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# EURIPIDES AND PUCCINI UNDER THE OTTOMANS

## *The Surprising Richness of Greek Girls' Schools in the Late Empire*

Dr. Oya Daglar Macar, Turkish historian and Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Commerce University, recently spent five months as a guest of Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts with her husband, Dr. Elçin Macar, researching American Protestant missionary activity in 19th- and 20th-century Turkey. The Macars were quickly recognized as historians of insight and integrity and, for those who came to know them, valued as dear friends. A specialist in the history of medicine in Asia Minor, Dr. Macar's published work covers a fascinating variety of subjects; here she gives *Road to Emmaus* readers a rare glimpse into Greek Orthodox education in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire.

RTE: Dr. Macar, we think of the Ottoman Empire—which at its height included Asia Minor (modern Turkey), most of the Balkans including Greece, and large areas of northern Africa and the Middle East—as a very male-dominated society. When did public education for women first appear?

DR. MACAR: The Ottoman Empire went into a long period of modernisation after adopting the *Tanzimat Firman* of 1839 as state policy and this affected both the political institutions and the traditional social order. The reason for

*Opposite: The Phanar Greek Orthodox College (Megale Schole) Istanbul, Turkey.*

the reform was to curb demands for administrative autonomy that had begun to gain ground among the non-Muslim communities, to combat tides of nationalism within the varied ethnic groups of the empire, and to avoid foreign pressure. In other words, to prevent the collapse of the empire. While *Tanzimat* introduced new legal and administrative categories, efforts were also being made to adopt a common identity and an awareness of Ottoman citizenship through education. Under the new ruling, all children, male or female, had to attend primary school, from age seven to eleven for boys and six to ten for girls.

RTE: How did this decree affect the Greek Orthodox community and other minorities?

DR. MACAR: The traditional social order of the Ottoman Empire was organized into religious communities (*millets*), which meant that individuals lived under the spiritual, financial and administrative authority of the religious community into which he was born: Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Armenian, or Jewish. In this social order, each religious community had its own courts and was internally self-governing. Everyone, of course, was ultimately under the rule of the sultan.

Under the modernizing *Tanzimat* decree, the Ottoman state began to pursue an educational policy of “*controlled tolerance*” in regard to the non-Muslim communities. Permission was granted to the non-Muslim communities to open and develop their own schools, and the state also began regular inspections and oversight of the curriculum and administration of these newly-opened schools. In this period, the Ottoman Greek Orthodox community in particular made considerable progress in the area of education.

RTE: How then did non-Muslim communities educate their children before the *Tanzimat* decree?

DR. MACAR: Before 1839, because each of the millets was organized as a separate political entity under their own religious leader, they also maintained their own schools, which were overseen by religious leaders or *vakifs* (charitable foundations). For non-Muslims, these were generally primary schools founded in or near churches or synagogues. They concentrated on religious education and basic literacy and were attended by both boys and girls. In addition, some wealthy families hired tutors for their children. Over time,

some secondary schools were opened for non-Muslim boys, but there wasn't a secondary school for non-Muslim girls until 1870.

The new '*Milli Nizamname*' (Community Regulation), which allowed for the reorganization of the Ottoman Greek community, directly affected Orthodox Greek education. As the old millet system was reformed and the secular authority of the clergy diminished, lay influence increased. With this change, an important step was taken towards secular education. At the same time, as capitalism gained influence, the Ottoman Greek merchant class began to take on the values of 19th-century western Europe.

In 1869, the *Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi* (Regulation on Public Education) was enacted. With this regulation, non-Muslims were allowed to open primary and junior high schools and to be educated in the same state schools as Muslims in senior high/secondary schools. Another regulation, *Cemaat Mektepleri Talimatnamesi* (Regulation on Community Schools) detailed administrative policies for the community schools.

RTE: Did many non-Muslims go to Muslim secondary schools?

DR. MACAR: Primary schools became compulsory in Ottoman Turkey for both boys and girls in the last quarter of the 19th century, at which time the state started opening schools. The new law did not say that the schools were Muslim because the state opened the schools for all citizens, but in practice, only Muslims went to these schools. Non-Muslims—Christians and Jews—had their own schools. For example, when a secondary school was opened by the sultan (today this is the famous Galata Saray College), the pope prohibited Catholics from going there, saying, "You cannot attend a school with Muslims and other heretics."

The Ottoman state also granted significant privileges and a certain amount of freedom to the Greek community in setting up their schools. Other non-Muslim communities had to submit their curriculum, the books they would use, and the names and diplomas of their teachers to receive permission to open the school from the state education committee. For the Greek schools affiliated with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, however, simply noting the location and the level of the school to be opened was enough to obtain permission. This privilege facilitated the opening of many schools by the Greek community after 1869.

Before 1869, there was not a single formal secondary educational institution for Greek girls in Asia Minor. Wealthy, educated families among Greek

Ottoman society had their daughters instructed by private tutors, while poorer girls, as we said, often received a rudimentary education through informal lessons at local churches. Also, some Greek Orthodox began sending their daughters to the Protestant secondary schools for girls that were set up after 1832.

After the *Regulation on Public Education* was put into practice in 1869, primary and secondary schools began to be established for girls of the Greek community. The first of these was the Pallada Greek Girls' School (1874) and the second was the Zappeion Greek Girls' School (1875). Funding of the schools was overseen by educational foundations and community, church, and personal donations.

RTE: Why did the education of girls in the Greek community assume such importance at this time, thirty-five years after the 1839 decree?

DR. MACAR: Education for girls became increasingly important because of social changes in 19th-century Europe and the Ottoman Empire which had begun to recognize the equality and rights of women. After the 1860s, articles and news about women claimed greater space in European, Greek and Ottoman newspapers and magazines. The time had come, it was felt, for women to leave their homes and to engage with the wider society. The cosmopolitan structure of Constantinople-Istanbul, as well as its importance as the Ottoman capital—the center of the empire's press and publications—made it naturally take the lead in discussing women's issues.

In Ottoman society, Greek women first appeared in the wider society by establishing charitable institutions as “protectors of the poor”. Within a short time, these women also organized social foundations focusing on education and culture and became active members of society. Along with schools, women's education flourished in literary and cultural associations where men and women worked and studied together. The importance of having educated mothers to raise and teach the next generation brought about advances in the education of women within the Greek community, and many Greek girls' primary and secondary schools were opened. The need for teachers for these newly-opened schools also increased the urgency of educating women. This was generally accomplished by adding an extra two or three

*Opposite: Phanar Greek Orthodox College (Megale Schole): Today a secularized Greek secondary school offering the required Turkish state curriculum with additional classes in Greek language, literature, and religion.*



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years of education to the high school level, or by graduating from specific teacher training schools. However, teacher training schools were limited, as their motive was not primarily to provide women with job opportunities but to educate cultivated women, future mothers and housewives who were able to transmit the values of the community to the next generation.

RTE: This is interesting, because a much earlier Orthodox archbishop of Constantinople, the fifth-century John Chrysostom, said something very similar about raising girls with good values:

“If you mold her completely in this way, you will save not only her but also the husband who will marry her, not only the husband but also the children, not only the children but also the grandchildren. For when the root becomes good, the shoots are outstretched toward what is better, and for all these you will receive the reward. Therefore, let us do all things so as to help not one soul alone, but many through the one.”<sup>1</sup>

DR. MACAR: Yes, and for this reason, the curriculum of Constantinople’s girls’ schools was in harmony with prevailing role expectations. Pedagogy, housekeeping, health, and baby care courses were included in the curriculum of junior and senior high schools. In some schools, homemaking departments were opened. On the other hand, efforts were also made to properly teach Greek girls at least one European language, and art and culture classes were also important parts of the program.

## Language Debates

RTE: So, this wasn’t a purely classical education involving ancient Greek language and literature, math, rhetoric, and so on?

DR. MACAR: No, in fact, in the 19th and 20th centuries there were great linguistic debates in Constantinople and throughout the Greek world as to whether Demotic or Katharevousa Greek should be used in literature and education to bring about national and ethnic unity. Katharevousa was an artificial form based on Ancient Greek, while Demotic Greek was the common and spoken language of the people. The defenders of Katharevousa appealed to the desire for historical continuity in using this “purer” form of Greek, while those opposed claimed that it was a “foreign language.” Decades of de-

1 Ed. note: St. John Chrysostom, Homily 9 on First Timothy 2, Migne, 62:584.



bate ended in 1976 when *dimotiki* was finally accepted as the form of Greek to be used in literature and education.

Serious disputes also erupted between the traditional and progressive wings of the Greek community over teaching foreign languages in girls' schools. A 1909 conference held by the *Istanbul Rum Edebiyat Dernegi* (Constantinople Greek Literature Association) proposed that proficiency in a foreign language need only be provided for boys embarking on a career, whereas girls' foreign language education should be limited, particularly at the secondary school level, because it might cause young girls to lose their Greek consciousness and corrupt future generations.

Despite this outlook, intellectuals who defended foreign language education emphasized its importance for vocational and economic reasons, particularly in cosmopolitan cities like Constantinople. Foreign language fluency was a "*new necessity*" and, as I've mentioned, to obtain this training many affluent Greek children were attending Protestant missionary schools despite the risk of being proselytized.

It was the parents who ultimately decided the matter by demanding foreign language training for both sons and daughters, who could use their language skills to make advantageous marriages and move in higher social circles. Well-off Greeks were willing to send their daughters to these Protestant missionary schools that taught foreign languages. In order to compete, Greek schools were forced to include high-level instruction in German, French or English—French being the most requested.

RTE: After hearing of your research, Dr. Demetri Katos, the Dean of Hellenic College mentioned that his grandmother (born in Constantinople around 1910) attended one of these girls' schools until her family left for the island of Chios. Her entire education had been in Constantinople, and although her schooling ended when she was ten or eleven years old, Dr. Katos recalls that well into the 1990s she was writing him weekly letters in the high level of Katharouvesa Greek that she had learned as a child in these schools. It was as if she had a college degree compared to her contemporaries who grew up in Greece. Later, she learned English as well.

DR. MACAR: Yes. When I began to search this subject, I was surprised that these schools had quickly become much more modern and secular than I had supposed. For example, the Zappeion Girls' School, Ioakimion Girls' School, and Pera Center Greek Girls' School offered intensive foreign language edu-

cation and students attended language classes not according to their grade as we do now, but according to the proficiency of their language level. It is remarkable that they were able to follow the best of European educational methods this closely, and successfully apply them.

RTE: Did these students also learn Turkish?

DR. MACAR: Before 1915 Turkish wasn't taught in these schools, but as the Ottoman state policy became more nationalistic, training in the Turkish language became compulsory. Some courses, such as history and geography, were required to be given by Turkish teachers in Turkish. The other courses were in Greek.

### Elektra and Antigone

RTE: Earlier you mentioned classes in the fine arts and culture. How did these fit in?

DR. MACAR: Theatre, music, poetry and literature classes were provided by every girls' school. Theatre performances were generally based on the works of Ancient Greece and included such performances as Euripides' *Ifigenia*, and Sophocles' *Elektra and Antigone*. These plays were not randomly selected; the European Renaissance and Enlightenment had revived world-wide interest in ancient Greek culture. Through the presentation of these heritage works as part of the school curriculum, the Ottoman Greek middle-class was forming a new identity.

On the other hand, girls' schools also provided a good level of music training. In fact, music instruction at the Zappeion Girls' School included Italian opera, along with French and German works—a curriculum we would be hard-pressed to find in most modern secondary schools.

Art and handicraft exhibitions, as well as dramatic performances at the end of each semester, were important tools to involve the Greek community and encourage financial support of the schools. Drawings were held for student art and handicrafts, and tickets were sold for theatre, ballet and musical performances. In this way, students were able to show what they had learned and families formed closer ties with teachers and administrators. In order to organize these public activities, schools had to inform the Constantinople/Istanbul Municipality about the event schedule and receive permission from the Ministry of Education.

## Introducing European Educational Models

RTE: What kinds of teaching methods did they use? We usually have the impression that 19th- and 20th-century schooling was rather dull and rigid.

DR. MACAR: This was not the case here. Not long after their founding, these Greek girls' schools began to utilize modern European educational methods including the *Monitorial (Bell-Lancaster)*, *Froebel* and *Pastellozi* methods; Greeks were closely following new educational developments in the West.

Most frequently used was the Monitorial method, which was developed in 19th-century England by Joseph Lancaster, and put into practice in many Greek schools, including Constantinople's Beyoglu Center Greek Girls' School. Known locally as the *Alilodidaktik* method, it was brought to Constantinople by American Protestant missionaries in the 1830's, and its outstanding feature was that it had senior students teach and supervise younger ones. In this way, education and socialization of the primary grades was provided inexpensively and the problem of teacher scarcity was also solved. This system was especially practical in Anatolia where the number of Greek schools had increased rapidly, but lacked funds and equipment. Later, the *Alilodidaktik* method that originated in these schools was used for adult and military education in the Ottoman Empire.

A second system, the *Pestalozzi Method*, was a revolutionary alternative to classical methods of teaching that featured strict discipline and theoretical courses. Designed by the Swiss educational reformer Johannes Pestalozzi, the method was based on his motto, "Learning by head, hand and heart". American and European educators, including many German public schools, had put his impressive method into practice in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Ottoman Greek community, which was in close contact with Europe, also implemented the *Pestalozzi Method* in their schools. Courses in morals, physical education, drama, music, and the development of manual skills were added to the curriculum. The Zappeion Girls School was the first to adopt this, and the method's success was a great contribution to the rising quality of education.

Another teaching method used in Greek girls' kindergartens, particularly in the Zappeion and Pallada girls' kindergartens was the 19th-century *Froebel Method*, developed by Friedrich Froebel, who believed that education for three to six year-olds was vital for early childhood development. This method combined creative and improving games with teaching at the child's

skill level. Plays incorporating music and movement were an important part of this method. These kindergartens provided an important *play-based* and *child-oriented education* instead of traditional methods that were *teacher-based* and *inactive*.

The longest-lived and most prominent Greek girls' schools in Constantinople included the Palada/Pallas Girls' School (founded in 1874), Zapeion Girls' School (1875), Yuvakimyon Girls' School (1882) and the Beyoglu Center Greek Girls' School. There were also a number of other Greek girls' schools in various districts of Istanbul.

### The Ottoman Response

RTE: Under the Ottoman Empire, were these schools overseen by the Orthodox Church or by the community?

DR. MACAR: There were probably influences from both the church and the community. Under the Ottoman millet system, there was a hierarchical order within these religious minorities, with the Ecumenical Patriarchate being the most important and privileged among the communities. It not only ruled the Ottoman Empire's Greek Orthodox, but also the Romanian, Bulgarian, and Serbian Orthodox. When these groups became nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries, they also established (or reestablished) their own patriarchates. Around the same time there were changes within Constantinople's Orthodox community—for instance, while previously a metropolitan or local bishop would have headed educational committees, the growing Greek middle-class wanted more of a say in civil areas such as education.

RTE: Do we know how the Ottomans viewed these innovative Greek schools?

DR. MACAR: The courses taught and the methods used in Greek girls' schools played a definite role in the rise of Greek nationalism. Ottoman state authorities who closely watched these developments perceived them as a danger to their political existence, not only because a highly educated minority might have undue influence, but because they feared that these schools were cultivating nationalist and separatist ideas. As a result, government inspections of Greek schools increased, and they looked closely at curriculum and teaching methods. However, when Ottoman school inspectors realized how successful these innovative methods were, they incorporated them into the Ottoman Muslim school curriculum in 1887!

When these Greek schools first opened, education was not yet an Ottoman state responsibility, but was part of society's private sector. It was only during the reign of Ahmed II, and with the modernization of the state, that the Ottoman government began assuming responsibility for education and other social services, which increased greatly under Atatürk and the new secular republic. In 1923, there was a decree that minorities could still establish schools, and they could teach their community's mother-tongue along with Turkish, but religious education in all schools was curtailed by the new secular republic. At this time many of the Protestant missionary schools were closed.

RTE: Did these private Greek schools survive the compulsory exchange of populations?

DR. MACAR: After the exchange of populations, all Greek schools in Asia Minor were closed except in Istanbul and on the small islands of Imbros and Tenedos. Because of the decreasing Greek population, there are only a few Greek schools left in Istanbul today.<sup>2</sup>

RTE: Dr. Macar, thank you for this rich and surprising glimpse into Greek education under the Ottomans. How would you summarize this period?

DR. MACAR: I would say that the rapid increase in the number of Greek schools stimulated competition and helped speed up the opening of Muslim schools. The innovation and development of 19th- and 20th-century Greek girls' education is significant in evaluating Ottoman education as a whole, and these models present us with important clues to Turkey's present educational system. ✦

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Note: The Ecumenical Patriarchate website ([www.patriarchate.org](http://www.patriarchate.org)) lists four secondary schools including the Phanar Greek Orthodox College (Great School of the Nation), Zographeion Lyceum, Zappeion School, and the Kentrikon School, as well as a dozen primary schools.