The Ottoman Press as a Political and Literary Platform in Cyprus between 1878-1900

Ahmet Yıkkıık
The Ottoman Press as a Political and Literary Platform in Cyprus between 1878-1900

Ahmet Yıkık
University of Cyprus, Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies

Abstract. The aim of this study is to examine Cypriot journalism between the years of 1878 and 1900, which coincides with the arrival of the first printing press to Cyprus. The first Cypriot newspaper was published in the same year. It should be noted that during the Ottoman rule (1571-1878), the printing press arrived in Cyprus for the first time in 1878, when administrative governance of the island transferred from the Ottomans to the British. The first Cypriot newspaper was published the same year. It should be noted that during the Ottoman rule (1571-1878),

The beginning of typography and journalism in Cyprus

The printing press arrived in Cyprus for the first time in 1878, when administrative governance of the island transferred from the Ottomans to the British. The first Cypriot newspaper was published in the same year. It should be noted that during the Ottoman rule (1571-1878),
there were no printing presses or printing houses on the island – documents were reproduced lithographically. Official paperwork – state correspondence or circulars – had to be engraved on stone plates and printed one by one on specially produced paper, and could only be produced in limited numbers. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that literary works were produced in manuscript form, and that the number of such manuscripts that have survived until the present day is very limited. We should also note that it is well within the realms of possibility for copies of newspapers published in Ottoman Turkish and Greek to have reached Cyprus from abroad, by post, or by sea from Istanbul, Athens, or Alexandria – cities with which Cypriots have historically held well-established cultural and commercial relations. Namık Kemal, one of the leading journalists, poets and writers of reform-era Tanzimat, – and an exile on the island throughout the 1870s – wrote: “It is not easy to get the newspapers at all. However I feel indeed grateful whenever they send me newspapers by post.”

It would not be misleading to assume, moreover, that newspapers published in relevant foreign languages reached the island through its consulates – French, British, etc.- in Larnaca. In short, without a press of their own, no Cypriot newspapers were published during the Ottoman period, though literates among the island’s Muslim and/or Orthodox population had limited access to newspapers brought from abroad.

The printing press and printing house were introduced to Cyprus under the initiative of the Greek Cypriot teacher, writer and journalist Theodoulos Constantinides. Educated first at the French college in the Antoura province of Lebanon, then in Alexandria, Constantinides started working as a Greek language teacher in Greek schools within the Archdiocese of Alexandria (the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria) in Cairo. In his spare time, he published the Cairo newspaper and Evrepi magazine. It was with the desire to take this professional experience back to Cyprus that he sought financial support from Greek Cypriot donors and Egyptians of Greek origin – especially from Kipriaki Adelfotita (“The Cyprus brotherhood”), founded in Egypt. His campaign was a success, and with the donations he received, Constantinides returned to Larnaca with a printing press. Initially, he secured the permission of the Turkish Pasha of Larnaca for the publication of a paper; soon after his return in Cyprus, however, the island came under British rule, so he again solicited publishing rights, this time from the first British Governor of Cyprus, Sir Garnet Wolseley. Wolseley gave his permission, but on the condition that the paper would be published in a bilingual edition, in English as well as Greek. Paradoxically, then, the history of the Cypriot press begins with the publication of a “twin” paper, titled Kypros (Cyprus), printed in both languages in a single edition, – two pages in Greek and two in English. The two halves of this unusual whole, we should note, did not have exactly the same content.

The first issue of Kypros appeared in Larnaca on August 29, 1878. The 1000 copies sold at once. Nevertheless, its economic viability proved problematic, with the result that the newspaper’s printing house was eventually confiscated by the English company Henry King & Co., which continued publishing the newspaper until 1892, at first in the same format, then in an English-

1 Ünlü 1981 p. 10; Kuntay 1949, pp. 214-216.
2 Hadjiprodromou 1990, p. 10.
Larnaca continued to hold the reins of Cypriot journalism for about twenty years. Besides the weekly Kypros (Cyprus), the city also saw the publication of Neon Kition (“New Kitium”), Stasinos, Enosis (“Union”), Horkatis (“Villager”), Neon Ethnos (“New nation”).

In 1880 Limassol acquired its first printing house and its first newspaper – Alithia (“Truth”), Salpix (“Trumpet”), and Diavolos (“Devil”) were to follow. Nicosia acquired its first printing house in 1882, when Constantinides’ Neon Kition transferred: its new and modern for the needs of that period printing Office was set up by George Nicopoulos, who started printing in the capital the newspaper Phoni Tis Kiprou (“The voice of Cyprus”) which was actually the successor of Stasinos. Also published in Nicosia were: Evagoras, Embros (“Ahead”), Eleftheria (“Liberty”), and Patris (“Homeland”). The first newspaper in Kyrenia was the satirical paper Ragias by George Stavrides (1898), written in poetic metre, and which was also published in Nicosia.

The Greek Cypriot press at the time played an important role in reinforcing national feeling, confronting moral and social decadence, and challenging the state’s heavy taxation policy, which was draining the Cypriot people.

The role of Ottoman Armenians in the introduction of the Ottoman press in Cyprus

The competition that existed between the centre of Ottoman Empire (Constantinople) and her province (Egypt) is relevant to both the establishment of Turkish printing houses and the publication of the first Turkish newspapers. In the Ottoman Empire, the first printing house to publish Turkish literary works in the Arabic alphabet was established in Istanbul, by Hungarian-born Ibrahim Muteferrika, on December 14-16, 1727, during the reign of Ahmet III (1703-1730). The printing house, for which the official name is “Dar-ut-Tiba’at-Ul-Amire”, was known as “Basmahane” (literally, “print house”) by locals. The first printing house in Egypt was Cairo’s Bulak Printing House, established by Mohammad Ali in 1822. The first Turkish newspaper in Arabic, the Vaka-i Misriye (“Incidents of Egypt”) was published here in 1828, with the intention of reflecting official declarations, legal practices, and the work of Mohammad Ali Pasha. A weekly newspaper, it had a circulation of about 600, with the left column presented in Arabic and the right column in Turkish. It preserved its bilingual structure until the period of Khedive Ismail Pasha (1863-1879), after which it was published in Arabic only. The first Turkish newspaper to be published in the Arabic script in the Ottoman Empire was Takvim-i Vakayi (“Calendar...
of incidents”), which had commenced its publication in 1831, during the reign of Mahmut II. In the first issue of the newspaper, of which 5000 copies were printed, the newspaper explained its role as a public informant, responsible for announcing domestic and world affairs to the public as they happened.10

To reiterate, there were simply no printing machines in Cyprus until the late nineteenth century, and all official state documents were printed lithographically – much more slowly and at greater expense. The earlier method, using stone plates, was eventually replaced by a technique using metal type, but due to the particularity of the Arabic language this method remained difficult to apply. The Armenians were the first to do so successfully, creating 337 characters corresponding to all possible combinations of the letters in the Arabic language. This method was introduced to Egypt by Khedive Ismael Pasha, and the system was brought to Cyprus in 1880, possibly from Egypt or Constantinople. In order to help Turkish Cypriots, possibly following pressure from the Turkish Government, the British administrators of the island sought to introduce presses with Arabic characters to Cyprus. A British Ambassador in Constantinople was assigned to procure the equipment from Egypt – a task which was accomplished in 1882. Once the Arabic typeset was secured, an Armenian artisan named Minas Gregorian arrived in Cyprus, and together with three Turks, taught the new trade to Turkish employees of the Government Printing Office. The foundations were set for a Turkish Cypriot Press and Turkish Cypriot journalism.

The following records substantiate the significant role the Armenians played in both the translation of Turkish official documents and the establishment of Turkish typographers in Cyprus: on August 21st, 1878, Stephen Haicus Apisoghom Utidjian was appointed to the position of Chief Translator of State Documents (into Turkish), with an annual salary of £300. Minas Krikorian was assigned as Turkish Printer on May 4th, 1885, with an annual salary of £60. İbrahim Hassan Shefki was appointed as Turkish Printer Apprentice on 26th November, 1884, with an annual salary of £24. And Kiasim bin Ali was appointed as Turkish Printer Apprentice on November 21st, 1885 with an annual salary of £24.11 Until 1930, Armenians were employed for translation, printing and typesetting in the Colonial Administration Offices, as well as in the government printing office. From 1930 onwards, Turkish Cypriots were trained for those jobs and took the lead.12

Armenians made important contributions to Cypriot cultural life through the institutionalization of Turkish printing, the translation of official documents into Turkish, and the publication of the first Turkish newspapers on the island. From recent research, it appears that the first Cypriot paper in the Turkish language (old Turkish-Arabic) was issued, not by a Turk, but an Armenian originally expelled from Turkey. Travelling first to Cairo, he sought refuge in Cyprus following the British occupation. His name was Alexan Sarafian, and he was the editor of Ümid

10 Girgin 2001, pp. 7-19.
11 Cyprus’ Blue Book 1887-1888, pp. 132, 136, 138.
12 Dedeçay 1989, vol. 1., p. 39.
(“Hope”), a newspaper which released just five issues in Larnaca in 1880, published by Henry S. King & Co. Note the following, written in an edition of Neon Kition:

At the right time we had announced the publishing of a Turkish newspaper in Larnaka, with the title “Elpis” (Hope). Today we learn that Midhat Pashas does not allow its circulation in Syria, and that from London came instructions, addressed to the postal services, which do not allow its export from Cyprus. We do not know the Turkish language, therefore we are not in the position to inform our readers about its style and principles. But we believe that its publisher, Mr Alexandros Serafian, an Armenian, who as we learned was once exiled from Constantinople because he dared say that Turkey was not capable of combating Russia on her own, but was later called back, when his writings seemed to be true, was unfairly treated with this measure, that is to say, having to disrupt the publishing of his newly started newspaper.\footnote{13}{C. Sophocleous 2008, p. 31-32; cf. Neon Kition 35, 26-27/2/1880.}

Demiryürek claims that the Ümid newspaper was published in 1879 or 1880, and quotes the following, on the subject of its editor: “It was published by Alexan Sarafian, an Armenian from Istanbul, and the newspaper was forced to close down by the British administration, due to the fact that in its fourth issue there was an article which was claiming that Cyprus had been given to the British as a bribe.”\footnote{14}{Demiryürek 2004, p. 21.} The second Turkish Cypriot paper was Dik-el Shark (“Rooster of the East”), which was issued again by Alexan Sarafian on June 16, 1889. Unfortunately, neither of these papers have left surviving copies.

The first Ottoman-Turkish Cypriot newspapers published by local Muslims

As mentioned above, Kypros-Cyprus was the first newspaper published in both Greek and English. Their articles were typically nationalistic, and their sustained demand for Union with Greece naturally provoked anxiety amongst Turkish Cypriots, some of whom sought to protect their interests by issuing papers of their own, opposing Greek Cypriot demands. The first Turkish-owned, Turkish-Cypriot paper was published in Nicosia on July 11, 1889. It was titled Saded (“Issue”), released weekly and published by Kasabali Mehmed Emin Efendi. It was small in size (just 30x7 inches) and it had a short life, suspending its publication on November 14, 1889, after only 16 issues\footnote{15}{Cobham 1969, p. 512.}. The second – and historically most important – Turkish Cypriot newspaper was Zaman (“Time”). It was founded by a group of Turkish-Cypriot intellectuals and ecclesiasts who established an association (Osmanlı Kiraathanesi), and collected the necessary capital by launching an appeal for the founding of a private press, which they named Zaman. Fully equipped for that time, it printed its first paper on December 25, 1891, under the same

\footnote{13}{C. Sophocleous 2008, p. 31-32; cf. Neon Kition 35, 26-27/2/1880.}
\footnote{14}{Demiryürek 2004, p. 21.}
\footnote{15}{Cobham 1969, p. 512.}
name. As part of the paper's funding initiative, Tuccarbasi Dervis Efendi – the paper's owner – played a leading role.

It is obvious from the articles written in that period that Zaman was published with the intention of countering the views expressed by the Greek Cypriot press. The struggle against British colonialism, the preservation of the Turkish language and Turkish-Cypriot national identity, and the struggle against Turkish-Cypriot papers (mentioned by name) were central topics in the lead article in Zaman's first issue. During the first period of the publication of the Turkish Cypriot papers, the movement of the Neo-Turks against the Sultan's empire was in full swing. This conflict eventually spread to Cyprus, where both camps had supporters. The more conservative elements supported the Sultan, with the more progressive supporting the Young-Turk movement. Zaman supported Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) with partisan coverage, and in return, the Sultan bestowed the title of Pasha on Dervis, including a monthly allowance. Other members of the Turkish Association, however, took issue with this political stance, and instigated the editor of the paper Ali Reza to write articles against the Sultan, causing Haci Dervis to lose his title and allowance. Zaman continued to be published until the 2nd of September, 1900, reaching its 423rd issue.

From the conflict between the supporters of the Sultan and the Young Turks, Yeni Zaman (“New times”) was born, which was founded by the opponents of Haci Dervis, and headed by Kufizade Asaf Bey. Its first issue was published on the 22nd of August, 1892. It was a weekly paper which released just 28 issues. In January 1893 Yeni Zaman published a series of articles against the Greek Cypriot paper Phoni tis Kiprou (“The voice of Cyprus”), which supported the Union of Cyprus with Greece. It suspended its publication on the 22nd of February, 1893. Kufizade Asaf Bey, together with his friends, founded a new weekly newspaper, Kıbrıs (“Cyprus”), which published its first issue on the 6th of March, 1893. To begin with, Kıbrıs supported the Sultan, but it later changed policy and switched its support to the Young-Turks. The paper survived for five years and achieved a broad circulation, until Sultan Abdul Hamid II finally managed to close it down by bribing its owner. Thus Kıbrıs suspended its publication in 1898, after 318 issues. Until their closure in 1900, Ahmet Tevfik was responsible for two satirical papers – Kokonoz (“Ugly Old Woman”) (1896-1897 and 1910) and Akbaba (“Vulture”) – as well as the three newspapers, Feryat (“Cry”), Maabir (“Road”), and El Burhan (“Testimony”). Thus, during the first decade of the Turkish Cypriot press, altogether eleven papers were published.16

Leyle -i Visal (“Night of Coitus”) (1894-1895)

Leyle -i Visal was a serialized novel, penned by Kaytazzade Mehmet Nazım (1857-1924), with the first part published in the 118th issue of Kıbrıs17, on December 1, 1894 and the

---

16 Hadjiprodromou 1990, pp. 21-23; Mutluyakalı 2012, pp. 19-36; cf. Ünlü 1981, pp. 33-34.
17 It was a weekly newspaper of 500-700 copies, and circulated mainly in Cyprus, but copies were also sent to Turkey, Cairo and other places. See Cyprus Blue Book 1893-1894.
following parts weekly. Following the release of the 12th part (in the 130th issue of *Kibris*, published on March 4, 1895) the publication was interrupted, leaving the novel unfinished. Nazım was known as one of the most famous and productive journalists, poets and writers published in the Ottoman Turkish press in Cyprus, and his poems – whether in the classical Ottoman, Divan tradition, or in the more European-influenced Modernist mode – were published in various newspapers of the period, right up until the 1920s. Likewise, Mehmet’s novels and short-stories were widely serialized in contemporary newspapers. It should be noted that he was also the author of *Adem-i İhtiyat* (“The absence of precaution”), and *Yadigar-ı Muhabbet* (“The remnant of love”), which had been published by Cypriot Muslims before *Leyle-i Visal*. Briefly stated, in the period between the last decade of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th, coinciding with the emergence of modern Turkish-Cypriot literature – or more precisely, the literature of Turkish-speaking Muslim Cypriots of the period – the Arabic alphabet was still being used. It was during this period that Mehmet became one of the most prominent and productive writers – so much so, that it would not be an exaggeration to characterize him as the founder of western-style, modern Turkish-Cypriot literature.

Nazım hints that he will be telling a love story in *Leyle-i Visal*, which takes place on the island of Chios, where he served as a civil servant in 1884 – at the time, within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Considering that the plot of his first novel, *Yadigar-ı Muhabbet* took place in Istanbul, the question arises: why did the plot not take place in Cyprus? There could be many underlying reasons. However, considering that the author served as a civil servant in Istanbul, and that both works include detailed descriptions of the town where the storyline takes place, we may speculate that Nazım thought he would attract more Muslim Cypriot readers by promoting places outside Cyprus – by telling stories that took place there. One of the consequences of this decision is that researchers lose the opportunity to collect data on the social-life of Cypriots during that period, given how rich a social record Nazım’s work typically provides. Nevertheless – and despite the fact that the novel was left unfinished – *Leyle-i Visal* provides a lot of information concerning both his understanding of the novel, of contemporary social life, and of the period’s most pressing issues. The rest of this paper provides an analysis of the novel’s plot, its technical features, and the characteristics of the society Nazım depicts.

In the novel’s introduction, the author first presents some geographic information about the island of Chios, as mentioned above. He tells us that Chios is one of the islands in the Mediterranean under Ottoman possession. He notes that, according to the financial calendar, the island was exposed to a major earthquake in 1303, that many buildings collapsed during the earthquake, and that the majority of the population died. Therefore, he says, instead of the brick-and-mortar buildings that collapsed after the earthquake, wooden buildings were built – wooden buildings being more resistant to earthquakes, and less harmful in the event of collapse. So the island was rebuilt, creating wealth in the process, and increasing land-value.

---

18 See Yıkık 2017, for more information on Kaytazzade Mehmet Nazım’s life and works.
19 *Yadigar-ı Muhabbet* was initially serialized in *Yeni Zaman*. Once *Yeni Zaman* closed, the series continued in *Kibris* before being published collectively as a book.
The author also informs us that, due to the island’s geographic location and fine weather, the inhabitants seldom suffered from diseases such as flu and malaria. Those who did fall ill were recommended to go to Chios on sick leave in order to recover their health. The author characterizes Chios as a very suitable place for conservation of human health. Together, details such as these begin to suggest that the novel is developing along lines laid out by literary realism. They are evidence, too, of the positivism and rationalism popularized by writers and intellectuals increasingly influenced by the west. The author describes the island as a natural sanatorium.

As the introduction continues, the topic of Chios’ women is raised, and from a distinctively masculine point of view. The author calls the reader’s attention to a purported fact: the flirtatious, coquettish women of Chios are among the daughters of Eve, he says, who are famous for their beauty worldwide. Without going into details, he tells us that Chios girls have beautiful bodies that make men fall irresistibly in love. At this point, it is worth reiterating that the majority of literate people at that time – especially in Cyprus – were men. We may suppose that the author includes details such as these in an effort to keep the attention of male readers. So the narrator goes on to describe the character of the Chios girls. They are extremely attached to men who approach them in a caring manner, he says, and are deeply insulted at the first sign of interest in someone else. In a manner of speaking, they are always in their lover’s face. Examining the author’s image of Chios’ women in its context, it’s instantly recognizable as a version of the relatively progressive picture of femininity encountered in western novels of the same period. Compared to the views expressed by the Cypriot Muslim community at the time, it would not be misleading to consider Nazım’s attitude as ahead of its time.

At this point in the narrative, the narrator-writer intervenes and speaks directly to the reader, as if the time has come to turn to the main events of the novel: “Have we belaboured the alterations? Excuse me! See, we are now starting with the anecdote of the future.” Such a device coincides with the traditional Ottoman role of public meddah (storyteller), and it should be remembered that it was frequently used in the Turkish novel of the Tanzimat period by the prominent Ottoman-Turkish novelists, e.g. Ahmet Midhat (1844-1912). Therefore, it should be emphasized that here, the author did not completely break with tradition while producing a new genre; and in a sense, they reached a new synthesis – consciously or unconsciously – by using eastern and western narrative techniques together. Take, for example, a couplet from the famous Ottoman poet, writer and journalist Namık Kemal (1840-1888) – who, just like Nazım rendered service in Chios – which picks up a familiar theme: “Neş'e bahşolmada yoktur arakından farkı / Sakız’ın dilberi zira bir içim su gibidir!” (“There is no difference between the bestowed joy and rakia / The beautiful girl of Chios is indeed a sight for sore eyes!”)

---

20 For example, in the article reserved for Ahmet Mithat Efendi, one of the leading novelists on the website of the Islamic Encyclopedia, it is stated that the author was also influenced by positivist and materialist views: www.islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ahmet-midhat-efendi. Accessed 8 November 2020.
21 Kıbrıs 119, 17/12/1894.
22 Evin 1983, pp. 58, 82.
23 Kıbrıs 118, 01/12/1894.
In the first lines following the novel’s introduction, the author again relies on features of the eastern/orientalist narrative tradition. He reminds the reader of various cliched characters and situations frequently encountered in *The Arabian Nights*, and which he can rely upon readers being familiar with. He starts with Hanif Efendi, for instance, who introduces the characters in *Leyle-i Visal*. Hanif Efendi, who lives in the centre of Chios, is “rich beyond the dream of avarice” – to such a degree that he turns a blind eye to his finances. Hanif Efendi is as rich as Croesus.

Kamil Yaşaroğlu’s article titled “The anecdote of Croesus is indeed exemplary”, published on the *Milliyet* website, on the 20th of June 2016, explains the reference to Croesus – a reference to the Quran – as follows: “Croesus, who was one of the relatives of Prophet Moses, was proud of his treasures, loved show off, and wandered among his people with splendor. However, he perished due to his impiousness, arrogance and pride were destroyed.” 24 Indeed, consider how, in *Leyle-i Visal*, the narrator describes Hanif Efendi. Although he appears to be a good person who fulfils his religious duties and obligations, he embodies evil insofar as he is ambitious to acquire wealth. He never lets the grass grow beneath his feet; he takes care of all his business in person and deals with his work for as long as his health allows. He works to such an extent that he thinks about it even in his sleep. And despite all his wealth, he does nothing to help the poor, and does not hesitate to devastate others for the sake of earning the slightest amount. At the age of forty-five, he dies, leaving all his property, and incalculable financial assets to his heirs – one son and two daughters.

In this section of the plot we witness the author’s evaluation of the traditionally patriarchal Muslim community. The author emphasises that, although the children have inherited substantial wealth from their father, and their mothers are still alive, his three children remain unprotected. He prays to God that no child be left in the world without a father or a mother. But at this point the author makes the following pledge to emphasize the primary importance of the father: “Because, no matter how forgiving and compassionate mothers are, she cannot permeate the solid and unshaken religious belief and fine morality that a decent father can give to his children to the conscience of children” 25 Thereafter, the writer adapts the parable of the orphan son, frequently encountered in *The Arabian Nights*, placing it at the beginning of the novel. In a conversational mood, he shares the following warnings and comments with the reader listing a number of opinions he can be confident the reader shares, because of similar didactic stories that they have heard so frequently before. In his opinion, when a child – a boy, it is implied – reaches puberty, many dangers surround him. The boy may think he is genuinely friends with malevolent people who seek to take advantage of his inexperience. Those bad seeds who drag him in to bad habits or immoral entertainment could easily corrupt him and encourage him to squander his wealth. If he lives with a father, on the other hand, who will

24 ‘Karun kısası’ ibret tablosudur – Haberler Milliyet. Accessed 9 November 2020.
25 Kıbrıs 120, 24/10/894.
teach him to acquire the manners and the morals he needs during his youth, he will avoid suffering and come to grief.

This trope – of the naive, corruptible young man who loses his paternal inheritance because of his inexperience – is characteristic of the Eastern narrative tradition of didactic tales. In this case, it is Hanefi’s son Bahri who fulfills that role. Bahri, befriended by a number of immoral, deceitful characters immediately after his father’s death, becomes addicted to drink, sex, and a lifestyle of hedonism. In short order, he spends the wealth that would otherwise have lasted him a lifetime. At this point the author describes how it was not only the loss of Bahri’s father that played a role in his miserable situation: his mother also bears some responsibility. By remarrying as soon as Hanefi dies, Bahri’s mother sets him completely free. With an inattentive mother and two absent sisters, the author portrays the young man as a libertine – someone for whom there is no binding responsibility left in this world.

At this stage in the novel, the author brings forward criticisms and evaluations that reflect the masculine social perspective of his period. Mrs. Şakire, Bahri’s mother, is to all appearances a woman old enough and wealthy enough to support herself for the rest of her life. The author marks her desire to remarry as soon as her husband dies as self-indulgence. We ought to mention that, although Şakire Hanım’s age is left unspecified, the traditions of the period dictate that she should be younger than her husband, who died at 45. The author’s description of a woman – one who is perhaps not even 40 years old – as elderly, may seem odd to today’s readers. In the part of the novel where the author justifies his disapproval of Mrs. Şakire’s remarriage, the narrative turns into an internal monologue, dispensing with the omniscient, third person perspective that characterizes it up to this point. He constructs a monologue – an imaginary one that does not actually occur in the reality of the novel – to force Mrs. Şakire to question herself before her second marriage goes ahead, scrutinizing the – presumed malicious – intentions of her suitor. In this manner, the author revitalizes the narrative in the novel, giving the reader the impression, they are alone with the character and her thoughts. However, that this female character has thoughts she cannot express – and cannot be expressed because of her imprudence – reveals the narrator-author’s masculine perspective – one that dominates the Muslim society of the period – and this revelation does not escape the attention of the reader. The kind of questions Mrs. Şakire should have asked in her position, but did not, are listed as follows: “I wonder what could be the reason this man wanted to marry a woman like me who has lost her youthful bloom and whose body beauty is gradually disappearing, and not a young girl instead? This indicates at the most to his interest in my wealth, and not in my beauty. Besides, I have three orphans. Who knows how severely the man I will marry will beat these wretches!”

According to the above, if a man pursues a woman’s hand in marriage, he must either be tempted by sexual desire, and by bodily beauty, or he has an eye on the wealth she has acquired. As we can see, this point of view ignores a whole host of other possible reasons why two people may want to unite their lives. It should also be emphasized that the above words, which were
styled as if the words were coming out of the female character’s mouth, bear traces of the wider genre of *meddah* (storyteller) stories, which have an important place in the Ottoman narrative tradition. As such, the monologue resembles the scenes in which storytellers, who entertain the public by telling stories in front of a large audience in various crowded indoor or outdoor venues, imitate women by using handkerchiefs to make their voices high-pitched in the parts where female characters speak. As a matter of fact, though the scene is set up as a monologue, the presence of the male narrator in the background is unmistakable. Note that the choice of words, and the mode of articulation and expression are all similar to those of the narrator-author. Moreover, the setting – the location in which the action takes place – is not mentioned in this section, and no information is given about what Mrs. Şakire has experienced since the death of her first husband. Thus, the reader is left with the feeling that she is attached to the novel in the manner of a fairy-tale hero, as a means of communicating moral judgments to the reader.

As mentioned above, Mrs. Şakire continued to keep her two daughters born from her previous husband under her auspices after her second marriage. The author focuses on these two characters – Nebile and Makbule – as the plot continues, describing how they grow up, blossom, and enter their maidenhood. Although the narrative states that both sisters are very beautiful, it emphasizes that they are physically very unlike one another. 16-year-old Nebile is unique for the beauty of her face, we are told – as beautiful as that of a fairy-girl. And the author’s description of her beauty makes reference to Islamic belief. Those who have seen Nebile, says the narrator, may get the idea that God miraculously created a *houri*; Nebile is an angel descended from heaven, sent to convince sceptics and non-believers. Here, note that Nazım does not go into too much detail while drawing a physical portrait of each character, resting instead on emotional appeals typical of the Eastern narrative tradition. Nebile, for instance, is depicted as a young girl with long black hair, black eyes, a small mouth and nose, and small feet. The colour of her eyes and hair traditionally symbolizes her misfortune, drawing attention to the helplessness and sorrow of her situation. All these details reveal that, while describing characters’ appearance, Nazım does not adopt the attitude of a western writer, who adheres to external reality by acting as objectively as possible, and adopts the method of ‘drawing pictures with words’. Although he produces a work that falls within the scope of a western/occidental literary genre, he nonetheless could not dispense with the stereotypically eastern tools for the depiction of character, amongst them the prevalence of certain appeals to the reader’s emotion.

The author does not only portray Nebile, whom he displays to us as a beautiful young girl. At the same time, he puts her forward as an example of grace and virtue. Nebile is very talented, the narrator informs us, in traditional handicrafts such as women’s embroidery. So far, the reader has been presented with a familiar set of cues – everything points towards the telling of a story focused on a female character typical to the eastern narrative tradition, and gives the

---

27 No further information is given by the author about Makbule except from the elements depicted when she is shown to be with her sister.

28 Very beautiful girls living in paradise: see seslisozluk.com. Accessed on 28.11.2020.
impression that the story will take the reader of the era through a familiar fictional universe. However, the description does not stop there – the author has more to say about Nebile's virtues. She also plays the piano very well – and she can read. At this point, the character's ability to play a western musical instrument and literacy skills – considering the limited educational opportunities offered to women in Muslim society at that time – evokes the possibility that the author might intend to convey to the reader something unconventional and unexpected.

After emphasizing positive personal and outer characteristics in his introduction of Nebile, the author begins to suggest that the plot will pursue the theme of love, or marriage, further. He talks about how, in the world would it mean great happiness – bliss, even – to have a girl like Nebile. In order to attain such happiness, however, he suggests it is necessary to make a hit with the beauty in question. Clearly Nazım intends to communicate something about the traditions surrounding marriage, here. He draws attention to the necessity of winning consent from both halves of a couple, especially from the woman, for the conjugal union to take place. As is well known, in the Muslim community at that time, young people did not have a say about whom to marry. As a general rule, such decisions were made by the father of the family. With this context in mind, we get the impression that the author, who has thus-far tried to create the impression that he shares the dominant, patriarchal social values, will gradually address the issue of women's rights in an effort to raise awareness among his readers. The author suggests to the reader that it would be inappropriate for men to behave coercively in order to win women's hearts; on the contrary, they must win their affection with politeness. Some light is shed on the subject by implying that an individual – which here refers to a woman – is free to fall in love with whomever she wants. It is in this regard that the following words from the author, evoking freedom of thought and choice, draw our attention: “... no one can prevent freedom of conscience.”

It should not be overlooked that the word “freedom”, as used by the author in passages like this one, might have been used to implicitly criticize the oppressive environment in which political and individual rights were restricted during the reign of Abdülhamit II. We can frankly determine that this word, which was popular among pro-Constitutional intellectuals and writers, especially on the part of Namık Kemal, was the equivalent of the French word “liberté” in Turkish at that time, with the same political significance. As a matter of fact, the term “constitutionalism” was used in the same sense as the term “freedom”, among the members of the İttihad ve Terakki Partisi (The party of union and progress) in their struggles to enact constitutionalism.

As the plot continues, the novel focuses on the daily lives of Nebile and Makbule, as they lead their lives with their stepfather – Mr. Cemil Bey – and their mother Mrs. Şakire. Although these two young girls do not act disrespectfully towards Mr. Cemil, for the sake of their mother, in actual fact they do not like him at all. In any case, Mr. Cemil's bad habits begin manifesting themselves before long. He is a nervous man who is quick to anger, and starts drinking alcohol

---

29 Kibrıs 123, 14/01/1895.
30 Yücel 2017, p. 186.
five months after marrying Mrs. Şakire. After having a drink one evening, he returns home filled with anger and starts quarreling with everyone in the house. The two young girls, to avoid exposing themselves to this stressful situation, learn to stay out of his way, and shut themselves in their rooms whenever he is home. As you can see, Mr. Cemil embodies everything the author has thus far led us to expect from a certain character-type: the bad stepfather.

The breaking point – or catastasis – of the text occurs on a sunny autumn day. Nebile, having fulfilled her household chores, has returned to her room to avoid any confrontation with Mr. Cemil. She opens her window to admire the view from her room, which overlooks the sea, and starts playing one of her favourite pieces on the piano. A moment later, caught up in music, she is startled by an amorous and affectionate sigh of “uh-oh” from a newly rented house to the right. At that moment, she realizes she is being watched from the house opposite by an attractive looking young man. The young girl, embarrassed and blushing, immediately leaves her room, whilst making it clear to the young man that she is angry. Thus and so, the young man falls in love with Nebile at first sight. Nebile stayed away from the piano for a week after the incident. She eventually returns, however, and when she does, the same scenario occurs again. This time, she hears the young man reading a love poem to her, declaring his love. Nebile throws herself out of the room in a confused state, and similar situations repeat themselves every time Nebile plays the piano. Feelings begin to develop in the young girl's heart – feelings which herald that she is beginning to fall in love with her neighbour.

The following section of the novel introduces this young man to the reader: Mr. Vedad is presented as a handsome young man, without mentioning any of his physical features in detail. He belongs to a wealthy family, and his father is one of the notables of Chios, respected in society for his superior morals. We are told that the family rented the house opposite Ms. Nebile’s temporarily, because their mansion was undergoing renovations. Mr. Vedad, who has been in love with Nebile since they moved to the neighbourhood, goes to the window and cries out his love whenever she enters her room; and initially he gets the cold shoulder. In fact, he gets the impression that Nebile hates him, judging from the young girl’s attitude. After realizing Vedad was watching her, Nebile began drawing the curtains, then the window sashes. Whereas the author attributes Nebile’s response to her virtue, Vedad comes to a different conclusion and feels insulted. Nonetheless, he keeps waiting in front of the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of his lover. Nebile watches Vedad secretly from behind the curtain now and then. She begins to sympathize with his sadness, and increasingly believes the young man worthy of her love.

While a mutual platonic love sprouts between these two young people, Mr. Cemil returns home drunk again, one evening. The two sisters, Nebile and Makbule, immediately leave their mother alone and shut themselves in their rooms. While Nebile reads quietly on a couch, Makbule busies herself with some sewing. When Makbule sees her sister fall into a reverie, she can’t help but tease her: “Oh my dear! I see that you are deluded and lost again! You too will lose your mind reading a book all the time! Recently, you are spending most of your time reading novels.”31 A dialogue ensues about their stepfather, and the unpleasant events at home. It is
these moments of dialogue that raise this serialized novel to the level of contemporary Western literature, by eschewing some of its conventional, Eastern narrative features. In the chapters where the two sisters chat with one another, which the author fictionalizes in an almost cinematographic manner, the narrator-author withdraws and leaves the reader alone with the characters. The reader is given the opportunity to evaluate events through the eyes of the young female characters – and from a perspective that, for the time, was quite advanced – which might even be defined as feminism. The passive attitude of their mother, who fails to speak up against the bad attitude and rude behaviour of her husband, is criticized by the two sisters as follows:

Makhbule: “Leave the book and look at me! What do you think about how our gentleman behaved tonight? A total chatterer! Stoned and drunk! Isn’t he?”

Nebile: “(Desperately closing the book that she holds in hand) What shall I say? Damn it! Coming home like this every three to five nights? He speaks nonsense. I feel sorry for my wretched mother.”

Makhbule: “I cannot understand her approach to the issue either. She is too kind, she behaves cautiously. The more she pampers him, the more he gets spoiled and tries to humiliate and insult her. In fact, one should not behave so calmly. One should cut down to size if someone steps out of the courtesy and politeness line.”

It is noteworthy how the term “tuberculosis” is used, later in the same dialogue, as Nebile complains about her stepfather’s inappropriate attitude – a term which was frequently used in the novels of the period, especially under the influence of the romantic movement: “I’ve been feeling so sad since that fierce-looking man came here. The way things stand, I will definitely get tuberculosis!” At this point in their exchange, Makhbule informs Nebile about an intriguing development that will ultimately change the course of events for the worse. It is pointless to worry, she tells Nebile, because she will be leaving home soon. Puzzled and confused by what she has heard, Makhbule goes on to say that their stepfather has revealed to their mother the intention to marry Nebile off to one of his relatives. Nebile is furious, and proclaims that she would never consent to marry whoever her stepfather chooses. Even if her mother and her stepfather press her to marry that man, she will oppose and resist them – there will be no forced affection as far as she is concerned. Makhbule tells her not to rush to a decision. Whatever happens, she hopes Nebile will meet someone she can love, and with whom she can have a happy marriage. This moment of sincerity, with Makhbule wishing her sister well, takes place in the last few lines of the novel, before Nebile’s thoughts shift to Vedad, who cries out his love for her from the house opposite. Unfortunately, the conversations between the two sisters are never resumed. The novel was discontinued after the 12th issue, published on March 4, 1895.

32 Ibid.
33 Kıbrıs 129, 25/02/1895.
The problem of *Leyle-i Visal’s* literary and social value

*Leyle-i Visal* is important for being one of the few examples of western-style literary work that was written with Arabic alphabet during the inaugural period of Cypriot Turkish literature. Albeit unfinished, it is the second of two works written by Nazım – a Cypriot Muslim author – the first of which was titled *Yadigâr-i Muhabbet*. This latter novel was, to begin with, serialized in *Yeni Zaman*, and once the newspaper in question was closed (or changed its name), the serialization continued on the pages of *Kıbrıs*, before being published in its complete form as a book. The story of *Yadigâr-i Muhabbet* takes place in Istanbul. The framework of the novel is the relationship between two upper class Muslim youths who fall in love, then, for various reasons, fall apart. The young man of the pair passes away, in the grip of tuberculosis and longing for the young girl. This literary work, in which a romantic love story is told, can be regarded as a successful example of the novels written under the influence of realism, both in terms of its narrative depiction of place and person, and the vividness of its dialogue.\(^{34}\)

Unfortunately, it is not possible to give a definitive answer to the question of why the serialization of *Leyle-i Visal* was left half finished. Researcher Harid Fedai, who first discovered the novel, says that, as one of the most successful writers in Cypriot literary circles during his lifetime, it cannot be explained why Nazım left the novel he started writing in the most productive period of his literary career half finished. Nevertheless, Fedai also states that he hopes to eventually find the rest of the novel. However, no concrete evidence has yet been obtained to support his hope that *Leyle-i Visal* was ever completed. Thus, one can only speculate as to why the novel was left half finished.\(^{35}\) Perhaps personal reasons are to blame – health or family problems, or not being able to find time because of any number of other obligations he had to deal with. Whatever the reason, it should not be ignored that, as we have mentioned above, the author who ventured to suggest that women should be free to choose their marriage partner, and who, most significantly, put the concept of “freedom of conscience” on the political agenda, would likely have caught the attention of Abdul Hamid II – an administration which actively censored all the newspapers published in Cyprus through a program of press restrictions. It is not unlikely that the publisher and/or editorial board of the newspaper would have been forced to suspend the serialization of the novel in question. As a matter of fact, it is widely known that the pro-constitutionalist Young Turks published material in opposition to the Sultan in Cypriot newspapers of the period, and that, as a result, several Young Turks fled Istanbul for fear of its censorship laws. They took advantage of Cyprus, then under British rule, as a stepping stone to Europe, where they could carry on their activities freely. In this manner, they had the opportunity to disseminate their views among the intellectuals of the Muslim Cypriot community. Consequently, many Cypriot newspapers printed in Arabic script at that time, were prohibited from being dispatched beyond the island, because words such as “right”, “law”, “freedom” and

\(^{34}\) Nazım 2004.

\(^{35}\) Fedai 2002, p. 269.
“constitutionalism” drew the reaction of Bab-ı Ali (“Sublime Porte”) – journalists were removed from office and newspapers were closed.\(^\text{36}\)

It is evident from the plot summarized above that Nazım has created a romance novel in Leyle-i Visal. In the author’s second novel, we see him skilfully blend traditional Ottoman narrative techniques from a range of sources, including masal (“fairy tales”), halk hikâyesi (“folk tales”), meddah (“storyteller”) stories, and quotations from Divan poetry, which are frequently encountered in the novels of the Tanzimat Period. The use of grandiose ornamental language characteristic of Divan literature – language addressing the Ottoman upper class – makes the text challenging for ordinary readers to understand. When it was needed to make descriptions and/or psychological analysis the author used a more sophisticated Ottoman Turkish which contained many borrowed words from Persian and Arabic. However, the author’s preference for colloquial speech adds vividness to the dialogue that allows the text to be read fluently.

Looking more closely at the structure of the work, one can observe that it opens with the kind of descriptive passage that evokes classical western literature. After giving the reader varied information about the island of Chios, the island is praised for its beauty, and the reader is given the information necessary to situate the novel in time. The narrative present is 1894, the year the novel’s first instalment was published. Thus, the author indicates from the outset that he will follow a different path from the stories belonging to the Islamic narrative tradition. And one feature of such stories is that characters exist in a transcendent realm – a place where time and space are vague and irrelevant, where one’s personality is subsumed in the identity of beloved, and where reality is finally expressed in a metaphysical immanence which obviates reliance upon act and causality.\(^\text{37}\)

Where the author introduces the island of Chios to the reader, the narrator reports that the island used to belong to the Mediterranean Islands province of the Ottoman Empire, before sharing a host of rational and scientific data concerning an earthquake that occurred on the island in 1886 (the year 96 according to the financial calendar). The discussion moves to the various modifications in construction material and architectural technique intended to mitigate against future earthquakes, before weighing up the health benefits the island offers its inhabitants, and arguing for a greater emphasis on health-tourism. The author’s broadly positivist approach in this section indicates the influence of ideas imported from the West and disseminated among the Ottoman intellectuals of the period. This educated class benefited from an education system revitalized by the westernization movement that gained momentum with Tanzimat Fermani of 1839 (imperial edict of Gülhane). Nazım uses his second novel as a means to disseminate these ideas to a wider audience. As a matter of fact, schools of medicine and political science offering secular education during Tanzimat (the Reform Era) became a third source of ideology besides newspapers and literature, and the intellectuals who were educated and trained in these schools had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with movements such as positivism, Darwinism and nationalism – all of them disseminated from the

\(^{36}\) Ünlü 1981, p. 26.  
^{37}\) Finn 1984, p. 2.
West. Briefly stated, the scientific approach, which manifests itself from the very beginning of the novel, demonstrates that the author’s purpose is not merely to tell the reader a pleasant story. As such, the reader recognizes that they are experiencing a different genre of literature to the Ottoman stories that rely upon cliched depictions of nature disconnected from reality, and in which the author’s chief aim is to demonstrate their skill in manipulating language. It should be emphasized that the novel in question was written at a time when literature reached the readers primarily from the pages of a newspaper, and in which the author, as a journalist, strives to disseminate an enlightened world view to a wider audience.

If we focus on character construction in the novel, it is evident that the author has benefited a great deal from the Eastern narrative tradition. An underlying social structure of patriarchal and conservative value judgments is made plain from the convention according to which the male heads of the family are introduced before the main characters. This is a social structure in which certain values, fed by Islamic beliefs, tightly encircle individual freedom. In such a society, it is assumed that the father plays the most important role in bringing up “well-behaved” children who grow up to be respected and successful individuals in society. The same position is recapitulated in the widespread view that it is the father who is primarily responsible for the logical development of his children, whereas the mother is responsible for their emotional development. The ‘prodigal’ pattern which is frequently mentioned in The Arabian Nights appears in the story at this point – the pattern mentioned earlier in this paper, according to which children left without the protection of the father are held to be easily led astray, and their fortunes lost. The author does not hesitate to rely on the eastern narrative tradition, then, and as a result, the reader would not be alerted while he delivers his message. Indeed, as we have already stated, many elements of the novel reveal their provenance in eastern narrative types – such as fairy tales and storytellers. These phenomena cannot be dismissed as Nazım’s personal preference, since we encounter them in other Ottoman novels of the period as well. On the other hand, many critics argue that the continuation of the eastern narrative tradition diminishes the success of the writers of the Tanzimat. From a perspective that prizes technical novelty, these features are considered a deficiency. However, this criticism makes too much of the claim that the authors of the period were inexperienced novel writers, and ignores that they created a genre of prose unique to the Ottoman Empire. From here onwards, it is possible to clarify the effects of the author’s broad strategy. That he did not want to immerse the reader in a completely foreign fiction world while introducing a distinctively western genre, resulted in an unusual hybrid of eastern and western literature.

Recall that, when depicting the physical appearance of the novel’s main characters, the author conforms more-or-less to the Eastern conventions we have been discussing so far: he introduces Nebile as a beautiful girl with black hair, a tiny nose, a small mouth, etc. In short, when describing the main female character of the novel, he ignores visual details that are the

---

38 Moran 2012, p. 22.
39 Gökçek 2018, p. 17.
40 Tampınar 1988, pp. 285-296 ; Akyüz n.d., pp. 66-82.
typical material of contemporary 19th-century European realist novels. However, in order to emphasize Nebile's beauty, the author does not hesitate to say that a man who sees her would fall in love with her at first sight. In other words, the author arouses the reader's expectation that the plot will pursue the theme of love – or, at least, he arouses the expectations of the competent reader – one who is accustomed to the love stories specific to the eastern narrative tradition, such as *Layla and Majnun, Farhad and Shirin*, etc. What could be the reason the author opts for cliched expressions and generic terms, when it is within their ability to write in the realist mode? One must take into account the conservative ideology of the Muslim readers who likely read the novel when it was published in the pages of the newspaper. One might infer that he made such a choice in order not to offend his readership. However, in the scene where the narrator-author withdraws, leaving Nebile and Mablye free to discuss marriage, we suddenly witness the girls who were depicted as insignificant, idealized, fairy-tale heroes as flesh and blood characters. Moreover, the upright stance of Nebile, who said that she would never marry the person her stepfather chose as her spouse, is quite impressive when considering the social position of Cypriot Muslim women in the last decade of the 19th century. Clearly, the author intends to, on one hand, praise Nebile for her talent in traditional handicrafts, and on the other, valorise her interest in literature and music – that she is the exemplar of a society that synthesizes eastern and western characteristics.

The issue of marriage has been frequently revisited by the authors of this period since *Taşşuk-u Talat and Fitnat* (“The love of Talat and Fitnat”) (1872), the first Ottoman-Turkish novel, written by Şemsettin Sami.\(^41\) However, if we take into account that the novel is penned by a Cypriot Muslim author who brings the issue of women's rights to the top of the political agenda and stresses freedom of conscience, the importance of its contribution to Turkish Cypriot literature and society is beyond dispute. *Leyle-i Visal* should be classed as a pioneering early work in the western, modernist style of Turkish Cypriot literature. It is a literary text which contains a considerably bold message regarding the society of the period. However, the fact that this novel was left half-finished makes it difficult to definitively determine its literary value. Nevertheless, the novel offers many possibilities to reflect on the first period of modernization in Cypriot Muslim society, containing as it does, evidence that western ideology was, by that time, already infiltrating the literary works of Cypriot Muslims.

**Conclusion**

The publication of Ottoman Turkish newspapers in Cyprus took place as a consequence of a series of political developments that would significantly change the history of the island. The regulations put into effect by the Ottoman sultans in response to foreign and domestic social pressure encouraged the people to participate in politics and to oppose one-man rule. During the Reform Era, when many institutions gained an entirely new and increasingly western face,
Sultan Abdul Hamid II resigned himself to the constitutionalist demands of the Young Turks. In 1876 he declared the first constitutional monarchy, but soon established an oppressive regime of his own in an effort to consolidate power by dissolving the elected parliament. In this period, newspapers gained importance as the major platform for Ottoman citizens to express their opposition to the Sultan. In response, however, the Sultan did not hesitate in his efforts to fiercely censor the press. Many journalists who opposed the Sultan were arrested, imprisoned or exiled. In this climate, many journalists fled abroad and continued their opposition at a distance, through their newspapers, which were used as a tool to disseminate their political views to a wider audience. Among them are those who, for instance, travelled to London and Paris, such as Namık Kemal, who published newspapers such as Hürriyet ("Liberty") and the like, as well those Ottoman citizens of Armenian origin who fled to Egypt, the rival of the Ottoman Empire in the East. We may cite Alexan Sarrafian, who published the first Ottoman newspapers in Cyprus, Umid and Dik-el Shark, as an example of those who fled Istanbul for Egypt, before coming to Cyprus among the Sultan’s non-Muslim opponents. Among the Muslim Ottomans who visited Cyprus, Muzaffereddin Galib, who was brought to the island to assist in the publication of Zaman, stands out among the dissident Ottoman intellectuals who pioneered the establishment of the Cypriot press. However, both Sarrafian and Galib suffered the wrath of the Sultan: the former’s newspapers were banned from dispatch abroad and for a short time their publication was suspended completely; the latter was forced to leave Zaman, of which he was one of the founders, and then Yeni Zaman was closed within a year as a result of the Sultan’s censorship.

Cyprus’ unique socio-political conditions played a crucial role in the formation of the Cypriot press. Greek nationalism, which was imported from Greece following its independence from the Ottomans in 1821, exerted a strong influence on Cypriot Orthodox intellectuals. They began to speak up in support of enosis (the movement of various Greek communities living outside Greece for the incorporation of the regions they inhabit into the Greek state). As of 1878, when the administration of the island was temporarily transferred to the British, these expectations came to the fore. Greek Cypriots realized how useful newspapers could be in communicating their political ideas to their fellow countrymen, inside and outside Greek borders. Dreams of publishing the first Greek newspaper on the island were realized once the necessary equipment had been brought from Egypt, yet, against expectations, the British occupation meant it was published bilingually, in English and Greek. Other local Greek newspapers were to follow soon after, however. Thus, the city of Larnaca, the economic and cultural centre of the period and the location of several western embassies or consulates, played a leading role in the first decades of the Cypriot press. At that time, the British administration, which was trying to gradually establish an effective bureaucracy on the island, felt the necessity to use Ottoman Turkish in its official newspapers and other official documents, and thanks to the Armenian translators and

---

42 Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) became known for his censorship on press and literature. See Tanpınar 1988, p. 516.
typographers brought to the island from Egypt, they created the conditions for publishing in
Ottoman Turkish on the island. Thus, the short-lived Umid (“Hope”) and Dik-el Shark (“Rooster
of the East”) newspapers, published by Alexan Sarrafian in Larnaca, met with a Cypriot Muslim
readership. In the last decade of the 19th century, newspapers such as Zaman, Yeni Zaman and
Kibris, of which copies were accessible in archives, began to be published one after another,
after Cypriot Muslims founded the first Zaman Printing House in Nicosia. Those were the years
when Nicosia raised its standing crucially in the island’s cultural and political environment. It
should again be emphasized that politics is one of the prominent reasons that Muslims pub-
lished newspapers in Cyprus during Ottoman rule. Then, once the administration of the island
was transferred from the Ottomans to the British, Greek Cypriots increasingly relied on news-
papers to express their claim to ownership over Cyprus, and to voice their support for enosis. In
such a political environment, Cypriot Muslims needed to respond to their rivals.
It should be emphasized that the newspapers published in Greek and Ottoman Turkish
between the years 1878 and 1900, which were at the core of journalistic activity on the island,
were one of the factors that contributed to the institution of democracy in Cyprus. The newspa-
pers served as the platform for major islander ethnic and religious groups to engage in political
dialogue. When we consider the Ottoman newspapers in themselves, we see that, on the one
hand, there are those who publish material loyal to the Sultan, and on the other hand, there
are newspapers such as Yeni Zaman and Kibris which were pro-constitutional. Democratic pro-
cesses had begun gaining ground within the Muslim community as well.
Thanks to the newspapers we have been discussing, the Cypriot Muslim community
becomes, on the one hand, gradually more and more integrated in the political process, and on
the other, enters in to the process of defining itself as a distinctive society. We have seen that
political concepts such as freedom, equality and justice, which were imported into Ottoman
territory under the influence of the French revolution and during its period of westernization,
gradually entered the Muslim political lexicon. They begin to compare themselves with the
Orthodox Cypriot majority with whom they were in competition, as well as with the British rul-
ers who took over the island from the Ottomans. In this process, it is noteworthy that they iden-
tified themselves primarily in terms of their religious identity – with Islam. At a time when the
Orthodox population met with Greek nationalism, the Cypriot Muslims considered themselves
part of a worldwide Islamic community. They problematized the underdeveloped state of the
Ottoman Empire in particular, and the entire Islamic community more generally, in terms of
education, trade, industry, and science. European innovations in the positive sciences, the level
of development western society enjoyed, political developments, architectural achievements,
and the lifestyle of the western urban class were all announced to Muslim readers on the pages
of newspapers. In this sense, newspapers can be said to have ‘enlightened’ the Muslim commu-
nity. Newspapers offered them a prescriptive view of the conditions they had to meet in order to
approximate the level of development they saw in the western world. Briefly put, the newspa-
pers paved the way for modernization. In this regard, the assessment of Ottoman newspapers
as having merely undertaken the function of opposing Cypriot Orthodox demands for enosis
omits a great deal. It should be stressed that these newspapers not only paved the way for the
modernization of Cypriot Muslims, but also provided a democratic platform for a wide range of political confrontations – despite the censorship the Sultan exerted on them from time to time.

Yet the impact of newspapers on Cypriot Muslims had not only been political in nature. The phrase “speaks up on politics, literature and (life) sciences” displayed at the top of the first page of Zaman, copies of which were available in the oldest Arabic script, provides us with a convenient summary of the newspaper’s mission. Alongside politics and science, the newspaper was used as a medium of literature for Cypriot Muslims, from the very beginning. The first examples of literary genres such as essays, travel writing, memoirs, and short stories, were imported from the west by newspapers, as well as various news articles that constitute evidence that Cypriot Muslims were adopting western ideas. Among these literary works, the most salient genre is undoubtedly the genre of the novel. Kaytazzade Mehmet Nazım’s second novel, left half finished, offers various clues that the first examples of the genre were written in pursuit of a strategy that relied on the eastern narrative tradition. In a novel which contains messages in harmony with the conservative moral values of Cypriot Muslims, the plot pulls away and leaves the reader in abrupt confrontation with scenes more appropriate to western realism. Moreover, the fact that women, who do not otherwise appear in the first newspapers, appear as heroines in a novel, and mention “freedom of conscience” during a seemingly naive discussion on marital customs, may well have been interpreted as constitutionalist propaganda by the mufti, who was the guardian of censorship at the time. The expressions our male author gives his characters may be regarded as feminist, or a disguised expression of his own political ideology. In all likelihood, even the use of the phrase “freedom of conscience” – or just the concept of “liberty” – opens the door to the implication that politics have infiltrated the novel from its inception, and that apparently innocent stories of romance may have always been used for the purposes of propaganda, and not just to enchant their readers in a moment of passing and apolitical literary pleasure.

---

43 Mufti is an official learned in Islamic law who is in charge of Islamic affairs for a province or district: www.seslisozluk.net. Accessed 26 December 2020.

44 At that time, Sultan Abdul Hamid II was monitoring the local papers on the island through the mufti of Cyprus, and in case they published news, articles etc. which he considered objectionable, he would stop their circulation outside Cyprus and ban their publication. See Mert 2003, p. 68-71.
Bibliography

AKYÜZ K. n.d. Modern Türk Edebiyatının Ana Çizgileri, 5th ed. Istanbul.
AVALON A. 1995. The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History. New York & Oxford.
COBHAM C. D. 1969. Excerpta Cypria. Nicosia.
DEDEÇAY S. S. 1989. Kıbrıslı Basın, volumes 1-2. Nicosia.
DEMİRÜREK M. 2004. Kıbrıs Türk Basını ve Türkiye Hükümetleri I Osmanlı Dönemi 1878-1910. Ankara.
ENGİN Ü. 1995. The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History. New York & Oxford.
EVİN A. E. 1983. Origins and Developments of the Turkish Novel. Minneapolis.
FEDAI H. 2002. Kıbrıs Türk Kültürü Bildiriler I. Ankara.
FINN R. 1984. The Early Turkish Novel 1872-1900. Istanbul.
GIRGIN A. 2001. Türk Basın Tarihi’nde Yerel Gazetecilik. İstanbul.
GÖKÇEK F. 2018. “Bir edebi tür olarak Türk romanının ortaya çıkmasının tarıhsel süreci ve bu süreç içindeki özellikleri hakkında neler söyleyebilirsiniz?”, M. Narlı (ed.), 40 Soruda Türk Romanı. İstanbul, pp. 17-19.
HADJIPRODROMOU A. (ed.) 1990. Mass Media in Cyprus. Nicosia.
KUNTAY M. C. 1949. Namık Kemal Devrin İnsanları ve Olayları Arasında, vol. 2. Ankara.
MERT Ö. 2003. “Osmanlı Belgelerine Göre Bir Kıbrıs Gazetesı: Zaman”, Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları 4, p. 61-87. Accessed 18 November 2020. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/iuydta/issue/952.
MORAN B. 2012. Türk romanına eleştirel bir bakış I. İstanbul.
MUTLUYAKALI C. (ed.). 2012. Kıbrıs Türk Basın Tarihi. Nicosia.
NAZIM K. M. 2004. The Remnant of Love (trans. Fuat Memduh). Nicosia.
SOPHOCLEOUS A. Cl. 1995. Συμβολή στην ιστορία του κυπριακού τύπου. Nicosia.
— 1997. Οι πρώτες κυπριακές εφημερίδες και τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα των Ελλήνων της Κύπρου. Nicosia.
— 2008. Τα κυπριακά μέσα μαζικής ενημέρωσης (Mass Media in Cyprus). Nicosia.
ÜNLÜ C. 1981. Kıbrıs'ta Basın Olayları (1878-1981). Ankara.
TANPINAR A. H. 1988. 19'uncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi, 7th ed. Istanbul.
YİKİK A. 2017. “A Protagonist in Cyprus’ Tanzimat Literature: Kaytazzade Mehmet Nazım”, B. Sagaster, T. Stavrides and B. Hoffman (eds.), Press and Mass Communication in the Middle East. Festschrift for Martin Strohmeier. Bamberg, pp. 151-170.
YÜCEL D. M. 2017. “Son Dönem Osmanlı Düşüncesinde Hürriyet Kavramının Çözümlenmesi”. Kafkas Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 19, pp. 179-188.