

# THE EFFECT OF OTTOMAN MODERNIZATION ON NON-MUSLIM WOMEN:

AN EVALUATION FROM TANZIMAT  
TO THE LAST PERIOD OF THE EMPIRE

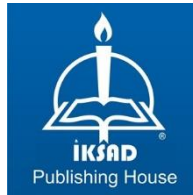
**Dr. Melek KAYMAZ MERT**



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## **PREFACE**

The modernization process, which started with the proclamation of the Tanzimat and Islahat Edicts in the Ottoman Empire, continued with the Constitutional Monarchy period. While modernization was felt in areas such as law and state administration, it was also reflected in public and social life. This process also had an enormous impact on Ottoman women and during this period, while living in a relatively closed society, they now began to exist in the social life. In the Ottoman Empire, a multinational empire, non-Muslim women as well as Muslim women carried out media activities, started work life and performed activities related to different branches of art. However, the history of non-Muslim women has not taken its place in Turkish official historiography a lot. This book is intended to examine the activities of non-Muslim women in the public sphere from the modernization process of the Ottoman Empire to its last period, accompanied by primary and secondary sources. I would like to thank Katerina Kotsaftiki for her help, while carrying out this study.



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The word modern (In Latin, modernus) was a term used within the Roman Empire before the Middle Ages to distinguish Christians from pagans living outside Roman territory (Parsons, 1971:67). In the 19th century, when new movements emerged in art and literature, the concept of "modern" was used to refer to the “new”, apart from the classical. During this era, in philosophy, scholastic thought was replaced by rational thought; the term “modernity” began to be used in this way (Metin, 2021:72).

It is generally accepted that the modernization process of the world embarked upon the West. The enlightenment thought, which laid the foundation for developments such as the Renaissance and the Reformation, became the beginning of very important and radical changes all over the world. This period included the English Revolution of 1688 and the French Revolution of 1789. During this era, scientific and philosophical developments in the Western world, social and political processes gained a momentum (Güvenç, 2020: 65). Besides, the Industrial Revolution that took place in the 19th century was another milestone. The modernization process in the Ottoman Empire, which could not remain indifferent to these changes, brought about some important changes (Karpas, 2014:3).

Along with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire suffered a series of military defeats against European states. As a result, it became clear that there were serious problems that must be solved. It was realized that the education system should be reorganized in order to re-establish the state's military power against Europe. (Somel, 2019:78). Another fact was that the Ottoman army must be adapted to the requirements of the



age. The reforms that started with Sultan Mahmud II in the late 18th century continued with the proclamation of the Tanzimat and Islahat Edicts. These edicts brought about developments such as the restriction of the Sultan's power and the guaranty of personal rights and security with the constitution. With the constitutional monarchy periods, the absolutist regime of Sultan began to relent (Metin, 2021:76).

These developments in the Empire were also transferred to cultural and social life. This modernization process naturally affected women as well. In this process, women began to take part in the public sphere. During this period, association and press activities carried out by women were an important part of the Ottoman women's movements. Significant changes were also made regarding women's education. During this period, the Ottoman Empire, which was a multinational empire, witnessed the emergence of non-Muslim women in the public sphere, but when women's movements in the Ottoman Empire are mentioned, the associations and press activities established by Muslim women are mostly emphasized in Turkish official historiography.

In this study, from the declaration of Tanzimat to the last period of the Empire, the activities of Armenian, Greek and Jewish women, who were among the non-Muslim groups that stood out in the Ottoman women's movements were tried to be enlightened. In this way, it was aimed to demonstrate that women had common problems and were involved in the same activities in the Ottoman Empire, which was a multinational empire, even though they had different religions and lifestyles. While the aims of the women's associations established before the weakening of the state and the loss of territory were almost the same, during the years of the national struggle, it was understood that some

non-Muslim women's associations were in the category of harmful associations.

## **1. MODERNIZATION AS A CONCEPT AND OTTOMAN MODERNIZATION**

The concept of “modern”, which means “new and contemporary”, expresses the characteristics that are specific to a certain period. Modernization, on the other hand, refers to an important process that started in the 17th century in Western Europe and continued until the end of the 20th century, symbolizing the break of the “past and tradition”. Modernization symbolizes the changes that occurred in economic, political, socio-cultural and many areas as a result of the thought movements and changes that were shaped over a long historical period in Western Europe (Kurtdaş, 2012:101).

Modernization is a process that started in Europe in the 17th century and spread all over the world, resulting from the changes in the forms of social life and organization. It occurred through four basic revolutions: the Scientific Revolution initiated by Newton, the Political Revolution that based on the government’s legality basing on the public, the Cultural Revolution and the Industrial Revolution based on the superiority of the reasoning. The Enlightenment movement, in which rationalism and science stood out as a result of the Renaissance and Reform movements, was one of the constituents of modernization. These improvements led the way for some changes in all social institutions of Europe (Aslan, 2011:10).

When we look at how the modernization process began in the Ottoman Empire, we must go back to the Siege of Vienna in 1683. The

failure of the siege had some negative consequences for the Ottoman Empire, which had been impoverished for a century (Çalışkan, 2022: 324). The price of the economic and social disintegration caused by this defeat in the Ottoman Empire would be paid over the years. The situation of the Ottoman treasury in 1686-1687 was also not encouraging. The change in Europe since the end of the 16th century had negative effects on the Ottoman Empire. The fact that the change is inevitable ensures that the dynamics of society become more active. Efforts to improve the situation by going back to the past, even if they produce positive results at first, over time cause the society to fall behind the era (Karabulut, 2010:126).

The modernization process that consisted of economic, military, political and socio-cultural changes and transformations became capable of affecting different societies in cultural and intellectual terms. Due to the previously mentioned problems, the Ottoman Empire could not remain indifferent to these developments and faced the process of modernization in social and political terms (Belge, 2012: 541). There is an accepted opinion that Ottoman modernization started during the reign of Sultan Mahmud. II. During Sultan Mahmud's reign, most of the reform movements were initiated with the aim of "saving the state". One of the most important developments in terms of modernization was "Vaka-i Hayriye" (Çalışkan, 2022:331) This event, called the "Hayırlı Olay", meant the abolition of the old army "Yeniçeri Ocağı", paved the way for a great innovation in military and political terms. The technological, regular, and centralized army that was established subsequently became one of the most important representatives of modernization developments (Belge, 2012:542).

Another crucial development regarding the modernization process in the Ottoman Empire was the declaration of Tanzimat and Islahat Edicts. These edicts enabled a suitable basis for law-based political and social movements that started in the Empire. With Tanzimat, immediately, there was a complete transformation of the political, economic, administrative, and social life in Turkey. This is how the process of establishing a constitutional government in Turkey and the rapprochement of Islamic and Christian communities began (Mardinli, 2020:3). With the Islahat eddict, the "safety of life and property guarantee given for the first time to non-Muslim citizens residing in the Empire emerged as an important step towards social equality (Çiçek, Aydın and Yağcı, 2015:13). The modernization movements that gained momentum with the Tanzimat Edict were the source of the developments especially in the Ottoman bureaucracy and the army. With the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy, the law-based social structure stood out, constitutional rights were guaranteed, and the Sultan's powers were limited. Such important developments on the basis of law led the way for the Ottoman society to experience a process of change and transformation in every aspect (Kantar, 2019:67).

## **2. WOMEN FROM THE OTTOMAN MODERNIZATION TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

One of the most important subjects of the modernization process that started to take place in the Ottoman Empire after the 17th century was women. The intellectuals who played an important role in the declaration of the Tanzimat and Islahat Edicts were aware of the importance of women's place in the modernization process and their role

in restructuring of society. During the Tanzimat period, schools for girls began to be opened, with the changes made in the land laws, daughters were given a share of the decedent's property, the hetairism system was also ended, and the "wedding dress tax" collected from married girls was abolished. During the Tanzimat period, new regulations in the state and social institutions also affected the family and women. A new status of women emerged. After the 1840s, administrators began to address women's issues. Secondary schools, vocational schools and teacher training schools were opened by the state (Altındal, 1994:78).

Structural changes that would lead to the modernization of the Ottoman Empire, which was built on traditional foundations, came out during the Constitutional Monarchy period. The modernization process also affected social structures (Kurnaz, 1996:56). In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire went through changes and structural transformations in the political, social, economic, education and legal fields in an effort to keep up with the West and progress, and Ottoman women were also affected by this process of change. Factors that were decisive in the restructuring of society, such as education, law, and economy, also determined the position of women in society. In other words, the position of Ottoman women showed parallelism with the modernization. The changes that took place were also reflected in women, whose roles were as "mothers and wives within the home", and they began to make demands to gain different statues in social life (Çakır, 1999:56).

Ottoman women expressed and introduced themselves for the first time through the press and women's magazines. Women's magazines played an important role in eliminating women's aversion of writing and conveying their demands. The first of these magazines was published in

1869 under the name “Terakki-i Muhadderat” (Çakır, 1999:58). Other important magazines of this period were “Kadın, Mehasin, Demet and Kadın Dünyası.” Apart from these, most of them were published for a long time such as Musavver Kadın, Kadın (İstanbul), Erkekler Dünyası, Güzel Prenses, Kadınlık, Seyyale, Bilgi Yurdu Işığı, Genç Kadın, Kadın Duygusu, İnci, Diyane, Kadınlar Saltanatı and Hanım. At that time, they not only published magazines, but they also expressed themselves in newspapers. “Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete” was among the leading periodicals published by women and there were a lot of articles mainly by female writers (Demirel, 2020:241). In the first issue dated 19 August 1311 (31 August 1895), the publishing policies under the title "Tahdîs-i Ni'met-Ta'yîn-i Meslek", as for those who love to read and write, educated, religious, to have good morals, to raise Ottoman Muslim women who have the characteristics of a good wife and a good mother," were explained (Leman, 1895:14).

Among the most important activities of women during and after the Second Constitutional Monarchy, was the establishment of associations. Many women's organizations were also established during the Constitutional Monarchy period. Among these, there were charities as well as associations that defended women's rights. These associations were struggling for women's education, providing them with job opportunities and tried to make them participate in social life. The associations which were called as “İttihat ve Terakki Kadınlar Şubesi, Kadınları Esirgeme Derneği, Teali Nisvan Cemiyeti, Osmanlı Kadınları Terakkiperver Cemiyeti, Osmanlı Cemiyet-i Nisaiyye, and Müdafaa-i Hukuk-ı Nisvan Cemiyeti” were established for these reasons (Toprak,

1992:231). Among these “İslam Kadınlarını Çalıştırma Cemiyeti” aimed to give women opportunities to find jobs (Demir, 1999:108).

With the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, great developments took place in terms of women's education. The first high school for girls, “İstanbul İnas Sultanîsi” was opened in 1913, and this was followed by the opening of Erenköy, Çamlıca and Kandilli Girls' High Schools, which still provide education today. In 1914, classes for girls started at Darülfünun and a separate İnas Darülfünun was established in 1914. In addition, in 1915, Turkish girls began to receive higher education together with boys at the Istanbul Faculty of Literature for the first time (Kurnaz, 1997:56). In 1917, the Fine Arts School and Conservatory for girls, schools providing tailoring training, and schools providing nursing and commercial courses were opened. It was during this period that girls were sent abroad for education for the first time. İnas Darül-Fünun, founded in 1914, was affiliated with girls' teacher training schools and provided education in the fields of mathematics, literature, and natural sciences. This school was also established to train teachers for girls' schools. In 1913, women began to be appointed as civil servants (Özkiraz and Aslanel, 2011:11).

In addition to all of these, the developments regarding the legal status of women were occurred. The Family Law Decree, which regulated the legal status of women, came into force in 1917. This decree is also the first legal text on family law prepared in an Islamic country (Çaha, 1996:102). With this decree, a new legal dimension was brought to the engagement. The age limit for marriage for girls was seventeen and for boys was eighteen. With the decree, polygamy was made possible by obtaining the consent of the spouse only. In addition to giving women

the right to divorce like men, marriages were officially registered with the provision that they must be performed with the presence of an official and two witnesses (Caporol, 1982:90).

Ottoman women, who became active in the public sphere with the Tanzimat, had to make a greater impact on business life during the period leading up to the 1912 Balkan Wars, the period of the entry of the Empire into the First World War (WWI). Hundreds of thousands of women, whose husbands, fathers, and brothers went to the front, were injured, or died, began to look for a new way of earning a living as they lost their only or basic source of income. Some women, who had to earn a living not only for themselves but also for their children and relatives, took over their fathers' or husbands' jobs and started working as pliers while others entered factories as workers. The extent of the misery of women was so serious that the government opened an institution called “İslam Kadınlarını Çalıştırma Cemiyeti” in 1916 and began to help them find jobs (Uçan and Çolak, 2008). More than 14 thousand women applied to its central branch in the first few months of its establishment, and in addition to providing shelter, food, and clothing to those in need, it also tried to find spouses for single and widowed women by placing advertisements in newspapers. Since the inflation caused by the war and the difficulty in supplying basic necessities also affected the families of fixed-income civil servants, many women from the middle class entered working life for the first time to contribute to the family budget and fill the positions vacated by men. These women, who generally worked in education, health, commerce, government, service, and production sectors, labored as school principals, teachers, inspectors, secretaries, civil servants, clerks, and accountants, etc. (Atamaz, 2014: 33).



During the years of war and occupation, Muslim women established associations to awaken national consciousness and eradicate the situation in the country. Among the most important associations established in this context is “Teal-i Nisvan Cemiyeti”, which was founded by important figures such as Halide Edip and Neziha Muhiddin. This association, which provided financial aid to soldiers during the Balkan Wars, hosted different conferences with the participation of men and women. (Şahin and Şahin, 2014: 55). Other associations established by women between 1910 and 1919 serving in this direction are as follows: Esirgeme (Esirge) Cemiyeti, Teal-i Vatan-i Osmanî Hanımlar Cemiyeti, Osmanlı Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti, Hanımlar Cemiyeti , Donanma Muavene-i Milliye Cemiyeti Hanımlar Şubesi , Kadınları Çalıştırma Cemiyet-i İslamiyesi, Osmanlı Cemiyet-i Hayriye-i Nisvâniye, Mamulât-ı Dâhiliye Kadınlar Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi, Şehit Ailelerine Yardım Birliği, Hizmet-i Nisvan, Asker Ailelerine Yardım Cemiyeti, İttihat ve Terakki Kadınlar Şubesi (Tunaya, 1998). With this spirit, women also organized protests occupation. The first rally in Istanbul to protest the occupation of Izmir was held in Fatih Square on 19 May 1919. Rallies in Usküdar on 20 May, Kadıköy on 22 May and Sultanahmet on 23 May were also organized. Prominent figures of the period, known for their roles as intellectuals, poets and teachers, Halide Edip (Adıvar), Nakiye (Elgün), Sabahat (Filmer), Şükufe Nihal (Başar), Hayriye Melek (Hunç) made speeches condemning the occupations. They also announced to the world that they were ready to fight together with men (Özdemir, 2021:3).

The process of women taking part in the public sphere, which started with the Tanzimat, turned into a national movement during the

war years, and women joined into great battles, including going to the front. With the declaration of the Republic, they would fight for their legal rights. The women's movements in the first years of the Republic were for women to have equal access to the legal and political rights given to men with the Republic. This consciousness grew out of the modernization process initiated in the late Ottoman period and the efforts of women in this process.

### **3. NON-MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

Before touching on the status of non-Muslim women in the Ottoman Empire, it is necessary to clarify the concept of non-Muslim. The term "non-Muslim" is generally used for all groups other than Muslims. Non-Muslims are divided into two groups: "polytheists" and "scripturalists". Scripturalists were also called "Kitabî", and if they live under Islamic rule, they are also called "Ahl-i Zimmet or Zimmi" (Kurtaran, 2011:57). Islamic law generally regards members of four religions as scripturalist. These are Christians, Jews, Magians and Sabians. If they live in a Muslim country, their existence and security will be under the responsibility of the Islamic state, and they are called Zimmis in short. Non-Muslims living in Ottoman lands were in this status. Among these four religious' groups, Magians and Sabians were almost non-existent. Of the remaining two groups, the most numerous are Christians. Although Jews were fewer in number than Christians, their economic influence within the country was quite large (Ercan, 2001:23).

In order to understand this expression better, it is necessary to look at the "millet" system in the Ottoman Empire. The organization that

determined the legal status of non-Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire, started with II. Mehmet's conquest of Istanbul. With the conquest of Istanbul, "Conqueror", who considered himself the "Greek Kaiser", began to organize his state, which he considered the continuation of the Roman Empire as a way of world domination. (İnalçık, 1973:102). With this method, Mehmet the Conqueror, wanted to make the new capital a multi-religious city and the center of different religions. He especially wanted to separate Orthodox Christians from Latin Christianity and prevent Roman influence on the Greek Church (Güneş, 2015:67). In order to achieve this political goal, he organized the non-Muslim communities of the state in the center of Istanbul. This policy, which integrated the non-Muslim people into Ottoman society in the form of communities or nations by strengthening centralization and hierarchy within itself, continued for many years under the name of the millet system (Weinstein, 1997:78).

When non-Muslim women in the Ottoman Empire are considered, it must first be expressed that although the religions and languages of the Ottoman women were different, their lives were not very different from each other. There exists a lot of memories, narratives, and books on this issue. For example, the German officer Helmuth von Moltke (1800-1891), who worked as a military trainer in the Ottoman army between 1835- 1839, wrote letters about the daily life of Ottomans. These letters give us information on this subject. In a letter dated 1836, Moltke's remarks about the days when was hosted at the house of the Armenian Mardiraki, the chief translator of Serasker Hüsrev Pasha and what he saw in Istanbul in general contain important observations about the life of Armenian women at that time: "It is actually possible to call these

Armenians Christian Turks; they have taken a lot from the customs and even the language of this dominant nation. However, the Greeks preserves their identity much more. Since they are Christians, their religion only allows them to marry one woman. But this woman remains almost as out of sight as Turkish women. Armenian women also wear veils when they go out” (Moltke, 1960: 25).

Non-Muslim women also had the same social and economic status as Muslim women in the Ottoman society and avoided meeting with men just like them. Their clothing styles on the streets were almost the same. As in many of the communities that formed the Ottoman Empire, which had a patriarchal culture and social structure, the family structure of the Armenians was based on male dominance, and women were no different from Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire in matters such as work, marriage procedures, education, and communication with men (Jennings, 1999:123). On the other hand, especially Jewish women's participation in socio economic life was higher than other groups. Jewish families were quite wealthy and Jewish women were engaged in trade. For instance, Reyna Nasi, a member of the Nasi family, established a printing house in Ortaköy. It is also known that Jewish women had close relationships with palace women (Sümer, 2020).

Although there were some examples prior to that period, non-Muslim women mostly became active in public life with the period starting with the Tanzimat period and continued during the Second Constitutional Monarchy and afterwards. During this period, non-Muslim women established associations like Muslim women, entered the press life through magazines and newspapers, and they carried out several activities to make their voices to be heard.

When we look at the Ottoman Empire and the women's movements that existed during the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, we see that the demands for the right to education, voting rights and citizenship were dominant in the first place (Tekeli, 1982:134). When we look at the components of the movement, it is possible to observe that it is a movement with many identities, including Greek, Armenian, Circassian, Arab, Jewish, Kurdish, etc. women. Women's groups of each community published their own magazines, established associations and foundations, and became an active part of the struggle as subjects of the women's movement. After this multilingual and multicultural structure of the Ottoman women's movements, unfortunately, we can talk about the existence of a predominantly monolingual and cultural Turkish-Muslim women's movement, rather than women's movements, from the founding of the Republic of Turkey to the 1980s (Berber, 2017).

Through associations and publications such as magazines and newspapers, educated, middle-class women began to discuss the position of women in Ottoman society, starting from the issues that hurt them the most. The topics of discussion are very diverse: marriage with more than one woman, the right to divorce in favor of men, the exclusion of women from social life, and restrictions on clothing. They also criticize the conditions of femininity within the family and demand their right to exist in education, working life, social and public life. (Berber, 2017)

## **4. NON-MUSLIM WOMEN FROM THE OTTOMAN MODERNIZATION TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

### **4.1. Armenian Women**

As a nation living in the Ottoman Empire, Armenians entered a different period in the 1800s with the influence of Europe and the modernization process in the country. During the Tanzimat period, Armenian intellectuals, who were in Europe due to their duties, had the opportunity to see and follow the developments in the world closely. This situation brought about a change in their history, language, literature, politics and trade in the 19th century (Şişman 1998: 11). In short, it caused all kinds of developments to be followed closely and reflected on the Ottoman Empire. Young Armenians educated in Europe affected from liberal and democratic views. They were also deeply affected by nationalism. The Islahat Edict, declared in 1856, further strengthened the thoughts of the Young Armenians and provided the opportunity to easily present their new ideas (Bozkuş, 2020:97).

Within the scope of modernization or innovation movements in the Ottoman Empire, sending students to Western countries for educational purposes was of major importance. The Ottoman Empire sent students from all nationalities abroad during this period and did not make any discrimination in this regard. Between the years 1840 and 1850, nearly sixty Armenian students graduated from French schools and came to Istanbul. Between the years 1839 and 1876, 116 Muslim and 78 non-Muslim students were sent abroad and received training in fields such as military service, law, and medicine. In this context, it is obvious that Armenian women intellectuals also contributed to this process (Artinian, 2004:74-75).

Armenian women participated in the struggle for the modernization of Ottoman women in the fields of family, education, work, and politics, which started in the 19th century. During this period, the roles of Armenian women began to change. This meant the formation of a new understanding of public space and private space. Accordingly, the nation was reconstructed as a nuclear family consisting of father, mother, sisters, and brothers. With the influence of the Westernization movement, the rules restricting women in both family and social life were more flexible especially in big cities, and the status of women began to improve (Çınar, 2003: 76).

One of the most important developments of this period for the Armenians was the document originally called “Nizamname-i Millet-i Armenian.” (Figure 1). This document, prepared by religious functionaries of the Armenian community and submitted to the Sultan's approval in 1862, passed into the history as the Armenian Constitution. (Bebiroğlu, 2003). The regulation consisted of 99 articles. The ones between 1 and 7 were related to the election procedure and principles of the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul. Articles 7-23 were about the Patriarch of Jerusalem, articles 24-35 were on Spiritual Assembly, articles 36-43 were on Corporal Council, 44-51 were on the Commissions established by the Corporal Assembly. Articles 52-56 covered the subject of District and Church administrations and 57-71 were on the formation of the General Assembly, the election conditions of the members, their organization, and duties. Articles 72-84 were on how to cast votes and 85-89 described the structure and working method of assemblies and commissions, articles 90-93 included the principles of aid to be given to members of the nation in need. The ones 94-98 dealt

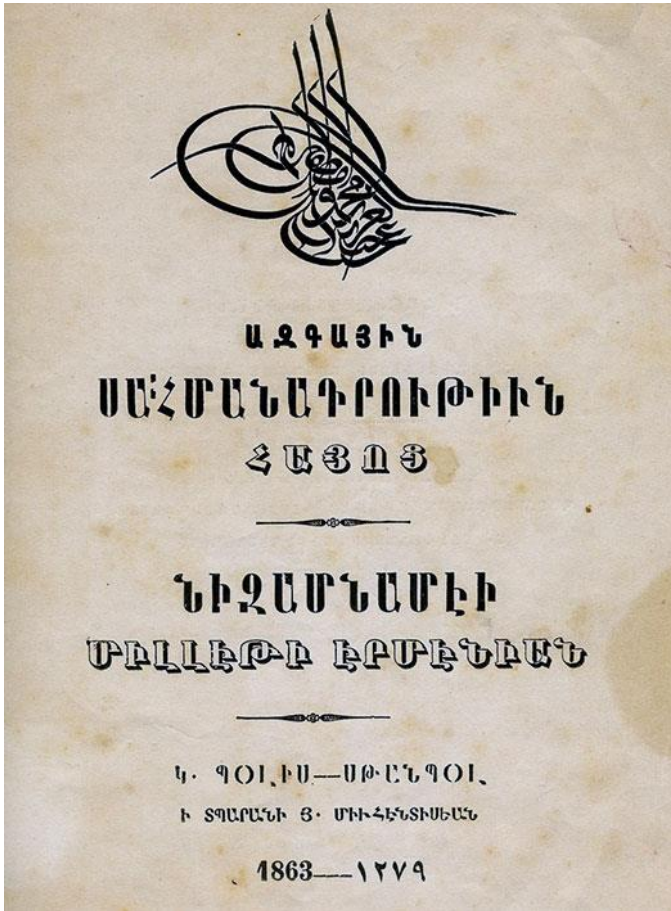
with the issue of spiritual leadership, and the 99th and last article regulated the path to be followed by the Spiritual and Physical Assembly when a new structure was needed in the next years (Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), 1847).

This regulation, which Armenians call the Armenian Constitution, preceded the first Constitution of the Ottoman Empire, Kanun-ı Esasi, by 13 years and brought important privileges to Armenians. Although the Sultan's approval was required on some issues such as the appointment of the Patriarch and the approval of the regulations, Armenians, in addition to religious affairs, carried out their own affairs in education, health, foundations, taxes and partly the judiciary through commissions to be elected according to this regulation (<https://turksandarmenians.marmara.edu.tr/tr/1863-tarihli-nizamname-i-millet-i-ermeniyen-baglaminda-osmanli-devletinin-ermenilere-yonelik-tutumu/> Access Date:03.03.2024).

As a result of the social and cultural transformation for Armenians, the first movements targeting women's freedom started in this period. Schools were opened for Ottoman Armenians, and women entered business life and started to establish various associations. Schools were modernized and girls began to receive education together with boys (Çınar, 2003). In 1871, there were 48 Armenian schools in Istanbul, 18 for boys, 13 for girls and 17 were mixed schools (Taşdemirci, 2001:13). Furthermore, it is seen that in the 1907-1908 academic year, 204 Armenian schools were opened and 40 of them were girls' schools (Güçtekin, 2012:126). The number of schools where Armenian girls could receive education was increasing in the country, and Armenian



women were contributing to the education of girls through the societies they founded.



**Figure 1:** Nizamname-i Millet-i Ermeniyan Armenian Document Cover 1863.

Armenian women established a lot of associations for several reasons. The first association founded by Armenian women was the “Fukaraperver Cemiyeti” founded in 1864 under the leadership of

Armenian Nazlı Vahan. Later, associations such as the “Kalfayan Cemiyeti and Milletperver Ermeni Kadınları Cemiyeti”, which were also founded by Armenian women, aimed to contribute to the education of Armenian girls. In 1879, an association called “Okulsever Ermeni Kadınları Cemiyeti” was established, aiming to train teachers to educate girls in the provinces. There was also “Darülmeşagil/Aşeha Dankidom”, which was established with the aim of providing employment for women and men, and “Şişli Diknanes İnga Rotiyum Derneği”, which was established with the aim of teaching professions such as sewing and embroidery to girls. In 1908, as a concrete example of the cooperation of Muslim and non-Muslim women, there established a charity organization called “Turkish and Armenian Women's Union Committee (Çakır, 1999:78). This was established to help those released from prison with an amnesty and those returning to Istanbul from exile, was a marked example of this cooperation (Çınar, 2003:56).

The mentioned schools were opened for the education of Armenian female students living in Istanbul, but in 1860, efforts were made to ensure that education became widespread in the provinces. The organizations that existed in Istanbul societies (for example, Andznever Society) opened literacy courses for Armenian villagers who came from the provinces as seasonal workers and taught Armenian as they did not speak any languages other than Turkish or Kurdish. It was expected from them to teach Armenian to their neighbourhoods (Sanjian, 1965:67). Schools opened for the education of Armenian girls were not only in Istanbul but also in different cities of Anatolia. In Ankara, Greeks, Armenians, Catholics and Jews had separate schools for both girls and boys. Apart from the central district, Armenians lived in Nallıhan,

Sivrihisar and they had one school in Kalecik district and two schools in other districts. If there were two schools belonging to a community in the village, one of them was built for boys and the other was allocated to girls. Likewise, there were 9 Armenian schools in Tokat and the number of girls was 200 (Taşer, 2012: 410).

In the 1860s and 1870s, Armenian cultural societies began to be established in places such as Adana, Van, Erzurum and Diyarbakır. Ararathian Society had branches in Van, Erzurum and Mamuretülaziz, on the other hand Tebrotzasirats Arevelian (Eastern School Society) was active in Muş, Bitlis and Diyarbakır. The aim of these societies and schools was to improve education in the Armenian community and popularize the Armenian language (Somel, 2019:80). Especially the works of Armenian intellectuals who studied abroad were effective both in the education of women in the Armenian society and in the modernization of Muslim women. In this context, intellectuals in the Armenian society in the 19th and 20th centuries, by educating women, increasing their education levels, were very effective in granting legal rights to all women of the society (Deveci, 2020:100).

A charity organization in Istanbul, Baregordzakan Cemiyeti, established a modern farm in Çukurova to teach modern farming and technology. On the other hand, wealthy members of the community were serious about establishing modern schools. With the financial support of Mıgdiç Sansaryan, (a Russian Armenian and a wealthy businessman), schools were opened in Erzurum and Van. In 1879, the "Armenian Women's Union" (Askanever Hayuhiats) was founded to improve girls' education. Finally, among many cultural societies located in the provinces and Istanbul in 1880, the issue of overcoming lack of

coordination arose. As a result, cultural societies were united, and the "Armenian Schools Union" (Miatsial Enkerutiun Hayots) was established. The aim of this organization was to form a harmonious educational system among Armenian schools in the Empire (Libaridian, 2004:79).

During this period, modernization for Armenian women was closely related to the associations established, as for other women. During this period, educational activities for Armenian girls were carried out with the help of associations. Another Armenian women organization which related to education services was "Milletperver Ermeni Kadınlar Cemiyeti" (Azkaniver Hayuhiantz). The founder was Zabel Asadur-Hancıyan (Sibil), who was born in Usküdar in 1863. She was a strong writer, educator, poet, and novelist believing that women would become stronger by organizing and thus gained a strong identity and focused on the problems of Anatolian Armenian women and girls at a young age as a vigorous advocate of women's rights. In 1879, she founded "Milletperver Ermeni Kadınlar Cemiyeti". She taught in Armenian schools in Istanbul and the countryside and worked especially hard to raise educated and knowledgeable Armenian orphan girls. Her association was closed under the conditions of that era. Later, after the declaration of Constitutionalism, it was opened again. In 1909, Zabel Asadur strengthened the management team of this association with enterprising and hard-working young and intellectual minds and established the committee called "Edebiyat Kurulu" (Kragan Tahliç). Zaruhi Kalemkeryan was appointed as the chairman of the board and Hayganuş Mark was appointed as the secretary. They carried out activities in the field of education and culture

(<https://hyetert.org/2016/07/23/19-y-y-feminizm-unculerinden-zabel-asadursibil-in-olumum-82-yili-anisina> / Access date: 03.03.2024).

The activities of Armenian women were not limited only to associations, they were also active in the press. In 1862, Elbis Gesaratsyan published the first Armenian women's magazine "Gitar". (Figure 2). Elbis wrote articles defending women's rights in the magazine. In an article, she wrote: "You have often witnessed that there are women who are more thoughtful, more foresighted and more knowledgeable than men; but knowingly, they are forced to blindly submit to the incompetent man; because according to the rules, a woman must be a bird with her tongue cut off, and a man, even if he is a crow, must sing himself and dominate the woman. Yes, my dear sister, these are my thoughts. Our ideas must blossom. Talented women should take this as their duty, mobilize the lethargic minds by legitimate means, be alert and protect their freedom, and call for education. We should create reading rooms and assemblies and learn something that appeals to hearts and minds so that we can take steps towards progress and be considered (human

[http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/web/26-148-11/tr/biyografiler/biyografiler/elbis\\_gesaratsyan/?tur=Alfabetik](http://www.istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/web/26-148-11/tr/biyografiler/biyografiler/elbis_gesaratsyan/?tur=Alfabetik), Access date:02.03.2024)



Figure2: Gitar Magazine Cover, 1862.

Another magazine is called “Hay Gin”, where Hayganuş Mark was the editor-in-chief. It started to be published in 1919 as the publication of the Armenian Women's Union and continued its existence until 1933. It was full of various content on topics such as women's rights, education, and social justice. In the meantime, the magazine covered many issues such as women's social status, working conditions, and education and health rights (<https://feministbellek.org/hay-gin/> Access date: 02.03.2024).

Among the most famous Armenian women writers was Sirpuhi Düsap, who stood out with her emphasis on women's rights. (Figure 3). In her novel "Mayda", written in 1883, she condemned women's submission to men and called for equality between the sexes. She received reactions as a result of her criticism of the traditional family

structure. She questioned the situation of women without economic and social freedom in the articles she wrote for various newspapers published in Istanbul and Izmir (Etker, 2012:64).

Another important feminist figure, Zabel Yesayan (1878-1934), one of the Ottoman Armenian feminist writers and advocate of anti-war ideas, stated in her memoir titled *Silihdari Bardezneri* (Gardens of the Gunner) that they read Düsap's writings together with their female friends in their early youth, and they read these writings while discussing their own experiences and the injustices they were exposed to. She explained that they were influenced by these words:

"When Ms. Düsap heard that I was a candidate to enter the world of literature, she warned me that crowns with laurel leaves and many thorns awaited women on this path. She said that in our reality, it is not tolerated for a woman to come forward and want to make a place for herself, and in order to overcome this, it is necessary to rise above the average and added: "A man may be a mediocre writer, but a woman can never." (Aktokmakyan, 2009). After writing this novel, Düsap stood out as the first female Armenian novelist, and with this novel, the issue of women's freedom began to take place in Armenian literature. Düsap also influenced the generations after her, and especially writers and poets such as Zabel Asadur (Sibil), Hayganuş Mark and Zabel Yesayan began to seriously oppose the male-dominated structure of Ottoman Armenian literature (Bozkuş, 2020: 104-122).

In "Demet", a magazine published by Muslim women, Armenian woman writer Logofet Fuad introduced Zabel Asadur, Sırpuhi Düsap and Zabel Yesayan, as famous women of the Ottoman Empire, to readers who did not speak Armenian, and added the pieces she translated from

the texts of Zabel Asadur and Sırpuhi Düsap to her article (Fuat, 1908). This work of Logofet Fuad is noteworthy in many respects because it contributed to the development of the relationship between the literature of the two languages, in a period when there was no intense translation relationship between Turkish and Armenian (Demirbilek, 2023).



**Figure 3:** Sırpuhi Düsap, the First Armenian Feminist Writer, 1841.

When Armenian women intellectuals are mentioned, it is essential to tell Mari Beyleryan, as well. She graduated from Pera Art School and started writing in the *Arevelk* (East) newspaper under the pseudonym “Kalipso”. While most of her articles were published by some newspapers abroad, they also initiated literary and political discussions



among the intellectuals of the period (Saygılıgil, 2016:15). Mari Beyleryan managed to display a versatile personality at a young age and attracted the attention of her teacher Karekin Srvantsdyants. Srvantsdyants asked Mari to give lectures in Armenian schools while she was still a student and enabled her to teach subjects such as Armenian language, religion, and Armenian History. The teaching experience she gained thanks to Srvantsdyants would also provide an opportunity for Mari Beyleryan to earn a living in the future. However, the mark left on the intellectual life of her teacher Srvantsdyants, who was a clergyman, would have an impact on Mari's writings throughout her life. This revolutionary woman, who was concerned with the issue of women's freedom and whose political views were cooked in the flames of socialism, is not remembered as the other women intellectuals (<https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/20324/anadoluda-ezilen-ermeni-kadinlar-icin-mucadele-veren-bir-yurek-mari-beyleryan> Access date: 30.07.2024).

Participation in the workforce was among the public life activities of Armenian women in the Ottoman Empire. In Bursa silk factories in the year 1860, 95% of working women were Greek and Armenian (Öztürk, 2010:75). In 1908, because Armenian and Greek women workers were in the majority in the carpet factory in Uşak, Muslim women were unemployed and therefore went on strike. During the reign of Abdulhamid, the Armenian and Greek communities opened tailoring schools for girls. In the last periods of the Ottoman Empire, Armenian women were playing a very active role in all areas of the public sphere, from business life to art. They were educating their daughters through the associations they established, and they were trying to spread the

Armenian language among Armenians who did not speak this language. Also, their tailors turned Istanbul into a fashion center almost on a European level (Yılmaz, 2019).

During a period when Muslim women were not welcomed to appear on stage, there were non-Muslim women, especially Armenian women, on theater stages. Armenian women took part in different branches of art during the modernization period. Arusyak Papazyan, who was born in Istanbul in 1841 and died in Istanbul in 1907, was the first professional Armenian female theater artist of the Ottoman Empire. The fact that Arusyak Papazyan was the first professional Armenian female theater artist and appeared on the stage in Istanbul in 1858 should be seen as an act that points to Arushyak's personal courage and determination, considering the moral norms of the church (Akkent and Kovar, 2019:7). Aghavni Zabel Binemeciyani, who established her own theatre, was also a prominent figure. She worked with Muhsin Ertuğrul (Pamukçyan, 2003).

Yeranuhi Karakaşyan, born in Üsküdar in 1848, was one of the famous theater actors of the period. She successfully represented male roles and performed with the Bengliyan team in 1878 and 1881. Participated in tours, especially as a result of her outstanding success in the operettas "Girofle-Girofla" and "Beautiful Helen", received the title of "Master Soloist" (Tütüncüyan, 2008). Verkine Karakaşyan, born in Üsküdar in 1856, started her stage work by singing songs at the Aziziye Theater. She was involved in Bengali Theatre. Verkine, one of the famous artists of the period, played roles in many different works (Yazıcı, 2024:987). Particularly in the canto performances, Minyon Virjini, Küçük Amelya, Peruz Hanım, Şamran

Hanım, Küçük Eleni were the main kanto performers who entertained the people of Istanbul with their stage dances (Çaylak, 1991:23). Also, Merope Kantarcıyan, the first Armenian female theater artist to play the role of Hamlet, was an important figure in Armenian theatre. Born in 1857, she became a theatre player when she was only 15. She went to Tbilisi with a theater artist Bedros Atamyan (Heronimos) and acted in different plays, but she passed into history as the first female artist to play Hamlet (Onur, 2005:54).

Another Armenian prominent theatre player was Kınar Sıvacıyan. Kınar Sıvacıyan, known as Kınar Hanım, was born in Istanbul in 1876. She was introduced to theater thanks to her mother, Bercuhi Hanım, who was a theater actress as well. Thanks to her mother's suggestion, she appeared on stage in Tekirdağ with her play "Körün Oğlu" when she was only 14 years old. <https://catlakzemin.com/13-agustos-1950-darulbedayinin-ilk-kadin-oyuncularindan-kinar-sivaciyan/> (Access date: 15.08.2024). In 1894, she went on a six-year Balkan tour with the same troupe. After her return, she joined the "Mınakyan Community" in 1901. Her fame grew over the years. In 1912, she founded a company called "Yeni Osmanlı Tiyatrosu" together with Zabel Binemeciyan and Sirapyon Hekimyan. The theater continued until Binemeciyan's death in 1915. She joined Darülbedayi (Ottoman theatre) after it was opened. In 1916, she took part in the play titled "Çürük Temel", adapted from Emile Fahre's play "La Maison D'Argile", which was the first play staged publicly. In 1920, when Muslim women were forbidden to go on stage, she helped Afife Jale, an actress like herself, escape from the police. She passed away on August 14, 1950 (<https://www.feministsanat.com/kinar-sivaciyan/>) (Access date: 11.08.2024).

During those years, female artists emerged as the major force in the field of music. Turkey's first female classical Western music composer, Koharik Gazarosyan was born in Istanbul, 1907. She was so famous all over the World that as an Armenian female pianist from Istanbul, there were news about her in the New York Times. (<http://istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/koharik-gazarosyan/?tur=Alfabetik> Access date: 11.08.2024).

And this period was one in which many firsts were achieved for Armenian women. The first Armenian female photographer Maryam Şahinyan, the first kanto player Peruz Terzakyan and actress Rozali Benliyan were figures that are not very known. (<http://istanbulkadinmuzesi.org/koharik-gazarosyan/?tur=Alfabetik> Access date: 11.08.2024). Armenian women, who tried to exist in all areas of life, especially theater art, from the period when the modernization movements began until the last years of the Empire, also contributed to feminist historiography.

WWI was the war that actually ended the Ottoman Empire. After the defeat, the Empire signed the Armistice of Moudros. (Lewis: 1993: 21-39). During this period, the gaps in authority in Anatolia and Rumelia occurred and led the people to ideas such as liberation, protection, mandate, and independence. With these ideas, some minorities established organizations, and these are called "harmful" because they supported the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire (Yılmaz, 2020: 3257). Such a purpose is what the Armenian Women's Red Cross Association, established in Bulgaria during the war, served as an example. This organization urged Armenian women all over the world to unite against the Ottoman Empire and to help Armenian soldiers,

wounded, widows and children (Tetik, Gürler and Aksu, 2008:94). Another association called “Milletperver Kadınlar Cemiyeti” had the same purpose and participated destructive activities against Ottoman army (Gürün, 1985:128).

## **4.2 Greek Women**

The movement of socialization in the modern sense within the Ottoman Empire in an earlier period than other communities emerged among Greeks, and it is not a coincidence because Greeks drifted with Western influence more quickly. Thanks to the trade relations they developed with Europe, they had a relation for a long time. On the other hand, in Europe, as intellectuals accepted Greek civilization as the foundation of Western civilization and the source of its cultural institutions over time, Europe's relationship with Greeks in the Ottoman geography attracted close attention (Kılıçoğlu, 2019:6)

Greek women began to take part in the public sphere during the modernization process and carried out press and association activities to make their voices heard on various issues. One of the most important names that stood out in this process was Eufrosyne (Marou) Samartzidou. (Figure 4). She was a poet and educator. She wrote articles defending girls' right for education. She was the principal of Thessaloniki Girls' High School between 1864 and 1870. Furthermore, she published the first Greek women's magazine of the Ottoman Empire, "Kypseli" (Petek), in 1845. (Figure 5). This magazine is also the first women's magazine published in the Ottoman Empire. The edition of the magazine Kypseli was an innovation as it consisted one of the first editorial attempts in Greek language in Istanbul. It was published only for six

consecutive months from the 1st of May 1845 until October of the same year. It was a monthly published one. The magazine was characterized as feminine (for women) in the subtitle and was dedicated to the Sultan's mother "The Queen of Women in East". Its aim was to promote women's education and contribute to the progress of all people in the East. Almost in the middle of its cover a Muse can be seen. According to Greek mythology Muses protected spiritual, intellectual, and artistic creations particularly poetry, music and singing. ([http://kypseli.fks.uoc.gr/index.php/pub/view?id=19&page=2&fbclid=IwAR0Oae\\_uXAwZoRcmzK1fMeFHstwRKzRVNs-BrL4hzqoUHN7wUJYiSdfZ9Sw](http://kypseli.fks.uoc.gr/index.php/pub/view?id=19&page=2&fbclid=IwAR0Oae_uXAwZoRcmzK1fMeFHstwRKzRVNs-BrL4hzqoUHN7wUJYiSdfZ9Sw) Access date: 02.03.2024).

In the magazine, which was published in 34 issues, articles were written about the necessity of women to receive education in order to be good wives and mothers, and it was pointed out that there was no school for Greek girls in the country. Kypseli adopted the most radical principles and ideas of Enlightenment. (Demirbilek, 2011:8). The principle of natural equality of all human beings and the philosophical principle of natural human rights- were mentioned with the theoretical base of editor's argumentation and reasoning focusing on the acceptance of the basic principles and ideas of political philosophy of Enlightenment that was radical democracy. Also, it claimed that social inequality between the two sexes was due to the male-dominated societies, thus, it became the first feminist magazine in Greek language. The material was educational with articles, poems, and literature. A great part of the material was written by Efrosini Samartzidou, an article is written by the teacher Politimi Kuskuri and another one by Korais.4 years after the

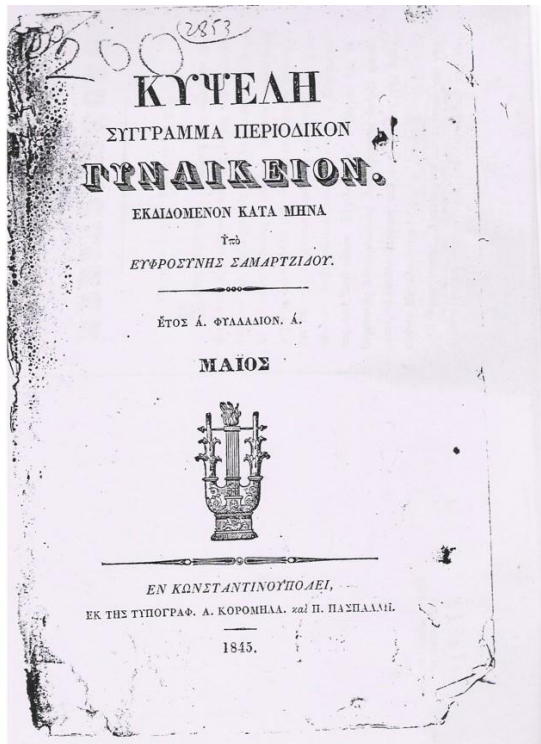
publication of Kypseli Magazine, a primary school was opened for the first time for poor Greek girls (Bozis, 2011:40).



**Figure 4:** Eufrosyne (Marou) Samartzidou, the first Greek women's magazine of the Ottoman Empire, 1820.

When we look at the press activities of Greek women, we see that there were different Greek magazines published like Kipseli and Evridiki in 1870 in Istanbul by Emilia Ktena Leondiadas, the sister of Sapphus Leondiadas, the famous educator and headmistress of the girls' school. The magazine aimed to contribute to the intellectual progress of Anatolian women. It was believed that social development was possible with the enlightenment of women, and topics such as women's history, the nature of women, their social goals, the results of scientific research on women's lives, and women's education were discussed. (Dalakoura, 2012: 2). "Vosporis", the third of the Greek women's magazines

published in Istanbul, was published by Kornilia Prevezioti and distributed from 1899 to 1906. Articles were written on issues concerning women in the magazine, and the magazine was printed with pictures. The social, educational, pedagogical, and home themes in the magazine concerned the "modern" women of the period and wanted to change the perception of women and improve the position of them. (Psarra, 2005: 67-79).



**Figure 5:** Petek (Kypseli) Magazine Cover, 1845.

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During this period, Greek women's magazines published in the Ottoman Empire focused heavily on the importance of girls' education. The magazines "Evridiki" "Bosporis" and "Kipseli" took their place in feminist literature as the only women's magazines published in Greek community until the 20th century. The magazines generally explain the importance of education for girls in the upbringing and development of society. It was emphasized that education at the primary school level was not sufficient, secondary school education and even pre-school education were essential, and in this context, it was necessary to train female teachers (Dalakoura, 2016: 363).

The magazine called Neogolos, published between 1873 and 1874, and emphasized women's issues (Memet, 2021). In an article, the social role of women was emphasized and reminded the social role of women

has been very important in Christianity. Although it is accepted that the subject was an effective force for the future of men, the Greek people in Turkey also took action for the education of girls and they established schools in Istanbul. In this issue of the magazine, it is stated that girls' schools called "pallas" would be established and that qualified teachers would work in these schools. It was also mentioned that future would be shaped by the educated women (Neogolos, 1874).

Education of the Greek citizens of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries had a religious identity dominated by the patriarchate. This structure changed with the internal church reforms made in 1776 and the merchant class had a role in the administration (Tekeli and İlkin, 1999:22). With these developments, the church pressure on Greek education was reduced. Thus, the principle of secularization in education began, and school programs were made according to this new understanding. A similar issue applies to Armenian schools (Keskinçılıç, 1999:70).

The first junior high school for Greek female students was opened in the 1870s. Prior to that date, there was not any formal educational institution other than Ottoman primary school for girls. The wealthy families of the society were training their daughters with private tutors. The girls of other families took education which provided in the schools founded by churches. After Regulation of Public Education was operated in 1869, primary and secondary schools started to be initiated for the girls in Greek community in the 1870s. The first of them was Palada Girls' School (1874) and the other one was Zapyon Girls' School (1875) (Macar, 2010: 805-817). The finance of girls' schools was maintained

by some foundations, community or church incomes, and private donations (Tekeli, 1985:56).

Educational activities of these schools and their staff were inspected by the state and these Greek schools were subject to a special taxation. The number of Greek schools was not limited to Istanbul. Many girls' schools were opened in various parts of the country. In the cities like Kayseri, Yozgat, Balıkesir and Bursa, there were 400 Greek schools for girls. In Greek society, it was recognized that women had a crucial role in raising new generations. The role of women was to transfer the culture between the generations. Thus, education was really important. First of all, they gave great importance to foreign language learning. (Saraç, 2020:305). A European language must be included in the curricula of schools. Wealthy Greek families encouraged their daughters to receive qualified foreign language education. In these schools, as a part of the Enlightenment tradition, girls were taught lessons in different branches of music, painting, literature, and art. Generally based on old Greek masterpieces, theatre plays were being performed in these schools. Religion, health, baby caring, and housewifery were the other lessons taught. In the last instance, being a good housewife and mother were one of the primary goals of the education (Büyükarci, 2003:362).

In the Ottoman society, Greek women first appeared in the social life as the “protectors of the poor” and tried to gain a place in the society. Within a short time, along with charity institutions, these women also founded social foundations focusing on education and culture and became active members of the social life (Macar, 2010: 805-817). Among the associations founded by Greek women, “Atena Kadınlar Cemiyeti” had a special importance because it was a women's initiative.

As mentioned before, women's movements in the Ottoman Empire gained momentum with the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy, but "Atena Kadınlar Cemiyeti" was established in 1877 with the initiatives of the Aya Fotini Girls' School in Izmir. Its emergence before the Constitutional Monarchy is an indication of the increasing presence of Greek women in the public sphere in general. Similarly, the establishment of the "Peralı Fukaraperver Rum Kadınlar Cemiyeti", the first Greek women's society in Istanbul, dates back to a much earlier time (Tağmat, 2015: 101).

The activities of the "Athena Kadınlar Cemiyeti", which is the first known women's society in Izmir, focused mainly on girls' education. "Hayırsever Kadınlar Cemiyeti", founded in 1889, is also a women's society established for charitable purposes. The society whose activities were mainly directed towards women and women's education, continued its existence until 1922. Its primary aim was to provide employment opportunities to poor girls by teaching them various handicrafts. The society, which established a workshop on handicrafts and gave trainings to young women workers, also carried out various charity works for the poor (Kılıçoğlu, 2019: 395-440).

Another association that played an important role in the education of Greek girls was the "Maarifperver Cemiyet." This association provided scholarships and dormitories for Greek girls. The students who grew up in the girls' schools became teachers when they graduated. both within Greece and in Anatolian geography and the Black Sea (Gerasimos, 1197). These teachers played an active role in the educational and cultural development of Ottoman Greek schools. such as the mission of spreading the Greek language and national ideology

among the Greeks. “Kültür Cemiyeti”, established in Izmir in the same years, was established to support the artistic activities of the members of the society and to increase their cultural level by using the library (Cihangir, 2019:13).

When the employment of Greek women is focussed, their presence in the civil service is especially worth mentioning. Mariko Hanım, who was born in Ankara as the daughter of Vasil, studied at Greek girls' schools in Ankara and she entered the midwifery department of the Faculty of Medicine. Later, she received her midwife diploma on December 9, 1911 (Özger, 2012: 421).

During this period, Greek female actors were appearing in theaters in Istanbul. In 1869, a theater was desired to be established in Beyoğlu under the name of Tiyatro Sultani. According to their plans, distinguished and ethical plays and tragedies would be performed in Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian and Armenian in this theatre. The male actors would be Muslim Turks, and the female actors will be Greek and Armenian women. Actresses Pipina Vonasseras, Elpis Halkiopulo were performed in plays that Greek society was mostly interested. In 1900, the Greek Kardovilli and Tsohas community wrote Marula's Destiny and played the Lyre of Nikolas the Elder. There were 10 female and 20 male actors. The Sultan gave them fine arts medal. A famous woman artist Paraskevopoulou and her troupe played Hamlet at the Odeon in 1910 (And, 1970).

An important Greek women artist was Denizkızı Eftalya (Atanasia Yeorgiadu). Born in 1891, she was the first Greek artist to record on behalf of the conservatory. Collaborating with Columbia Records, which started its operations in Istanbul, the conservatory made vinyl recordings

of approximately 100 works compiled from Anatolia (Öztürk, 2023:100). Eftalya Hanım sang 56 of these pieces. However, only "Soprano" was written on the labels of some of these records, Eftalya's name was not written. At least eleven of the records she released between 1930 and 1933 were written only as "Hanım" without using the name of the soloist. The name "Deniz Kızı Eftalya Sadi Hanım" was used in the records she recorded starting from 1930. She also had the title of the first headliner of the Republic of Turkey. Furthermore, she gave concerts many times in the presence of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Işıқтаş, 2023:50).

In this context, it is necessary to mention Madam Kalitea, the first vamp actress of the Ottoman Empire. Madam Kalitea acted the role of a seductive French governess in a film called "Mürebbiye" in 1919. At the time the movie was made, Istanbul was under occupation. The French Commander of the Occupation Forces, Franchet d'Esperey, banned the screening of the film on the grounds that the seductive governess Anjel represented a French woman and that French women were humiliated in the person of Anjel. The film, which tells the story of a young French woman, Anjel, who cheats on her lover with another man and seduces everyone, including the owner and the cook of the mansion where she works as a babysitter, was secretly shown and attracted great attention, despite the ban on showing it in Istanbul and sending it to Anatolia. The censorship applied to the movie *Governess* is the first censorship of Turkish cinema that is both moral and political. Madam Kalitea (Aristea Kalinea) appeared in seven films between 1917 and 1923 (Öztürk, 2006:47).

During the years of national struggle, it was seen that some Greek women carried out association activities, but these were harmful

associations. These associations served Greece's goals on Ottoman lands. One of them was “Rum Kadınları Müdafaai Milliye Cemiyeti” (Ural, 2012:59). The above-mentioned national goals of the Greeks regarding Anatolia typically, showing that they mobilize all their strength to achieve could be seen in the aims of this organization. One of the organizations Greek Cypriot Defense National Society was to support Greek women in Istanbul. Women had duties like collecting aids. Furthermore, they carried out activities such as making propaganda. Members of the society, Madam Elestyo, Madam Ökenidis, Madam Zarifi, Madam Kalmokoresi, Madam Pañçeri, Madam Bodosaki, Atna Spadis, held meetings in the newly opened Greek Bank in Beyoğlu. The mentioned organization, which was formed in a relatively narrow circle, communicated with Greek notables in various regions of America, The large amount of aid they collected by resorting to all kinds of means was given to the Greek Bank on behalf of the patriarchate. A woman named Virjin Çorhaki was elected as a president for propaganda activities. Society members mostly met with foreign banker families and other women. They tried to get help from these people (TITE, 1922).

Another association in which Greek women operated was “Muavenet ve Müdafaai Milliye Kadınlar Şubesi”. The branch was moved to Izmir and Bandırma with the encouragement and guidance of the patriarchate. More than 1000 people were sent and propaganda delegations spread widely in every district through making extensive notifications. The organization which collected money for patriarchate was “Beyoğlu Rum Kadınları Cemiyeti”. Women raised money during the Easter in the church. They also went to different Greek shops in Istanbul. The priests who preached to the people in their churches also

informed the public about defense officers in Istanbul. They recommended that aid be given to their soldiers (Toker, 2006:156).

The women organizations which served the same purpose were “Ayakalozpo Kadınlar Cemiyeti” and “Rum İttihadı Millî Cemiyeti”. They were also raising money for Greek soldiers. Another organization established by Greek women was called “Nea Zoi (Yeni Hayat) Cemiyeti”. The aim of the society was to ensure that Istanbul joined Greece. They asked the registered members to follow orders exactly. They were getting signatures stating that they would bring new members. 9690 people from Bakırköy and its surroundings, 11,000 from Tatavla, 7000 from Hürriyet Club, Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Darıca and 5678 members registered from the Islands. It was decided that members tied ribbons on their left arms as a special sign (BOA, 1921).

### **4.3. Jewish Women**

While some of the Jews living in the Ottoman lands became subject to the Ottoman rule through conquests, a significant part of them escaped from the persecution and oppression they suffered in the countries they lived in because of their religion and were settled in these lands by the Ottoman Sultans who welcomed them (Bozkurt, 1993: 539).

On the other hand, Sabataism should also be mentioned regarding Judaism in the Ottoman Empire. Sabatayism is the view adopted by those who follow the footsteps of a person named Sabatay Sevi (Düzdağ, 2002). This person, who emerged in the 1600s, claimed to be the Messiah and later became a Muslim upon the request of the Sultan. He informed his community that he would continue being a Messiah under the guise of a Muslim. The members of this community is also called “dönme



(converted)”. Sabatism, which represents the transition from Judaism to Islam, has always been a secret and mysterious community since that day (Eroğul, 2001:107).

The 19th and 20th centuries are described as the golden age of Jewish culture by almost all researchers. Like many other Ottoman ethnic and religious elements, the Jews were also affected by the conditions of the time according to their own circumstances (Atuk, 2021: 203-225).

One of the most important developments for the Jews living in the Ottoman Empire took place in 1877. At that time, Istanbul (Tersane) Conference was organized. From the countries like USA, England, Germany, Austria, Belgium and France, Jewish communities signed a document included the following sentences in brief: “Jews always lived well in the Ottoman Empire. Non-Muslim people were treated equally like everyone else. With the edicts, no one in the Ottoman Empire was discriminated against by race and religion and their rights were protected.” In this way, Jewish representatives signed a joint declaration for the first time. Jews living in Ottoman lands at the time did not have any problems with the state (BOA, 1870).

Until the Tanzimat period, there were no schools that Jewish girls could attend, like all girls of the Empire. Girls' education was mostly a part of the religious services of synagogues, and some young girls received private education at home. However, with the Alliance Israelite University (AIU) founded in 1860, a new era began in education for Ottoman Jewish girls. (Figure 6). Needy Jewish girls were receiving education in these schools. These schools were founded by the French. Female students who did not speak French learnt to speak and write this

language. Along with this, they learnt handwriting, arithmetic, mythology, history, drawing and songs. Girls were given sewing and decoration lessons separate from the boys' curriculum. The aim was to raise girls who were knowledgeable in every field appropriate to the age and suitable for the motherhood (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/alliance-israelite-universelle> Access date: 02.03.2024).

In 1895, six schools were identified in Izmir. 4 of the schools were boys' schools and 2 were girls' schools, and the total number of students (2500 boys, 500 girls) was 3000. Those were the years when the schooling rate of Jewish girls increased rapidly. In addition, girls were receiving education in Jewish schools in Haydarpaşa (BOA, 1907). Local committees were established so that poor girls in Selanik could make their own living. After 1887, a "Young Women's Workshop" was established in this school so that students could learn the production of various clothes in addition to general education (Unal, 2017: 153-179). In 1872, some Jewish women were sent to Paris to receive education. When they returned, they became educated modern women and started educating girls (Shaw, 1991:23).

Sabataist Şimon Zvi established a school called "Feyz-i Sıbyan Mektebi" in 1885. In 1890, students with a higher educational background began to receive an increase in acceptances from female students. In the primary school curriculum prepared by Feyziye Mektebi for female students; Biology, Mathematics, Geography, Geometry, History, Islamic History, Religious Knowledge, Arabic Language, Persian Language, Ottoman Language, Literature, Women Duties, House Management, Calligraphy, Knitting, Paper Cutting Training, and

Cross Stitch lessons were given. The education process of female students consisted of five years in primary school (Altinköprü and Turgay, 2022:80).



**Figure 6:** Alliance Israelite University Certificate, 1854.

It is known that Jewish women constituted a significant part of the workforce in the 19th century. They dealt with the trade of wool, linen, silk fabrics, spices, vegetables, olive oil and even wine. There were also Jewish women who were engaged in wine production, cheese and pastry making, cosmetics and beauty, finance, real estate business, crier, dancer, singer, teacher, healer, apart from professions such as fortune telling and midwifery (Amnon and Elisheva, 1993:223).

At the beginning of the 20th century, five hundred Jews worked in the tobacco industry in Istanbul, fifty percent of whom were women and children. In 1900, approximately two hundred young Jewish girls were

working in the silk industry in Bursa. Furthermore, two hundred young girls were working in lace production in Silivri. In Balat, the poorest Jewish district of Istanbul, half of the residents were tobacco workers, window cleaners, pastry sellers or maids (Groepfer, 1999:144).

In the Ottoman Empire, especially when Izmir Jews were mentioned, aid organizations lustered. Women were actively working in these organizations. They helped the poor, the sick and the elderly. The charities were divided into 4 categories: unemployed, orphans, women, and immigrants. The main aid institutions for the poor were the Fukaraperver Cemiyeti (Ozer Dalim), Talmud Torah Declaration Committee, Goodwill (Buena Velundat), Soup Kitchen, Malbush Aronim, Bigde Kodeş, Oel Moed and Dansa (Arslan, 2016: 197). In Izmir at that time, these institutions, which were very effective in preventing widespread begging, were also very effective in ensuring that its people live peacefully. They also helped the other Jewish societies in the other countries and took permission from the Sultan to do this (Shaw, 1991:76).

“Yahudi Kadınlar Cemiyeti” was founded by Jewish women to help those in need in Izmir, 1912. In order to help the unemployed, agricultural and apprentice schools were opened by the Universal Israeli Union in 1902, as well as sewing and embroidery courses. There were charity organizations such as” Lazaretto, Hevrat Yetumot, Ezra la Yeladot, Mohar u Matan” to take care of the poor, orphans, and women in the community (Arslan, 2016:198). Thanks to these institutions, the marriage expenses of young girls were covered; pregnant women were assisted, Orphans were housed, fed, educated, and employed. While the first of the aid institutions such as “Hahnakat Orahim” served the

immigrants from Russia and met the food and drink needs of the Jews who came to visit the city for 3 days (Siren, 1995:23). A small hospital belonging to the Izmir Jewish Community was purchased by Osbia, a woman of Dutch origin in the first half of the 19th century (Siren, 1995:45). Furthermore, Hasköy Kadınlar Komitesi, Galata Kadınlar Komitesi, Hamilelere Yardım Derneği, and Perseverensya were the communities established to help needy girls or women. (Arslan, 2016:200).

From the two prominent families of the Jewish community in the 19th century; Fernandez and Kamondo families, some women like Helen Fernandez, carried out various activities such as settlement of immigrants and collection of donations (Ünal, 2017:153). On behalf of their family, they supported a lot of immigrants during the Ottoman – Russian War. Regina and Irene Kamondo, from another wealthy family, were also awarded Legion of Merit for helping war victims. The women of the Kamondo family were so famous in their charity activities that the expression "Kamondo woman" was formed (Belasel, 1999:67).

Jews were generally very active in press life. The first Ladino-language newspaper in Istanbul, or Israel (Light of Israel), was published in 1853. El Tiempo, the longest-running Turkish Jewish publication after Şalom, started broadcasting on October 1, 1872(Figure 7). (<https://bianet.org/yazi/turk-yahudi-basinin-173-yillik-tarihi-166233> Access date: 03.03.2024).

When we look at the press activities of Jewish women during this period, we see that these activities took place mostly in Izmir. The magazine called “El Komersial”, published in Izmir in 1878, and contained articles supporting women's movements (Malino, 1998: 250).

This newspaper mentioned about how necessary it was for women to receive a good education, and mostly emphasized how important for women to participate the business life. In an article published, the writer wrote as:” The woman holds the family's future and the next generations.’ What is the woman's duty? Is it not a noble and holy mission to raise the family? Is not the future of society in her hands? She is the one who needs to educate the children well, she is the one who raises children, humane citizen. We should make sure that the woman, once she has become a mother, will have the understandings needed for the things she desires to make true.” (Goffman, 1999: 89).

When we look at the activities of Jewish women in the public sphere, unlike Armenian and Greek women in these years, we do not come across a newspaper published solely by women. However, articles by women writers can be found in some newspapers. For instance, a writer named Lucie, mentioned the common proverbs regarding women, which were used in society unfairly. She cited as an example the sentence, ‘kien mujer tiene- pelea tiene’ (whoever has a woman - has a fight). (Arslan, 2016:201). Although they were not as active as Armenian and Greek women during this period, Jewish women in the press were mostly known for their charity activities.

Sabiha Sertel, who was a member of the previously mentioned Sabataist group and later changed her identity, has an important place in Turkey's feminist history. She was born in Thessaloniki in 1895. The liberal education she received at the Terakki School after the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy broadened Sabiha Sertel's horizons during this period (Çatal, 2022:59). She describes this period in a later interview as follows:

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**Figure 7:** El Tiempo Magazine Cover, 1872.

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“One of the events that first motivated me to study was the period and environment in which I lived. My elder brother was a member of the Young Turks organization in Thessaloniki against the tyranny of Abdulhamid. I would secretly read the secret works he brought home, Namık Kemal's poems, and Ziya Pasha's writings. The first kernels of the rebellious and revolutionary spirit in me belong to this period (Sertel, 2021:22).

Since women could not receive a university education in Thessaloniki of the period, Sabiha Sertel and her friends established an organization called "Tefeyyüz Cemiyeti". Members of this organization were also obliged to pay a membership fee. They tried to continue their education with the collected dues. Sabiha Sertel, in her book about her mother, describes this formation as follows: “They started taking private lessons from convert (dönme) scientists educated in Europe, an Italian philosopher living in Thessaloniki, and professors at the Faculty of Law: They were taking courses such as law, philosophy, logic, sociology, economics.” Sabiha Sertel herself defines her entire purpose in Tefeyyüz Cemiyeti as "having a profession" (Sertel, 2021:23).

Sabiha Sertel married Zekeriya Sertel in 1915. According to Zekeriya Sertel, this marriage was from a society who had not married Turks for years and who were introverted (Tuğlacı, 1990:45). In 1909, they published a weekly magazine called “Büyük Mecmua”. In her articles, Sabiha Sertel discussed issues such as women's rights, equality between men and women, and women's right to vote, with a bold and feminist approach (Özdemir, 2012). Sabiha Sertel would be a very active writer and thinker in the first years of the Republic but was exiled due to her Marxist views (Tuğlacı, 1990:47).

There were also Jewish women who left their mark in business life or artistic activities. For instance, Roza Eskenazi, born in Istanbul in 1895, was a singer accompanied by her masterful interpretation and interesting dance in different languages such as Greek and Ladino. (Figure 8). She made significant contributions to the Ottoman urban entertainment repertoire with the songs she popularized. Her art life has changed differently with the influence of socio-political developments. She recorded important records in America with her accompaniment group, continuing in different geographies. It is known that she is accepted among the master interpreters of Eskenazi's Izmir style (Smyrnaki) rebetikos (Paşaoğlu, 2017:12).

The female members of the Sabataist Gencer family, who have important works on Turkish makam music, have also contributed greatly to music. From this family, Nebibe, Neyyire and Aliye hanım got an education in Fevziye Schools. Female vocal artists of the Gencer family, who illuminated the gramophone record period of Turkish makam music with their performances, learned the musical talents from their trainers and their families. However, due to the conservative structure of the society in which they resided, they were not able to perform live (Altinköprü and Turgay, 2022: 78).

Among the other prominent Jewish women were: the first female professor Pedagogue Norma Razon, the dentist Korin Macar, the poet and novelist Gentile Arditti Püller, the poet Ester Morguez Algranti, the dictionary writer Klara Perahya, the lawyer Fani Kohen Motola, the ballet artist and trainer Lilian Barokas, the first Jewish female painter to graduate from the Academy of Fine Arts, Sarah Fahri Hutzinger. (<https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber/92868/naim-a-guleryuzden->

mesleklerinde-ilk-olan-turk-yahudi-kadinlari-sergisi-Access  
Date:08.08.2024).



**Figure 8:** Roza Eskenazi and her musicians, 1930s.

During the national struggle years, Jews, who initially tended to act together with Armenians and Greeks, also founded organizations called "Macabi" and "Alyans Israilit" in Istanbul. However, Jews, in order not to lose their privileges such as freedom of trade, religion and culture, instead of their wishes., since they lived a comfortable life in the empire and with their traditional circumspectness, they did not engage in destructive activities as much as other minorities (Akşin, 1998:35). However, there were women who were active in the intelligence organization called NILI, which desired to establish a Jewish state in Palestinian lands. These activities in Palestine were carried out by a woman named Sarah Aaronsohn. Sarah's mission was to obtain

"biometric and biographical" intelligence, military, and political confidential information of Turkish and German officers through female agents in NILI (Bozkurt,2019:3).

## **CONCLUSION**

As it is known, the Ottoman Empire is a multicultural empire. Throughout the Ottoman history, different cultures and religions were never assimilated, and the necessary conditions were always provided for them to live in prosperity. The changing conditions of the country, starting with Tanzimat and Islahat and continuing until the Constitutional Monarchy, affected all nations living in the country.

The modernization process that started with the Tanzimat in the Ottoman Empire called forth a lot of changes. One of the most important subjects of these changes was women. During this period, women living in the country were affected by the developments and gradually tried to take part in the public sphere and make their voices heard, especially through press activities. Women began to take part in the public sphere, especially with the declaration of the 2nd Constitutional Monarchy. The leading figures of modernization thought gave special importance to the modernization of women and gave it a different meaning.

In such a setting, Ottoman women began to publish newspapers and magazines. Thanks to these magazines and newspapers, they not only made women's problems heard, but also paved the way for women in the country to acquire the habit of reading. Women who entered business life by pursuing various professions were now entering a new era.

This whole process of change affected non-Muslim women as well as Muslim women. In the Ottoman Empire, regardless of religion, women dressed similarly, were subject to similar rules, and lived similarly. Therefore, the problems experienced were similar. The activities of Muslim and non-Muslim women in the public sphere remained very similar from the modernization process to the decline of the Empire.

Non-Muslim women also established aid associations, pushed for the education of girls, and attempted to announce their demands for rights through press and broadcast activities. However, in the midst of the empire's weakening and civil war, associations founded by non-Muslim women evolved into separatist and hostile associations.

Today, it is not known that the first women's magazine published in the Ottoman Empire was *Kypseli*, a Greek magazine, and that the first Armenian feminist magazine was *Haygin*. *Hayganuş Mark*, who described herself as the first feminist activist Armenian woman, *Elbis Gesaratsyan*, the first Armenian women journalist are not mentioned enough in Turkish historiography. The understanding of a homogeneous society that was tried to be created in the transition from the Empire to Republic was also reflected in historiography, cultural and religious differences were not expressed much and Turkish national identity was taken as the basis.

Recently, in Turkey, women's history has been addressed more holistically from the Ottoman period to the present day, and studies on this subject are increasing. For instance, the Istanbul Women's Museum introduces many women who lived in these lands and contributed to women's history and strives to pass them on to future generations. In

addition, women's studies are becoming more diverse and academic studies on this subject are increasing.

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