioned by the ruling elite depended on a selective dissociation from preceding historical periods. As aptly put by Göle, non-Western modernization typically has the effect of seriously toppling and changing society’s relationship with their history.⁶¹ Beginning with the 1930s, history became one of the most significant tools of *Kemalist* nation-building endeavors. The Turkish Republic presented its citizens with a highly selective version of history as the means for the above-mentioned dissociation and recast it in a nationalist mold. The direct reflection and inclusion of the Republic’s perspectives on history and identity formation in educational content happened through the writing of new history textbooks for all school grades in the early years of the same decade. The new textbooks were almost a mirror-image of the newly created official history that came to be labeled the Turkish History Thesis.

Islam had a peculiar place in this new officially sanctioned national historical narrative and the ideology surrounding it. The common understanding that Islam and the Islamic past, along with the Ottoman legacy, were pushed aside in favor of a distant pre-Islamic Turkish past seems to be warranted to a considerable degree. However, if taken too far this view

undermines the delicate nuances that operated with regard to the place reserved for religion in the propagated ideology of the time. In other words, it connotes complete removal or omission from the dominant discourse. Rather than fully discarding the subject of Islam in the national historical narrative, the ruling elite developed a historicized, positivized and nationalized perspective on it that seemed apt to teach the young generation and to popularize among the people at large. Hence, while emphasizing Turkishness as the primary ingredient and bonding cement of the national composition and giving primacy to patriotism in ideological terms, a revisionist and corrective attitude towards Islam is clearly discernible at the same time. Additionally, this approach did not only define the political realm in order to control and confine religion to the private spiritual sphere as often claimed, but it went far beyond that into the ideological field to generate a new understanding of Islam in cultural and religious terms. Through a very unorthodox representation, this new understanding rooted in a positivist perspective robbed Islam of any transcendence and universality declaring it a product of a particular context; a depiction that would be regarded as blasphemous and heretical if viewed from within Islam's own framework.

In this sense the 1930s stand out as a unique point in the range of the preceding Ottoman background and the succeeding Republican context with regard to the intricate relationship between ideology and religion. The revised new editions of the history textbooks, already in the following decade⁶² and later, diluted and moderated most of the expressions and representations about Islam and the Islamic past used in the textbooks of the 1930s. Later occasions in which political shifts⁶³ necessitated the production of new history textbooks in Turkey were mainly: the 1950s after the shift to multi-party politics in 1946 and the victory of the opposition party in 1950; the mid-1980s following the military rule of 1980-1983 and the return to civilian regime after the elections of 1983. The years between 1950 and 1980 witnessed a period of transition in which some radical aspects of the 1930s outlook were tempered and relatively conservative elements started penetrating public life to a limited extent. From the 1980s onwards, these elements were legitimized within the context of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that nationalized religion on different grounds, but still within a general picture of secularism.

The turning points in this chain clearly indicate that significant political shifts in Turkey brought their revisions to the dominant national narrative and mirrored them in official historiography,⁶⁴ which subsequently had their reflections in revised history textbooks. Within this context the 1930s evidently constituted an exception rather than the norm in the continuum of the dominant ideology's approach to religion in its efforts of an “editing of the past as to project meaning to it.”⁶⁵ Official narratives or their byproducts in Turkey, or any part of the Muslim geography, never referred to Islam as “the religion of Muhammad” ever

before or after and positivized religion in its ideology to the degree witnessed during the 1930s.

Notes

¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of History," in *The Varieties of History from Voltaire to the Present*, ed. Fritz Stern (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 197-208.

² Suavi Aydın, "Resmi Tarihin Temeli: Ulusal Tarih Yazımı ve Resmi Tarihte Mitlerin Kaynağı," in *Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları-1*, ed. Fikret Başkaya (Ankara: Özgür Üniversite Kitaplığı, 2008), 43.

³ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 27.

⁴ For a contemporary evaluation related to textbooks and religion in the Middle East see, Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Gregory Starrett, eds., *Teaching Islam: Textbooks and Religion in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006). For an overall picture see, Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Ortadoğu'da Millet, Milliyet, Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2011).

⁵ For possible points of comparison between Turkey and Iran see, Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zürcher, eds., *Men of Order: authoritarian modernization under Atatürk and Reza Shah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

⁶ A study attempting to periodize the stages of development for Republican Turkish nationalism identifies the period of 1929-1938 as an era in which the ethno-cultural dimension of the Turkish nation was stressed. The fundamental reference points of Turkish nationalism evolved from religious (1919-23) to secular (1924-29) themes and then became infused with ethno-cultural motifs (1929-38). Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene: Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001).

⁷ For information on the creation of the Turkish national identity, see Suavi Aydın, *Türk Kimliğinin Yaratılması ve Ulusal Kimlik Sorunu Üzerine* (İstanbul: Özgür Üniversite, 2009).

⁸ On the creation of the ideal state-sanctioned citizen, the outstanding contemporary source is Afet (İnan), *Vatandaş İçin Medeni Bilgiler* (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931,1933). For studies on this subject, see Birol Caymaz, *Türkiye'de Vatandaşlık, Resmi İdeoloji, ve Yansımaları* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2007); Füsun Üstel, "Makbul Vatandaş"ın Peşinde-II. Meşrutiyet'ten Bugüne Türkiye'de Vatandaş Eğitimi (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005); Fatma Gürses, "Kemalizm'in Model Ders Kitabı: Vatandaş İçin Medeni Bilgiler," *Akademik Bakış* 4,7 (Kış 2010): 233-249.

⁹ For a digest of the scholarship on the relationship between history and identity building, see Yücel Öztürk, "Tarih ve Kimlik," *Akademik İnceleme* 2,1 (2007): 1-25.

¹⁰ (Türk Ocağı "Türk Tarihi Heyeti" azalarından Afet Hf. ile Mehmet Tevfik, Samih Rifat, Akçura Yusuf, Dr. Reşit Galip, Hasan Cemil, Sadri Maksudi, Şemsettin Vasıf ve Yusuf Ziya Beyler tarafından iktitaf, tercüme ve telif yollarile yapılmış bir teşebbüstür.) *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1930).

¹¹ The most extensive study on the formation of the Turkish History Thesis remains: Büşra Ersanlı Behar, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de "Resmi Tarih" Tezinin Oluşumu (1929-1937)* (İstanbul: AFA Yayınları, 1992). For a condensed review of

the nature and formation of it, see Ahmet Şimşek, “‘Türk Tarih Tezi’ Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme,” *Türkiye Günlüğü* 111 (2012): 85-100. For a critical edited volume see, Cem Küçük and Münir Üstün, eds., *Resmi Tarih Yalanları* (İstanbul: Profil Yayıncılık, 2011).

¹² One of the best works dealing with how the Turkish History Thesis was reflected in new history textbooks of the 1930s is still: Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993) Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998).

¹³ Zafer Toprak, “Darwinizm’den Ateizme Türkiye’de Tarih Eğitiminin Evrimi,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 216 (2011): 30.

¹⁴ A significant nuance should be underlined here: this article focuses exclusively on religion’s place in history education the content of which was an outgrowth of the newly created national historical narrative. For a discussion of religion curricula in Turkey, see Sam Kaplan, “Religious Nationalism’: A Textbook Case from Turkey,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, 3 (2005): 665-676. For information on religion’s place in Turkish national education in general, see Yeşim Bayar, “The Dynamic Nature of Educational Policies and Turkish Nation Building: Where Does Religion Fit In?” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, 3 (2009): 360-370.

¹⁵ It should be noted that this article’s focus does not include academic history writing of the time. Its interest is confined to uncovering the ways in which the newly created historical narrative as part of the dominant ideology chose to represent Islam and the Islamic past. For the development of history in the academic milieu, see Erdem Sönmez, “Türkiye’de Tarih Disiplininin Oluşumu ve Kurumsallaşması,” *Bilgi ve Bellek* 8 (2009): 135-146.

¹⁶ Andrew Davison and Taha Parla, “Secularism and Laicism in Turkey,” in *Secularisms*, ed. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 67. For an account of the Republic’s policies on religion see, İsmail Kara, “Din ile Olmuyor Dinsiz de Olmuyor! Cumhuriyet Devri Din Politikaları,” in *Cumhuriyet Tarihinin Tartışmalı Konuları*, ed. Bülent Bilmez (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2013), 72-96. For an assessment of Republican relationship between the state and Islam see, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Türkler, Türkiye ve İslam. Yaklaşım, Yöntem ve Yorum Denemeleri* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2009), 113-127.

¹⁷ Zafer Toprak, “Mukaddes’ten ‘Temeddün’e Kültür Devrimi. Şemsettin Günaltay ve Türk Tarih Tezi Eleştirilerine Yanıt,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 208 (2011): 38,49.

¹⁸ “It went beyond the narrow confines of diplomatic-political history, established an interdisciplinary approach. It viewed history on a wider temporal axis. It made use of foreign sources to an unprecedented degree. It transcended the old chronicler tradition or the pass on pattern of the II. Constitutional Era. It included more synthetic information. It established the links between anthropology, philology and history. It treated human evolution on a scientific basis.” Toprak, “Darwinizm’den Ateizme”, 30.

¹⁹ For the intellectual legacy of positivism from the late Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic see, Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building. From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010) (especially see, “Chapter 9 – The Young Turk Mindset”, 110-123). For a general overview of diverse intellectual dispositions during the late Ottoman Empire and the early

Turkish Republic see, Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Türkiye’de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi* (İstanbul: Ülken Yayınları, 2005)

²⁰ M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Atatürk. An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 66. (especially see, “Chapter 3-The Scientism of the Young Turks”, 48-67)

²¹ The evolution and spread of mass education was very much intertwined with historically decisive transformations such as the rise and growth of the nation, the territorial nation-state and nationalism as an ideology in later eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries along with the development of capitalism as the major backdrop. These transformations had their roots in the self-defined “West” of their time and spread to other geographies in the world in various ways. Most studies on nationalism stress the important role of education in these processes either as one of the agents of change or reproduction, if not both. As Ernest Gellner put it, “the ideal of universal literacy and the right to education is a well-known part of the pantheon of modern values.” Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 28.

²² Valdimer Orlando Key, Jr., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 316.

²³ Harmon Zeigler and Wayne Peak, “The Political Functions of the Educational System”, in William M. Cave and Mark A. Chesler (eds.), *Sociology of Education. An Anthology of Issues and Problems*. New York: Macmillan, 1974, pp.183-205

²⁴ Michael W. Apple, “Regulating the text: The socio-historical roots of state control,” *Education Policy* 3, 2 (1989), 107-123. Also see, Martin Carnoy and Joel Samoff, eds., *Education, social transformation and transition states in the third world* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Henry A. Giroux and Anthony N. Penna, “Social education in the classroom: the dynamics of the hidden curriculum,” in *Curriculum & Instruction. Alternatives in Education*, ed. Henry A. Giroux, Anthony N. Penna, and William F. Pinar (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing, 1981), 197

²⁵ Janet Maw, “Ethnocentrism, history textbooks and teaching strategies,” *Research Papers in Education* 6, 3 (1991), 153-169. Also see, Peter Weinbrenner, “Methodologies of textbook analysis used to date,” in *Council of Europe Meetings on Educational Research: history and social studies methodologies of textbook analysis*, ed. Hilary Bordillon (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1990).

²⁶ Kenneth Wain, “Different perspectives on evaluating textbooks,” in Bordillon, 39. For a similar approach, see Alain Choppin, “The Emmanuelle textbook project,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 4, 2 (1992), 345-356.

²⁷ Especially in non-Western geographies, the educational system came to be regarded as the key to rapid, if orderly, social change. In such contexts, “once regarded as an essentially conservative, culture-preserving, culture-transmitting institution, the educational system now tends to be viewed as the master determinant of all aspects of change.” James S. Coleman, ed., *Education and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 3.

²⁸ “How could a person be a Turk and not side with Kemal Pasha?” “We are not Turks, Sir.” “What are you then?” “We are Muslims, praise God!” [“İnsan Türk olur da, nasıl Kemal Paşa’dan yana olmaz?” |Biz Türk değiliz ki, beyim.” “Ya nesiniz?” “Biz İslamız, elhamdülillah.”]

From a dialogue between the characters Ahmet Celal (a retired army officer and intellectual) and Bekir Çavuş (a Turkish peasant who had been drafted and

completed his military service) in a novel published in 1932. The quoted conversation takes place in 1922 in a village near the city of Eskişehir on the eve of a victory by the forces lead by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Yaban* (İstanbul: Birikim Yayınları, 1977), 203.

²⁹ For a detailed discussion of the concepts of secularism and laicism with reference to their theoretical bases and the implications of their differences in the Turkish context see, Andrew Davison, *Secularism and Revivalism in Turkey: A Hermeneutic Reconsideration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 153-54, 181-88. ; “Turkey, a Secular State? The Challenge of Description,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003): 333-350. ; Ayşe Kadioğlu, “The Pathologies of Turkish republican laicism,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, 3-4 (2010): 489-504.

³⁰ Davison, “Turkey, a Secular State?”, 340.

³¹ Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey. The Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003), 84.

³² For detailed information on this institution see, İştâ B. Tarhanlı, *Müslüman toplum “laik” devlet: Türkiye’de Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (İstanbul: AFA Yayınları, 1993). Also see, Binnaz Toprak, “Islam and the Secular State in Turkey,” in *Turkey: Political, Social and Economic Challenges in the 1990s*, eds. Çiğdem Balım, Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, C. Karataş, G. Winrow, F. Yasamee (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 35.

³³ Şerif Mardin, “Religion in Modern Turkey,” *International Social Science Journal* 29, 2 (1977): 287 and “Turkey Islam and Westernization,” in *Religion and Societies: Asia and the Middle East*, ed. Carlo Caldarola (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), 179.

³⁴ Davison, “Turkey, a Secular State?”, 341.

³⁵ Works on textbooks used in the Ottoman Empire or the Turkish Republic is a rather newly developing field that accelerated since the 1990s. Pertaining to the Ottoman context, a monograph completely devoted to the study of various textbooks used between 1876 and 1918 is noteworthy. Nuri Doğan, *İlk ve Orta Dereceli Ders Kitapları ve Sosyalleşme (1876-1918)* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 1994). With regard to the Republican case, two symposia and the book versions of them proved to be significant in discussions on predominantly post-1980 history education and textbooks. Salih Özbaran, ed., *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları. 1994 Buca Sempozyumu* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1995); Ali Berktaş and Hamdi Can Tuncer, eds., *Tarih Öğretimi ve Tarihte “Öteki Sorunu”. 2. Uluslararası Tarih Kongresi* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998). A monograph that makes extensive use of textbooks published between the early 1930s and the mid-1990s and traces the ideological shift from the “Turkish History Thesis” to the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” is Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993) Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998). For more recent studies see, Fatih Yazıcı, “Cumhuriyet Dönemi Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Tarihyazımı,” in *Türkiye’de Tarih Yazımı*, eds. Vahdettin Engin and Ahmet Şimşek (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınları, 2011); Erdal Aslan, “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin İlk Ders Kitapları,” *Eğitim ve Bilim* 35, 158 (2010): 215-231.

³⁶ For an account of history education in Turkey, see İsmail Hakkı Demircioğlu, “Türkiye’de Tarih Eğitiminin Tarihi,” *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi. Türk Eğitim Tarihi* 6, 12 (2008): 431-450. For the early Republican period see, Mesut Çapa, “Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Tarih Öğretimi,” *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* 29-30 (May-November 2002): 39-55.

³⁷ Mehmet Sarioğlu, “Egemen İdeolojik Düşüncenin İlkokul Tarih Öğretimine

Yansımaları: Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’in İlk Yıllarına (1839-1936),” *Eğitim, Bilim, Toplum* 6, 24 (Autumn 2008): 92.

³⁸ Joseph P. Farrell and Stephen P. Heyneman, “Textbooks in developing countries: Economic and pedagogical choices” in *Textbooks in the Third World: Policy, content, and context*, eds. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 39.

³⁹ Later occasions of political shifts also necessitated the production of new history textbooks in Turkey. These will be briefly presented in the concluding remarks section.

⁴⁰ Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent. Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 101.

⁴¹ For information on textbooks used before the 1930s see, Erdal Aslan, “Atatürk Döneminde Tarih Eğitimi-I: “Türk Tarih Tezi” Öncesi Dönem (1923-1931),” *Eğitim ve Bilim* 37, 164 (2012): 331-346.

⁴² “Türk Tarihi Heyetinin başka azalarının ve mevzu ile alakalı zatlerin müteale ve tenkit nazırlarına arz olunmak üzere yalnız yüz nüsha basılmıştır.” *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, inside cover.

⁴³ *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 1-3.

⁴⁴ In early April 1931, the *Turkish Hearths* were closed down. The *Turkish Hearths Board for the Research of Turkish History* operating under it applied to the Ministry of Interior on April 15, 1931 for an independent status. Upon approval, the Board changed its name and established the *Society for the Research of Turkish History* (*Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*). The very first activity of the Society was the preparation of new history textbooks for high schools. (After the language reform the Society was renamed as the *Turkish Historical Society* (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*) in 1935.) For further details see, Uluğ İğdemir, *Cumhuriyetin 50. Yılında Türk Tarih Kurumu* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1973), 16-20, 123-125.

⁴⁵ The very first original editions of the 4 volume new history textbooks for the high school level have been used as sources in this article. (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931) The volumes are entitled: *History I - Pre-Historic and Ancient Times; History II - Middle Ages; History III - Early Modern and Modern Times; History IV - The Republic of Turkey* (*Tarih I - Tarihtenevelki Zamanlar ve Eski Zamanlar; Tarih II - Ortazamanlar; Tarih III - Yeni ve Yakın Zamanlar; Tarih IV - Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*). Reprints of these textbooks with very minor alterations in language to fit modern Turkish are available in four volumes: *Kemalist Eğitimin Tarih Dersleri 1931-1941* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2001).

⁴⁶ In an effort to attest to a prominent place on the stage of world history, the textbooks exalt the Turks to the point of superfluity and exaggeration. This effort can on some level be interpreted as a reaction against Eurocentrism. The materialization of this reaction transpires in the form of relocating the dawn and roots of civilization in general. These books take the origins of civilization back to Central Asia and the Turks as opposed to the European historiographic tradition that accepts civilization as emanating from Ancient Greece in Europe. One of the most provocative and fairly recent scholarly reactions to Eurocentrism remains the following title and emphasizes the strong African and Asian influences on the Greek civilization, which according to the author have been erased by a “racist” European historiography: Martin Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Volume I: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987). An earlier and path-breaking

critical study on the patronizing perceptions of the “East” by the West is still, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1978).

⁴⁷ For example, textbooks in the II. Constitutional period during the 1910s refer to him as “Hazret-i Peygamber zî-şân efendimiz”. During the 1920s one encounters the most typical “Hazret-i Muhammed”. Even in the early republican era, a history book published in 1926 refers to him as “Hazret-i Muhammed” (aleyh-isselâm). These are all exalting titles of high reverence. With the new textbooks, the reference is reduced to “Muhammad” only. Toprak, “Mukaddes’ten ‘Temeddün’e Kültür Devrimi”, 38.

⁴⁸ Term used in pre-Islamic Arabia to refer to people with a generic monotheistic understanding of religion and tying themselves to Abraham.

⁴⁹ Unless stated otherwise, all page numbers in brackets are from the textbook *Tarih II - Ortazamanlar*. İstanbul Devlet Matbaası, 1931.

“Muhammet 40 yaşına geldiği zaman vatandaşlarını, kendinin bulduğu ve doğru olduğuna inandığı yeni bir dine davete başladı. Muhammed’in davet ettiği bu dine o zamanın haniflerine imtisalen “İbrahim dini” yahut inkıyat manasını ifade eden “islam” denilmiştir.”

⁵⁰ “Aksi takdirde Muhammedi, her şeyi bir melekten alan ve aynen muhitine tebliğ eden ümmi, cahil, hissiz hareketsiz bir put derecesine indirmek hatasından kurtulmak mümkün olmaz.”

⁵¹ “Muhammedin koyduğu esasların toplu olduğu kitaba *Kuran* denir. Bu esasları ihtiva eden cümlelere *Ayet*, *Ayet*lerden mürekkep parçalara da *Sure* derler. İslam an’amesinde bu ayetlerin Muhammede *Cebrail* adında bir melek vasıtasile Allah tarafından vahiy, yani ilham edildiği kabul olunur.”

⁵² “Arap edebiyatının Kurandan evvelki eserleri bunlardan ibaretti.”

⁵³ “Müslümanlarca Kurandan sonra en mevsuk bir *hadis* mecmuası olan “*Sahih Buhari*” *Mehmet İsmail* isminde Buharalı bir türk âlimi tarafından telif edildi.”

⁵⁴ “...içtimaî hayat, Muhammedin ilk telkinlerini batı bir tekâmül ile tadil ve tevsî etmektedir.”

⁵⁵ “Hukuki hükümler zaman ve mekân içinde içtimaî heyetlerin uğradıkları değişikliklere göre değiştiğinden on dört asır evvelki zaman ve mekânın ihtiyacına göre lüzumlu ve kâfi görülmüş olan esaslar yerine bugün birçok mütenevvi kanunlar ve usuller konulmak zarureti görülmüştür. Bunlar dahi ebedî olmayıp zamanla değişmeğe mahkumdurlar.

Tarihe ait malûmata gelince: yeni fenler sayesinde meydana çıkarılan hakikatler en yakın tarih bilgilerini bile temellerinden sarsmaktadır.

İmana ait olan birinci esas, sadeliği itibarıyla hakikaten pek mühimdir. Bu esasın, her muhatabın kabiliyetine göre izahında güçlük çekilmez.”

⁵⁶ “Asırlardan beri hakim yaşayan Türkler, tabiatile bu çapulcuların hükmü altına giremezlerdi. İslam dinini kabul ederek efendilikten mevaliliğe (köleliğe) inemezlerdi. Bunun içindir ki Emeviler bir asra yakın bir müddet uğraştıkları halde Türkler arasında İslam dinini yayamamış ve küçük türk beyliklerini bile hakimiyetleri altına alamamışlardır. Türkler ancak kendilerini mevali yapmak isteyen Arapların efendisi olma karar verdikten sonradır ki kütle halinde İslam dinine girmişlerdir.”

⁵⁷ “Tarih vesikaları ile edinilen bilgilere istinaden kat’i olarak denilebilir ki İslamdan evvel bir Arap medeniyeti olmamıştır. İslam devrinde de medeniyet yaratan Araplar değil, onlardan başka ırktan olanlar ve bilhassa Türklerdir.”

⁵⁸ George Orwell, 1984 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 35.

⁵⁹ Norman J. Wilson, *History in Crisis. Recent Directions in Historiography* (Upper Saddle River, N.J. : Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 5.

⁶⁰ Ertan Aydın, “Peculiarities of Turkish Revolutionary Ideology in the 1930s: The Ülkü Version of Kemalism, 1933-1936,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, 5 (September 2004): 88.

⁶¹ Nilüfer Göle, “Batı Dışı Modernlik: Kavram Üzerine,” in *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce*, cilt 3. *Modernleşme ve Batıcılık*, ed. Uygur Kocabaşoğlu (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002), 56-67.

⁶² Erinç Erdal Yıldırım, *İnönü Döneminde Tarih ve Eğitim: Tarih Anlayışında Süreklilik ve Değişimler* (Ankara: ODTÜ Yayıncılık, 2014), 171-174. Also see, Başar Arı, “Religion and Nation-Building in the Turkish Republic: Comparison of High School Textbooks of 1931-41 and of 1942-50,” *Turkish Studies* 14, 2 (2013): 372-393.

⁶³ For more information on these transitions, see Atila Eralp, Muharrem Tünay and Birol Yeşilada, eds., *The Political and Socioeconomic Transformation of Turkey* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993) ; Richard Tapper, ed., *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State* (London: IB Tauris, 1991) ; Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: a modern history* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994) ; Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁶⁴ For the stages of this multifaceted interconnection between changes in political power holding and corresponding revisions to official historiography see, Kaan Durukan, “The Course of Historiography in Turkey at the Turn of the 21st Century: A Brief Introduction” (paper presented at the XXVIIth International Conference on Historiography and Source Studies of Asia and Africa «Local Heritage and Global Perspective», Saint Petersburg, Russia, April 24-26, 2013). For further details on the subject see, Kaan Durukan, *Türkili Hicazkar. Türkiye’de Tarih Anlayışı Üzerine* (İstanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2010). I would like to thank the author for his comments and help in the final revision of this article.

⁶⁵ Wilson, 18.

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