



Summary :

Presentation of the development of female education in Smyrna in the 19th and the early 20th century within the wider ideological framework of the time.

Date

19th – early 20th c.

Geographical Location

Smyrna

1. Greek-Orthodox Female Education in the Ottoman Empire

1.1. General Outline

Until the 18th century the education of the girls belonging to the upper Greek-Orthodox social strata was provided exclusively by their families. The mother was the person responsible, while home teachers or some monasteries undertook the task of teaching their students basic grammar, domestic duties, possibly a musical instrument or a foreign language, etc. This type of education concerned the offspring of the wealthy families, while the girls of the lower social strata were confined to the sheer “domestic” education, which to a great extent was oriented towards everyday needs.

The moment when the female education had to be legislated and the ecclesiastical and communal authorities would be responsible for organising it remains unknown. However, the first girls’ schools must have operated, in their early form, as grammar schools, in the late 18th and the early 19th century. Those first schools are evidenced in the big cities of the Ottoman territory ([Constantinople](#), [Smyrna](#), Serres). They were organised by the local parish churches and operated in privately owned premises, while the limited number of students belonged to upper social strata.

The regular operation of female educational institutions in the big cities of the Ottoman Empire must have started in 1840. Until 1922 there were three periods in the history of the Greek education in the Ottoman territories: In the first period (1840-1870), the first organised educational institutions of primary education are established as private or communal enterprises in big cities. Those institutions were gradually transformed into girls’ upper schools.

The second period (1870 – late 19th c.) was marked by the emergence and systematisation of the first girls’ upper schools, the establishment of more schools for teacher training and the completion of the educational network. In that period, the education offered to female teachers was different from the general high school and was received after the latter was completed. Moreover, new types of schools started to operate (nursery schools, professional schools). In addition to communal and private enterprises now there are educational and female charitable clubs, wealthy individuals and the Greek state. The final form of the girls’ upper school includes a nursery, an upper high school, a teachers’ and a governesses’ school. At the same time, the girls’ upper schools include the first classes in girls’ technical education.

Finally, in the third period (late 19th c. – 1922), there was an impressive development of female education, a strong interest in professional training and a boost to private enterprises so that new schools could be established.¹

1.2. The Ideological Dispute over Female Education

The aim and the nature of female education in cities like Smyrna were directly connected with the ideological dispute that broke out during the 19th century all over the Greek-speaking world.



On the one hand, the conservative scholars express through their texts their opposition to women being further educated. According to their prevailing argument, there are two distinct spheres of action for the two sexes: the man is made to rule and the woman to secure the calmness and tranquility of family life. The passive model of woman-Penelope is highlighted. This model is based on the alleged mental weakness of women, which is considered to be compensated by their spiritual merits, such as imagination, kindness, etc. As a result, the study of the language is recommended, while it is debatable whether the female mind is able to perceive the deeper meanings of the ancient writers, such as Demosthenes, Plato and Thucydides. Therefore, the “peaceful” Odyssey is more useful to women than the “warlike” Iliad. After all, it seems that the merits of domestic life, indispensable qualities of a woman, are not compatible with letters, which are only for men. At the same time, the opponents of female education were warning about the risk of departing from family and moral ideals, while they were focusing on the social role of the woman, which was identified with social and national progress.

Conversely, in the fields of letters and journalism, dominated by men at the time, there were a few occasional women, such as [Sappho Leontias](#) and Kalliopi Kechagia, the headmistresses of two important girls’ schools, the [Central Girls’ School “Agia Foteini”](#) in Smyrna and Zappeion in Constantinople respectively, fighting for the right of women to higher education. Unlike the model of “Penelope”, they brought out a dynamic female model that demanded a wider and more systematic education, which could be provided only by a girls’ school –a place with values and its own codes, which moulds national female consciences. Towards the late 19th century, the supporters of modern female education increased and became more serious: a very important newspaper, the “Ladies’ Newspaper” (*Efimeris ton kyrion*), came out in Athens discussing the emancipation of women through education and work.²

That ideological atmosphere, in combination with the particular economic, social and political circumstances of the Ottoman territories (economic development, urbanization, self-governed communities, competition between national and ethnic groups in the Ottoman Empire), defines the ideological content of female education in those territories. Thus, the female educational model formed at the time incorporates the national, moral, social and vocational aspects of education. The main target is the creation of a moral personality that could successfully fulfill its social role. However, from 1870 onwards, the main concern of education is to mould the “daughters of the nation”, the Greek mothers, wives and teachers.³

2. Female Education in Smyrna

2.1. Greek Orthodox, Greek and European Girls’ Schools

Smyrna was one of the great cities of the Ottoman Empire, where all through the 19th century until 1922, the institution of the girls’ school was particularly spread. The highest girls’ school in Smyrna, as it happened in the rest of the Ottoman territory, was like an establishment with many branches, whose organisation and structure included all school levels (preschool, primary, secondary education) and all types of directions (general, vocational, technical) of female education as well as the separate specialities (foreign languages, art and music lessons) of high school. It was actually a high school with a complete course of studies (three or even five grades along with classes in pedagogics and didactics for the prospective teachers, unless there was a separate department) including nursery school, primary school/public school and a high school/teachers’ training school. The private as well as some communal schools in big cities (Constantinople and Smyrna) had a separate teachers’ training school, branches of technical/vocational training and other directions. As regards their administration, it was centrally exercised by the principal (headmistress). Higher girls’ schools appeared in the 1870s, although some of them had been in operation as schools of higher education already from the early days of the first period of the Greek education in the Ottoman territories.⁴

Smyrna had a large number of girls’ schools, the most important being the Central Girls’ School and the [Omireion Girls’ School](#). At the same time, communal, private as well as foreign⁵ private girls’ schools trained the girls of the Greek Orthodox middle class of Smyrna so that they could be well-equipped and meet the requirements of their social role –to become girls of “good families”–, or even rise socially and serve the national role of the Greek wife-mother, in the framework of their new national identity promoted at the time.



In his work on education in Smyrna, Christos S. Solomonidis reports that before 1830 there was no organised female education in Smyrna.⁶ It seems that the few educated women belonged to the upper social class of Smyrna, since the family was responsible for providing elementary education at home at the time. [Adamantios Korais](#) reports that in the early 18th century there were only four educated women in Smyrna, one of whom was his mother.⁷

The Girls' School "Agia Foteini" is reported as the first girls' school in the city; it was founded in 1834 and was later renamed Central Girls' School. In 1881, as an answer to the "proselytizing" activities of foreign girls' schools, the Educational Club of Smyrna founded the Greek Girls' School. In 1885, it was recognised as equivalent to the Arsakeion school in Athens, while in 1886 it was renamed "Omireion". Those two central female schools had "dependants", that is, primary schools depended on them.

Apart from the "dependants", Smyrna had also communal higher schools for boys, girls or even mixed schools in every parish. The parish schools operating in 1922 were: St. Catherine, St. Dimitrios (Chatziantoneios), St. Constantine and St John the Forerunner.

The private enterprises, which dominated the field of education in the city, decided on the establishment and operation of girls' schools. The information provided by C. S. Solomonidis about the establishment of schools in Smyrna is valuable:

Bruer's school was founded in 1831 as a "girls' central school of education" in the house of the Bruers. In 1852, Sappho Tzani, the subsequent wife of Christophoros Lailios and headmistress of the Central Girls' School, co-founded the "Magnis Girls' School" along with Iosif Magnis, while in 1854 [Antonios Isigonis](#), K. Kourniachtis and F. Filipoutsis founded a girls' school called Hellenikon Paidagogeion. From 1857 onwards Antonios Isigonis was the sole headmaster of the Hellenikon Paidagogeion. The school operated for 30 years. Two years later, in 1856, Eirini Sofianopoulou founded a girls' school based on the **monitorial teaching system**, where French was first taught, while in 1857 some parents from Smyrna founded the short-lived Girls' School of the Patricians with a Boarding House, which aimed to educate and treat orphan girls, while in 1858 the theological teacher Methodios Aronis founded the Greek Girls' School (*Ellinikon Parthenagogeion*) with a boarding house. Sappho Leontias was the first principal followed by Antonios Pittakos. The school operated for 4 years. The Greek Girls' School of Ch. Anastasiadis was founded in 1858 and operated for 40 years. It included a nursery school, a six-grade public school and four high school grades. It accepted external students as well as students who either lived part of the day or all of the day at the premises. It also accepted 'moral' boys as long as their sisters were students of the same school. In 1861, Fotini Kokkinaki founded a girls' school, a nursery school, a complete primary school and a high school grade. The school operated for 30 years.

In 1870, Nicholas Aronis, the founder of the Greek School for boys, founded the National Girls' School, which operated for 4 years, while the Kydonopoulou sisters founded a girls' school in 1871 and A. Zafeiriadou a School for Girls, which operated for ten years. In the following year, the sisters Amalia and Kleopatra Skaramanga founded a girls' school, while in 1873 a girls' school with a boarding house was founded by Chrysanthi Papadaki, who followed the curriculum of the Arsakeio of Athens. The girls' school "Kadmus" of Eleni Christopoulou, along with a boarding house, started to operate in 1880, while in 1881 Pinelopi A. Masaouti founded the Greek Girls' School and Nursery School. In the same year the sisters Anna Gerasimou and Maria Papadogianni started the New Girls' School. Eleni Kalliga founded a girls' school in 1882, while Efthalia Kambopoulou founded in 1884 the girls' school "Ionia", which was later called Greek High School of Efthalia Tsihlaki. It operated for 30 years. The girls' school of Eleni Xanthou was founded in 1884 and included a nursery school and a boarding house; the girls' school of George Daldakis was founded the following year. The Dragatsi sisters founded in 1886 the Dragatseion Girls' School, while Anastasia and Penelope Korovili founded the girls' school "Agathangelos" in 1895. Finally, Ioannes Diamantopoulos founded his own girls' school along with a boarding house in 1900.

In the first decades of the 19th century the poor teaching of foreign languages and technical subjects, the economic power of foreign girls' schools, their curriculums, which responded better to the demands of the middle class in Smyrna, as well as the absence of a boarding house in the existing Greek girls' schools were problems that made several Smyrna families send their daughters to foreign schools of the city. Between 1875 and 1880 a percentage of 80% of the female students of Smyrna attended foreign private girls' schools.⁸ The girls' school of the French Sisters of Charity (Soeurs de Charité) was established in 1840, the girls' school Dames de Sion in 1875 and the girls' school of the Protestant Prussian Deaconesses in 1880. Smyrna also accommodated the girls' school of



St. Joseph and the five-grade commercial school of W. Barkshire with its boarding house, the American school of McLahlan, the Italian school, the English school of J. Barth, the International School of the Englishman E. Rainek and other foreign schools in the suburbs.

2.2. The Development of Girls' Schools

As regards the operation and staff of girls' schools, the first 50 years following the establishment of the Greek state the Greek Orthodox communities seemed to be depended on it. Female teachers that had graduated from the Arsakeio were appointed to big cities like Smyrna. Between 1880 and 1885 graduates from Laskaridou's school were appointed in Thessaloniki, Smyrna, Odessa and Alexandria after they had previously adopted progressive teaching methods, which were generally more widely accepted by the Greek communities abroad.⁹

From 1850 onwards, as it happened in other Asia Minor cities of the Ottoman Empire, lots of girls' schools were established in Smyrna. This development may be included in a wider campaign aimed at creating a Greek school network in the Balkan and Asia Minor provinces of the Ottoman Empire, which would propagate the national identity. This network was transformed in 1860-1870 in collaboration with the Greek state, and was connected with both the increased interests of the Greek Orthodox middle class in the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the Bulgarian and Serbian nationalism. On the other hand, the liberal atmosphere of the *tanzimat* reforms favoured the organised education of the Greek Orthodox in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰

After 1870 there was an increase in the number of girls' schools and their students in Smyrna, which was bigger than the respective increase in the free Greek state. At the same time, there were essential differences in structuring the girls' schools of the Greek territory as compared with the respective schools of the communities in the Ottoman Empire. The latter were described by the fact that more students were admitted to the institutions of secondary education, which operated on a more organised basis, since the primary school acquired a more practical character, the teachers' training school was separated from the girls' school and the level of the girls' high school rose.¹¹

3. The Dispute over Girls' Education in Smyrna

Female education must have been discussed by the society of Smyrna on a theoretical level as well. In the 1870s a dispute was triggered through a series of publications between Sappho Leontias, the headmistress of the Girls' School "Hagia Photeini", and male scholars of the city, over female education and its purport. The dispute was similar to that bedeviling Greece at the time. Leontias, on the one hand, supported that girls should receive the same basic knowledge as boys, with the addition of the knowledge intended specifically for women. On the other hand, [Ioannis Skylitzis](#) supported that [Xenophon](#) was the only ancient author whose texts should be taught to girls, as "anything else is useless for the woman".¹² Skylitzes was followed by Antonios Isigones, who was against the introduction of complex subjects and concepts to girls, for he thought they were unable to coordinate their mind and respond to their increased needs.¹³ The views of the two scholars were approved by the local press, which favoured the reformation of the curriculum followed by the girls' schools of the city. The newspaper *Nea Smyrni* reports: "French, Geometries and theoretical Arithmetic as well as the elevated theological subjects and the writers who are not suitable for women should be banished from girls' schools and be replaced with other subjects suitable for the education of good daughters, wives and mothers".¹⁴ But the dispute also concerned language: while the conservatives of Smyrna advocated the use of Katharevousa, Sappho Leontias banished the original ancient texts from primary school and introduced their translations.¹⁵ The issue of the "girls' education" was incorporated into the general ideological dispute between the enemies of female upper education and a group of women fighting for the right of girls to receive higher education – a dispute spreading all over the Greek and Greek-speaking world.

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2. About the dispute over female education in the Greek state, see Φουρναράκη, Ε., *Εκπαίδευση και αγωγή των κοριτσιών: ελληνικοί προβληματισμοί (1830-1910)* (Athens 1987), pp. 32-50.
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13. Ισηγόνης (Isigonis), Α.Μ., "Το Ελληνικόν Παιδαγωγείον Σμύρνης", *Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά* 12 (1965), pp. 99-106.
14. Newspaper *Νέα Σμύρνη* (28/7/1886).
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Glossary :

	monitorial system
Teaching method developed by Joseph Lancaster, under which the older students (in Greek: "protoscholoi") taught the smaller children some skill or activity.	
	tanzimat
The 19th-century reforms in the Ottoman Empire, which were inaugurated in 1839 with the edict of Hatt-i Şerif and came to an end with the Constitution of 1876. The reforms, which were considered an effort for the modernization and liberalization of the state, concerned every aspect of the political, social and economic life in the Empire. Of particular importance were the ones that equated legally Muslim and non-Muslim subjects.	

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