

Dressing Primary School Children in Mid-Eighteenth Century Istanbul

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Context

The pious endowment accounting document presented here, which is from the Topkapı Palace Museum Archive (TS.MA.d 4284 9/1), delineates the attire of primary school (*şıbyān mektebi*) children.¹ It is of considerable significance as it elucidates the idealized representations of clothing for children. The preliminary observations regarding the attire of children in early modern Ottoman society are predominantly interpreted as reflections of adult roles.² While scholarly interpretations have revealed the distinctive characteristics of pre-modern conceptions of childhood, the idea that children were seen as representations prepared for adulthood during the early modern period still holds considerable importance.

Eighteenth-century Ottoman poet Sünbülzade Vehbi suggests his son act appropriately by dressing like an adult male while avoiding clothing that surpasses that of his peers. Leyla Kayhan Elbirlik's remarks on clothing within Vehbi's understanding of the ideal child show the idea that clothing also embodies Islamic morality.³ Evaluating the association between childhood and adulthood as a process of moral preparation from the former to the latter indicates that children's attire is partially in accordance with contemporary clothing consumption trends observed in Ottoman society. Therefore, this document identifies clothing appropriate for primary school children, enhancing our understanding of eighteenth-century childhood and advancing textile studies. Based on the details provided in this document, I assert that the initial reflection of a specific, albeit informal, characterization is observed regarding children's school uniforms through particular items, despite their general similarity to adult clothing.

¹ BOA, TS.MA.d 4284 9/1.

² Marianna Yerasimos, "16.-19. Yüzyılda Batı Kaynaklı Gravürlerde Osmanlı Çocuk Figürleri," in *Toplumsal Tarihte Çocuk: Sempozyum, 23-24 Nisan 1993*, ed. Bekir Onur (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1994), 67-75.

³ Leyla Kayhan Elbirlik, "The Emotional Bond between Early Modern Ottoman Children and Parents: A Case Study of Sünbülzade Vehbi's 'Ideal' Child (1700-1800)," in *Children and Childhood in the Ottoman Empire From the 15th to the 20th Century*, ed. Gülay Yılmaz and Fruma Zachs (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 142-43.

The primary school referenced in this document was situated in Salıpazarı and was under the auspices of the Nuruosmaniye pious foundations (*evkâf*). The document was dated to the year 1173 AH (between 25 August 1759 and 12 August 1760 CE), which was approximately five years subsequent to the inauguration of Nuruosmaniye complex.⁴ It meticulously records the expenditures for clothing for the children, alongside the remuneration allotted for the school's instructors and the associated costs. This document stands out for two notable reasons concerning Ottoman consumption studies: first, it showcases student clothing in eighteenth century Istanbul; second, the pricing information it provides contributes to the limited sources available related to prices in eighteenth-century consumption studies. While the financial details pertaining to the foundation's expenses are undeniably significant, my primary objective in presenting this document lies in highlighting the relevance of the clothing inventory for children contextualized within the broader historical narrative of consumption patterns.

In this document, the clothing items designated for school-aged children align with the foundational attire habits of Ottoman men, women, and children. The seven garments listed form a complete and conventional set of outerwear, featuring *kapama* (coat), *entârî* (loose robe), *çintiyân* (shintiyan), *kuşak* (sash), *mest* (under-shoes), and *pâpûc* (shoes), topped off with *fes-i kırmızî* (red fez) as headwear. Although the items provided by the endowment may not inherently embody the preferences of the children or their caretakers, the prevailing consumption habits in apparel exerted a significant influence on the nature of the donations received. This connection between philanthropy and social ideals was evident in broader dynamics, particularly in the early modern clothing used to express belonging and representation. In this context, the lack of explicit reference to gender within this document is noteworthy, given that Ottoman primary schools were characterized as institutions that furnished education for both

⁴ The construction of Nuruosmaniye, as a mosque complex, commenced during the reign of Mahmud I and was opened in 1755 during the rule of Sultan Osman III: Fatih Köse, "Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Nuruosmaniye Camii İnşası-Tamirleri ve Onarımları," Vakıf Restorasyon Yıllığı, no. 5 (2012): 26–41.

genders.⁵ This absence further underscores how perceived similarities between early modern Ottoman women's and men's clothes shaped the designated norms for children, regardless of their quality or manner of wear.⁶ *Entārī* forms the essential attire, not specific to children, and is complemented by accessories such as *kuşak*, *çintiyān*, and footwear as *mest* with *pāpūc*. In addition, the allocated amount for the *na'īce*, the iron heel for shoes, likely reflects the total expenses, including the associated processing costs. Therefore, the items of fundamental early modern Ottoman attire were incorporated in this list without the need for gender identification.

The variety in the sizes provided shows that not all children attending the *şıbyān mektebi* in Salıpazarı were of identical age. The list highlights three distinct measurements exclusively for *çintiyān*, a type of trousers: five pieces of *şajir* (small), twenty pieces of *vasatçe* (medium), and twenty-two pieces of *vasat-ı kebîr* (medium large). This indicates that students of different ages received instruction at this primary school, resembling the practices observed in early modern Ottoman primary schools, where a single teacher facilitated learning for all students in one classroom.⁷ This practice arose because primary education typically occurred within schools in mosque complexes, predominantly comprising single-room masonry structures.⁸ Therefore, the list in this document, which enumerates forty-seven pieces of each category of clothing, indicates that there were at least forty-seven students enrolled at this institution. Within this framework, the clothing types provided by the endowment to these students of varying ages were not distinguished.

Nevertheless, the two specific clothing items, *fes* and *kapama*, stand for the initial characterization of children's uniforms in primary schools, irrespective of gender and

⁵ Osman Ergin, *Türkiye Maarif Tarihi*, vol. 1–2 (İstanbul: Eser Matbaası, 1977), 82; Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, vol. 3 (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1993), 201–202.

⁶ Betül İpşirli Argit, "Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Giyim Kuşam," in *Antik Çağ'dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Tarihi*, ed. Coşkun Yılmaz, vol. 4 (İstanbul: İBB Kültür AŞ, 2015), 240.

⁷ Elma Korić, "Childhood and Education in Ottoman Bosnia during the Early Modern Period (Mid Fifteenth to Late Eighteenth Century)," in *Children and Childhood in the Ottoman Empire From the 15th to the 20th Century*, ed. Gülay Yılmaz and Fruma Zachs (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 317.

⁸ Zeynep Ahunbay, "Mektep: Mimari," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2004), 7.

age. The distinguishing characteristics of early modern Ottoman dress were often depicted through accessories. Therefore, as an upper garment, *kapama* was predominantly associated with primary schools in Ottoman society. As noted by Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *kapama* was worn as an outer costume by both Janissaries and school children. He indicates that *kapama* makers (*kapamacı*) were one of the merchant groups in Istanbul. Furthermore, the term often referred to educational institutions, where primary school trips and clothing aids for school children were usually defined as *kapama*.⁹ Thus, it can be articulated as an item commonly worn by school children.

The concluding key point presented in this document is that *fes-i kırmızı* held considerable importance for school children during the latter half of the eighteenth century. This detail serves as a substantial record of the fez's usage in Ottoman Istanbul prior to its official adoption in the nineteenth century by the Ottomans. Youssef Ben Ismail's research on the use of the fez in early modern Ottoman society prior to Mahmud II highlights its significant presence in eighteenth-century Istanbul, as they were even granted their own guild. He notes that although the fez was seen as an accessory primarily associated with youth in Istanbul, it became popular among various tradesmen and some immigrants, symbolizing a sense of belonging throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁰ Accordingly, this document significantly contributes to the understanding of the consumption culture surrounding clothes produced in Istanbul, particularly revealing the specific attire of primary schools with the distinctive use of *kapama* and *fes-i kırmızı*. This is, in fact, further evidenced by the documentation that these two were recorded as regular donations for children attending other primary schools in Istanbul at the time.¹¹ This demonstrates their recognition as symbols of belonging for primary school children and the fact that *fes* and *kapama* makers in eighteenth-century Istanbul

⁹ Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1993), 164.

¹⁰ Youssef Ben Ismail, "A History of the Ottoman Fez before Mahmud II (ca. 1600–1800)," *Muqarnas Online* 38, no. 1 (2021): 164–71.

¹¹ The foundational charter (dated 1755) of Shaykh al-Islam Esat Efendi specified that annually, apart from *mîntan* (shirt), *kuşak*, *mest*, and *pâpûc*, children in the *şıbyân* schools should receive a *kapama* and a *fes*, see Ergin, *Türkiye Maarif Tarihi*, 1–2:88.

began to hold a notable role in the clothing expenditures of the pious endowments for primary school students.

Transcription

*Berāy-ı melbūsāt-ı şıbyān mekteb der şalı bāzārı
sene 1173*

<i>kapama</i> 47 ‘aded 79.5 <i>zīrā</i> ‘ <i>fī</i> 120
<i>entārī</i> 47 ‘aded 68 <i>zīrā</i> ‘ <i>fī</i> 160
<i>çintiyān-ı vasaṭ-ı kebīr</i> 22 ‘aded <i>fī</i> 150
<i>çintiyān-ı vasaṭçe</i> 20 ‘aded <i>fī</i> 120
<i>çintiyān-ı şağīr</i> 5 ‘aded <i>fī</i> 120
<i>kuşak</i> 47 ‘aded <i>fī</i> 39
<i>mest ma’a pāpūc</i> 47 ‘aded <i>fī</i> 90
<i>fes-i kırmızı</i> 47 ‘aded <i>fī</i> 90

<i>hā^vce-i mekteb</i>	1800
<i>efendiye</i>	
<i>halīfe-i mekteb</i>	1200
<i>na’çe bahā</i>	1560

berāy-ı şurre

<i>mütevellī</i>	7200
<i>kātib-i vakf</i>	3600
<i>rūznāmçe</i>	2400
<i>cābī-i vakf</i>	1200

Translation

For the garments of the primary school in Salıpazarı
year 1173 [AH (1759-60 CE)]

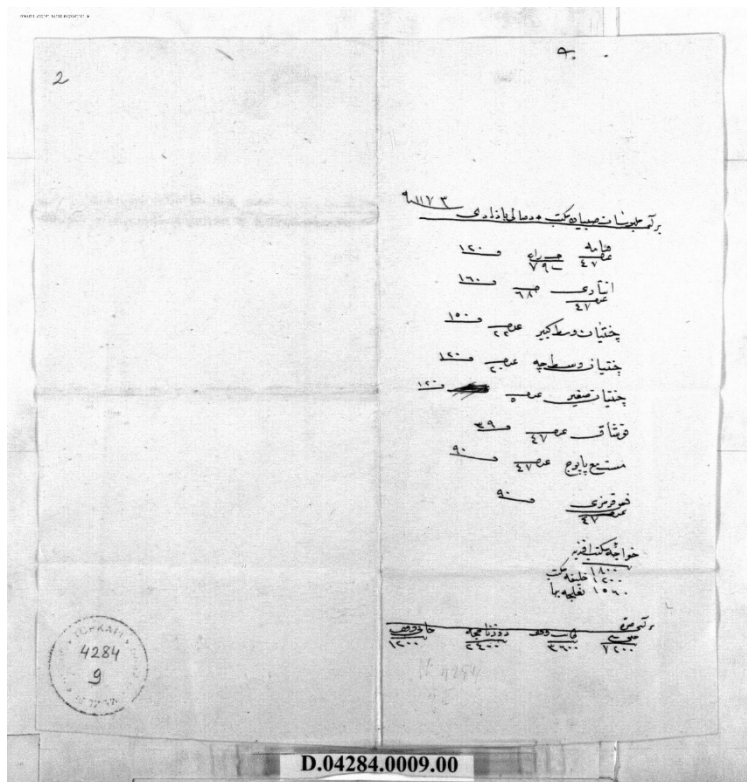
coat 47 pieces 79 cubits price 120	
loose robe 47 pieces 68 cubits price 160	
shintiyan medium large 22 pieces price 50	
shintiyan medium 20 pieces price 120	
shintiyan small 5 pieces price 120	
sash 47 pieces price 39	
under-shoes with shoes 47 pieces price 90	
red fez 47 pieces price 90	
to the head teacher (<i>effendi</i>) of the school	1800

assistant to the teacher	1200
costs of iron heels (for boot)	1560

for the *şurre*¹² funds

the waqf trustee	7200
foundation scribe	3600
daily ledger	2400
revenue collector of the waqf	1200

Facsimile



¹² The word *şurre* refers to the money, gold and other items that are usually sent every year before the Hajj period to be distributed to the people of Mecca and Medina. TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi Online, s.v. “Surre,” <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/surre>.

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