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## An Analysis of the Discourses on 'Sultan Mehmet II / Mehmet the Conqueror' in High School History Textbooks in Turkey from the Tanzimat Period to the Present in Terms of Historiographical Differences

### *Tanzimat Dönemi'nden Günümüze Türkiye'de Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarındaki "Sultan Mehmet II / Fatih"e Dair Anlatıların Tarihyazımsal Farklılıklar Açısından İncelenmesi*

**Abstract:** Textbooks play a crucial role in the content dimension of education, specifically concerning the subject matter taught during the learning and teaching processes. In contemporary educational frameworks, government-supervised textbooks serve as the primary source of information, disseminating knowledge that is considered appropriate by the authorities to a broad audience within the public sphere. Notably, history textbooks have emerged as significant instruments for the government in shaping state-society dynamics, largely due to the extensive information they encompass. This underscores the necessity for historiographical analysis of history textbooks utilized in schools since the Tanzimat Period, when the Turkish education system underwent Western modernization. This study aims to investigate the portrayal of Sultan Mehmet II (Mehmet the Conqueror), who orchestrated the conquest of Istanbul, as represented in high school history textbooks from the Tanzimat Period to the present, focusing on historiographical variations. The analysis of the textbooks revealed several distinct narratives regarding (1) Mehmet II's initial ascension to the throne and subsequent abdication, (2) his second ascension, (3) his role during the conquest of Istanbul, (4) his demeanor post-conquest, (5) his personal attributes, and (6) the circumstances surrounding his death. Ultimately, the historiographical discrepancies identified in the textbooks were assessed about the prevailing ideologies of their respective periods and the power dynamics that shape knowledge for specific ends.

**Key Words:** Sultan Mehmet II, Mehmet the Conqueror, history textbooks, historiograph

**Öz:** Ders kitapları, öğrenme-öğretme süreçlerinde "ne" öğretileceği ile ilgili olan içerik boyutunun önemli bir parçasıdır. Modern eğitim sistemlerinde iktidar gözetiminde hazırlanan ders kitapları, iktidarın uygun gördüğü bilginin kamusal düzende geniş halk kitlelerine sunulduğu temel bilgi kaynağı olarak işlev görür. Özellikle tarih ders kitapları doğası gereği içerdikleri yoğun bilgi nedeniyle devlet-toplum ilişkileri bağlamında iktidarın önemli yönlendirme araçlarından biri konumuna dönüşmüş durumdadır. Bu durum, Türk eğitim sisteminin Batı modernleşmesiyle şekillendirildiği Tanzimat Dönemi'nden bugüne okullarda okutulan tarih ders kitaplarının tarihyazımsal araştırmalara tabi tutulmasını gerekli kılmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın amacı İstanbul'un fethini gerçekleştiren Sultan Mehmet II (Fatih) karakterine dair anlatıların, Tanzimat'tan günümüze lise tarih ders kitaplarında nasıl yer aldığı tarihyazımsal farklılıklar bağlamında incelenmesidir. Araştırmada analiz edilen ders kitaplarından hareketle ortaya çıkan bulgulara göre (1) Mehmet II'nin ilk kez tahta çıkması ve sonrasında tahtan geri çekilmesi, (2) Mehmet II'nin ikinci kez tahta çıkma süreci, (3) İstanbul'un fethi sürecinde Mehmet II, (4) Fetih sonrasında Mehmet II'nin tutumu, (5) Mehmet II'nin kişisel özellikleri ve (6) Mehmet II'nin ölümü konularının tarihsel süreçte farklı anlatılarla sunulduğu görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak ders kitaplarında yer alan tarihyazımsal ele alış farklılıkları, içinde bulunulan dönemin hâkim ideolojisi ve iktidarın belirli amaçlarla bilgiyi yeniden üretmesi gibi etkenlerle ilişkilendirilerek değerlendirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sultan Mehmet II, Fatih, tarih ders kitapları, tarihyazımı

## **Introduction**

History can be explained as research carried out by historians living in a certain period about the past and the information they reveal as a result of this research. Accordingly, the transformation of history into knowledge is only possible through the initiative and research process of the historian. In this context, it can be said that the quality of historical knowledge is determined by the historian from the selection of the subject to the planning of the research process, from the use of sources to the stages of producing meaning from these sources. This situation, as Carr says, indicates that the historian is worth analyzing as much as history.<sup>1</sup>

The task of explaining how the historian behaves in the process of researching and producing history and how he is influenced by which factors are revealed through historiography. Historiography is a field that investigates the events, people, institutions, situations, and mentality of a particular community, state, or civilization in the past, and can be defined as an academic field of study that critically analyses the methods, theories and approaches used by the historian in the process, and the narratives in the text constructed at the end of the process. In other words, historiography is a field of study that focuses on the work process and products of the historian. This framework, also deals with the production of historical interpretations and concepts about human beings and the literary culture formed by human beings.

Due to the legitimacy provided by history, those in power have utilized history in almost every age and in different ways. However, the idea of modernization and the nation-state, which spread across the world with the French Revolution of 1789 after the Industrial Revolution, brought a new approach to the instrumental use of history in nation-building processes. This was made possible not only by writing history but also by teaching it in modern educational institutions. Therefore, the instrumental use of history "for citizenship education" has emerged within the modern education system.

Modern education, while existing with a scientific and national perspective, has not been independent of ideology, power relations, and politics in the context of knowledge-power-power relations.<sup>2</sup> From this point of view, it can be said that the government shapes the field of knowledge by using the educational apparatus and various discursive tools, especially textbooks, and recreates a "fit-for-purpose" "educational order" to build a collective memory that is always shaped in line with new goals. In this framework, it can be stated that both historiography and history teaching has turned into a kind of "legitimacy" field produced by the power through teachers, curricula, and textbooks. In this respect, it can be said that the most controversial tools are textbooks.

Textbooks are an important organizer of the content related to "what" will be taught in learning-teaching processes. In modern education systems, textbooks, which are prepared under the supervision of the government, function as the main source of information through which the knowledge deemed appropriate is presented to large masses of people in the public order. In this context, it can be said that textbooks in Turkey are an important part of every level of education, from kindergarten to high school. Although teachers and curricula seem to be the determinants of the lessons, textbooks can be considered to be in focus in terms of providing some practical opportunities in the teaching of the lessons. In a way, they are both a tool for the

<sup>1</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *Tarih Nedir?*, trans. Misket Gizem Gürtürk (Istanbul: İletişim Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Paulo Freire & Macedo Donaldo. *Okuryazarlık: Sözcükleri ve Dünyayı Okuma* trans. S. Ayhan (Ankara: İmge Press, 1998).

teacher to plan the lesson and an important resource that students can relate to outside the lesson. Therefore, it can be said that an educational opportunity emerges within the framework of the content (information-interpretation) offered by textbooks. For history textbooks, it is possible to talk about these functions and more.

History textbooks, which are teaching material in the learning-teaching process, can be considered among the popular works that the general public is exposed to, even though they are included in the writing and acceptance processes carried out under the supervision of the state. History textbooks have neither a rigid notion like academic studies nor a disorganized structure like other popular works. History textbooks can be considered to be at a transition point between the academic and the popular. In addition to the dense information they contain by nature, textbooks can turn into one of the important manipulation tools of power in the context of state-society relations over time. It can be said that history textbooks in Turkey are reconstructed within the framework of the education system shaped according to the ideologies of the ruling powers, the collective memory that develops according to political periods, and the official understanding of history that shapes it.<sup>3</sup>

Stating that writing the past is not an "innocent" act, Burke stated that the memories that are not considered objective and the *selection, interpretation, and distortion* in the records describing the past are socially conditioned.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Schudson, who underlines that selective memory contains opposites such as "seeing-not seeing" and "remembering-forgetting" and that *distortion* in collective memory is something *that cannot be prevented*, has put forward the dynamics of distortion in collective memory in four basic dimensions.<sup>5</sup> These are; distanciation, instrumentalisation, narrativisation, and conventionalization. The first dimension, which is defined as "distanciation", expresses an objection and withdrawal that past events did not happen. In this dimension, people begin to forget the related events that are considered problematic as time passes. In the process of forgetting, people lose the details of the past event and the intensity of the emotional intensity they experience decreases.<sup>6</sup> In time, two different moral understandings of the past begin to emerge. The first type of understanding manifests itself as an attempt to justify the past by removing it from the sphere of social responsibilities. The second understanding emerges as the "idolization, sacralization" and institutionalization of the past. This situation involves desirably directing the relevant past through subsequent interventions.

Another dynamic of distortion in collective memory is instrumentalization. This dimension can be expressed as the use of the past by distorting it for certain reasons. Here, the past can be shaped into the desired form in order to mold the present. Information about the past can be selected and emphasized by the purpose, or it can be ignored through cropping, suppression, and censorship.<sup>7</sup> Thus, with a kind of cognitive bias, history writes the "winners"<sup>8</sup> and the justifications of past conflicts are reconstructed through the dominant discourse.<sup>9</sup> The dimension of distortion expressed as *narrativisation* is the effort to present the past as a composition with a prologue-development-conclusion part and to make it interesting by embellishing it with a language that everyone can understand.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the fourth distortion

<sup>3</sup> Mehmet Gündüz, *Türkiye'de Ders Kitapları Tarihi* (Ankara: Republic Of Türkiye (T.C.) Ministry Of National Education (MEB) Press, 2023), 509-510.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca-Newyork: Cornell University Press, 1997), 44.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Schudson, "Kolektif Bellekte Çarpıtma Dinamikleri", *Cogito* 50 (2007): 179-199, p. 181.

<sup>6</sup> Schudson, "Kolektif Bellekte Çarpıtma Dinamikleri", 182.

<sup>7</sup> Schudson, "Kolektif Bellekte Çarpıtma Dinamikleri", 184-187.

<sup>8</sup> Schudson, "Kolektif Bellekte Çarpıtma Dinamikleri", 186.

<sup>9</sup> Serhan Mersin, "Azınlık Filmleri: Tarihin Yeniden İnşası ve Kolektif Bellek", *Sinecine* 1, no. 2 (2010): 5-29, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Schudson, "Kolektif Bellekte Çarpıtma Dinamikleri", 187.

dynamic is *conventionalization* or *cognitivism*. This can be expressed as making the past "knowable". In this dimension, an organized and constructed past emerges rather than the one experienced.<sup>11</sup>

History textbooks in Turkey date back to the modern schools opened during the Ottoman modernization process. In the Tanzimat Period, history and geography courses were given a special place in the modern curricula created with the establishment of modern schools such as "Mekteb-i Rüştiye, Mekteb-i İdadi, Mekteb-i Sultani" which provided formal education at the secondary and higher levels for the general public, apart from the trio of "Mekteb-i Harbiye" (War Academy), "Mekteb-i Tıbbîye" (Imperial School of Medicine), "Mekteb-i Mülkiye-i Şahane" (Imperial School of the Civil Services), which aimed to train technical personnel. Therefore, history curricula and textbooks within the framework of the Ottoman modern education system were prepared in this period. This situation necessitates the historiographical research and analysis of history textbooks taught in schools since the Tanzimat Period when the Turkish education system was shaped by Western modernity.

Based on the issues mentioned above, it is seen that history textbooks are taken as the primary research source/material in many scientific studies in domestic and foreign literature. However, when the literature in Turkey is examined, it is possible to come across studies that analyse history textbooks from different perspectives. The most common criterion for analyzing history textbooks is to analyse the content. It is seen that the studies analyzing history textbooks in terms of content focus on *identity transmission*<sup>12</sup>, *conformity with the basic aims of national education*<sup>13</sup>, *conformity with the relevant curriculum*<sup>14</sup>, *values education*<sup>15</sup>, *gender*<sup>16</sup>,

<sup>11</sup> Schudson, "Kolektif Bellekte Çarpıtma Dinamikleri", 193.

<sup>12</sup> Berrin Kübra Daloğlu, "Lise Tarih Dersi Kitaplarında Yer Alan Milli Kimlik Kavramının İçerik Analizi: 1939-1950", (Master's Thesis, Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2013); M. Talha Çiçek, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Ders Kitapları Çerçevesinde Türk Ulus Kimliği İnşası ve Arap İhaneti", *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 32 (2012): 169-188; Yücel Kabapınar, "Bir İdeolojik Mücadele Alanı Olarak Lise Tarih Kitapları-I", *Tarih ve Toplum* 106 (1992): 36-40; Yücel Kabapınar, "Bir İdeolojik Mücadele Alanı Olarak Lise Tarih Kitapları-II", *Tarih ve Toplum* 107 (1992): 28-31; Yücel Kabapınar, "Bir İdeolojik Mücadele Alanı Olarak Lise Tarih Kitapları-III", *Tarih ve Toplum* 108 (1992): 39-44; Yücel Kabapınar, "İdeolojik Bir Sendroma Yanıt", *Tarih ve Toplum* 113 (1993): 306-312; Tercan Yıldırım, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Kimlik Söylemi* (İstanbul: Yeni İnsan Press, 2016); Tercan Yıldırım & Ahmet Şimşek, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde "Biz" in İnşası: Tarih Ders Kitapları Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *Gazi Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 37, no. 1 (2017): 367-389; Fatih Yazıcı & Tercan Yıldırım, "History Teaching as A Nation-Building Tool in The Early Republican Period in Turkey (1923-1938)", *Paedagogica Historica* 54, no. 1 (2018): 1-14.

<sup>13</sup> Hakan Turan, "Liselerde Okutulması Önerilen Tarih Ders Kitaplarının İçeriğinin Türk Milli Eğitimi'nin Genel Amaçlarıyla Tutarlılığı", (Master's Thesis, Hacettepe University Institute of Social Sciences, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Bülent Akbaba, "History Curricula Changing...What About History Textbooks?" *V. International History Education Symposium*, İstanbul: 10-12 May 2018; Bülent Akbaba, "2017 Ortaöğretim Tarih Dersi 9-11 Öğretim Programında Yer Alan "Ders Kitabı Yazımında Dikkat Edilmesi Gereken Hususlar"ın 9. Sınıf Tarih Ders Kitabındaki Yansımaları", *Turkish History Education Journal* 8 (2019): 1-26.

<sup>15</sup> Tuğçe Durmaz & Togay Seçkin Birbudak, "Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Sorumluluk Değerinin Yeri (9. Sınıf Ders Kitabı İncelemesi)", *V. International History Education Symposium*, İstanbul: 10-12 May 2018; Yusuf Keskin, "Tarih Dersi Öğretim Programı ve Ders Kitaplarında Değerler Eğitimi", *Turkish Studies* 10(7) (2015): 659-674; Köksal Muç & Akif Pamuk, "Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Değerler ve Değer Aktarım Yaklaşımları", *Turkish History Education Journal* 9, no. 2 (2020): 532-548; Rawaa Hamdoon Mohammed Yateemlr, "Irak ve Türkiye Tarih Ders Kitaplarının Değer Eğitimi Açısından Karşılaştırılması" (Master's Thesis, Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2023); Tercan Yıldırım, "Yeni Ortaöğretim Tarih Ders Programları ve 9. Sınıf Tarih Ders Kitabında Değerler Eğitimi", *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 33 (2018): 557-572.

<sup>16</sup> Mehmet Alparğu & Hülya Çelik, "Türkiye'de Güncel Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Kadın Tarihinin Yeri", *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2016): 131-144; Lokman Aydın, "Ortaöğretim Tarih Öğretim Programları ve Ders Kitaplarının Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Açısından İncelenmesi ve Değerlendirilmesi", *XVIII. Turkish History Congress*, Ankara: 1-7 October 2018, 397-419; Nurhan Başoğlu, "Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Kadının Görünmezliği, Orta Asya Türk Kadın Tarihi" (Master's Thesis, İstanbul University Institute of Social

democracy education<sup>17</sup> or the adequacy of the content in general<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand, certain historical topics such as *Anatolian civilizations*<sup>19</sup>, *Islamic history*<sup>20</sup>, *Seljuk history*<sup>21</sup>, *European history*<sup>22</sup>, *Balkan Wars*<sup>23</sup>, *First World War*<sup>24</sup>, *Çanakkale Wars*<sup>25</sup>, *National Struggle*<sup>26</sup>, *Lausanne Peace Treaty*<sup>27</sup> were examined. In addition, there are studies that reveal how themes such as *Islam*<sup>28</sup>, *war*<sup>29</sup>, *Turkish world*<sup>30</sup>, *epidemics*<sup>31</sup>, *elements of violence*<sup>32</sup>, *economic mentality*<sup>33</sup>, *economy*<sup>34</sup>, *social history*<sup>35</sup> and *historiography*<sup>36</sup> are reflected in history textbooks.

Sciences, 1996); Sevim Can, "Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Kadının Görünen Yüzü", *Sakarya University International-Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Congress*, Sakarya: 5-7 March 2009; Ebru Demircioğlu, "10. ve 11. Sınıf Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Yer Alan Görseller ve Metinlerde Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temsiliyle İlgili Tarih Öğretmenlerinin Görüşleri (Trabzon Örneği)" (PhD diss., Atatürk University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2014); Melis Akay Şahin & Mehmet Açıkalın, "Türkiye'deki Ortaöğretim Tarih ve Sosyal Bilimler Ders Kitaplarında Kadın Şahsiyetler" *Mediterranean Journal of Women's Studies and Gender* 6, no. 1 (2023): 92-122.

<sup>17</sup> İsmail Hakkı Demircioğlu, "Tarih Ders Kitaplarının Demokrasi Eğitimi Açısından Değerlendirilmesi: Tarih Öğretmenlerinin Görüşleri", *I. International Symposium on European Union, Democracy, Citizenship and Citizenship Education*, (Uşak: 28-30 May 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Tarık Mintaş, "Ortaöğretim Tarih Ders Kitapları İçeriklerinin Yeterliliği (Öğretmen Görüşleri)", (Master's Thesis, Cumhuriyet University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Recep Yıldırım, "Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Anadolu Uyarlıkları", *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları*, in 161-166, ed. S. Özbaran (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Press, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Ömer Faruk Kırmıt, "Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarında İslam Tarihi Konu Anlatımı (1923-1960)", (PhD diss., Ankara University Institute of Turkish Revolution History, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Mehmet Suat Bal, "Türkiye'de Selçuklu Tarihi Öğretiminin Tarih Dersi Programı, Tarih Dersi Kitabı ve Orta Öğretim Tarih Öğretmeleri Görüşleri Çerçevesinde İncelenmesi", *Turkish History Education Journal* 9, no. 2 (2020): 570-585.

<sup>22</sup> Zeki Arıkan, "Ders Kitaplarında Avrupa Tarihi" *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları*, in 145-160, ed. S. Özbaran, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Meliha Köse, "1997 ile 2012 Yılları Arasında İlköğretim ve Ortaöğretimde Okutulan Sosyal Bilgiler ve Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Balkan Savaşları", *Sakarya Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 26 (2014): 132-160.

<sup>24</sup> Hülya Gölgesiz & Gedikler Saadet Tekin, "Türkiye'de Orta Öğretim Kurumları Ders Kitaplarında I. Dünya Savaşı'nın Öğretimi", *Journal of Contemporary Turkish Historical Studies* 18, no. 37 (2018): 475-510.

<sup>25</sup> Şerafettin Zeyrek, "Liselerde Okutulan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ve Atatürkçülük Adlı Ders Kitaplarında Çanakkale Savaşları", *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* 10, no. 40 (2007): 707-721.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmet Şimşek & Emre Çakmakçı, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi İlkokul Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Millî Mücadele", *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 15, no. 30 (2019): 189-227.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmet Tokmak & İlyas Kara, "Tarihsel Arka Planıyla Lozan Barış Antlaşması ve Ders Kitaplarına Yansıması", *History Studies* 15, (2023): 121-138.

<sup>28</sup> Yetkin, Sabri, "Lise Tarih Kitaplarında İslam", *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları*, in 167-195, ed. S. Özbaran, (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Press, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Özgür Aktaş, "Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Savaş Konularının Anlatımı Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme", *Adıyaman University Journal of Institute of Social Sciences* 14 (2013): 69-106.

<sup>30</sup> Büşra Ersanlı Behar, "Tarih Öğretiminde Türk Dünyası", *Tarih Öğretimi ve Ders Kitapları*, in 196-211, Ed. S. Özbaran (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Press, 1995); Taner Karakuzu & İlker Limon, "Ortaöğretim Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Orta Asya Türk Cumhuriyetlerinin Yeri Üzerine Bir Analiz", *Electronic Journal of Political Science Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 81-103.

<sup>31</sup> Namık Çencen, "1933'ten Günümüze Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Salgın Hastalıkların İşlenişine Genel Bir Bakış", *Milli Eğitim* 49, no. 1 (2020) : 919-946.

<sup>32</sup> Savaş Yücel, "2002-2003 Eğitim-Öğretim Yılında Okutulan Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarındaki Şiddet Öğelerine Yönelik İçerik Analizi" (Master's Thesis, Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Ahmet Şimşek, "Osmanlı İktisat Tarihi Konularının Öğretimine Zihniyet Temelli Bir Yaklaşım", *Akademik Bakış Uluslararası Hakemli Sosyal Bilimler E-Dergisi* 16, no. 2 (2009): 1-11.

<sup>34</sup> Mehmet Alper Cantimer, "Klasik Dönem Osmanlı Ekonomisinin ve Zihniyetinin Cumhuriyet Dönemi Tarih Ders Kitaplarına Yansımaları", *PESA International Journal of Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015): 16-36.

<sup>35</sup> Kamil Kaya, "1990-2000 Yılları Arası Lise 2 Tarih Ders Kitaplarının Muhtevası ve Bu Ders Kitaplarında Sosyal Tarihin Yeri ve Önemi", (Master's Thesis, Yüzüncü Yıl University Institute of Social Sciences, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Besime Arzu Güngör, "1980-2000 Dönemi Orta Öğretim Tarih Ders Kitapları ve Dönemin Tarihiçilik Anlayışı", (Master's Thesis, Marmara University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2005).

Image studies on some *historical figures*<sup>37</sup> or *communities*<sup>38</sup> are also important research topics on the content of history textbooks. In addition to this, studies on the effects of some historical or political periods on the content of history textbooks have an important place.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned studies based on history textbooks, Sultan Mehmet II (Mehmet the Conqueror), who led the Ottoman Empire to a brilliant period and whose name is associated with the conquest of Istanbul, and the period of his reign have long been subjected to serious analyses as a popular research topic in the historical literature<sup>40</sup>. These studies, which are based on the data sources of the relevant historical period, are studies with academic depth that provide extremely detailed information about Mehmet II and his reign period. However, the issue of how Mehmet the Conqueror as a historical figure is reflected in history textbooks in a wide time interval from Tanzimat to the present day remains an important research topic that needs to be answered in the relevant literature.

In this research, the history textbooks taught in high schools from Tanzimat to the present day were determined as the research material and the character of " Mehmet the Conqueror" as a historical figure was analysed through this material. The aim of the research in this framework

<sup>37</sup> Eray Alaca, "Türkiye'de Siyasi İktidarların Değişimine Bağlı Olarak Orta Öğretim (Lise) Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı Padişahı İmajı: II. Abdülhamit Örneği", *OPUS International Journal of Society Researches* 8, no.14 (2018): 555-577; İlknur Menekşe Bozkurt, "Cumhuriyetten Günümüze Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Sultan İmajı (1931-2021)" (Master's Thesis, Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2022); Suat Çatar, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Sultan II. Abdülhamit İmajı", (Master's Thesis, Marmara University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2019); İlker Dere & Ahmet Burak Ülker, "Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Tarihi Şahsiyetler", *Gazi University Gazi Faculty of Education Journal* 42, no. 1 (2022): 921-956; Ahmet Şimşek, (Ed.), *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında İmajlar- Devletler, Halklar, Kişiler* (Ankara: Pegem Akademi Press, 2019); Ahmet Vurgun & Nuri Brina, "Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarındaki İlkokul Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ve Silah Arkadaşları", *International Primary Education Research Journal* 5, no. 2 (2021), 126-139.

<sup>38</sup> Bülent Akbaba, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Kuruluşundan Günümüze Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk-Arap İlişkilerinin Sunumu ve Arap İmajı", *Gazi Üniversitesi Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 34, no. 3 (2014): 337-356; Özgür Aktaş, "Cumhuriyet Devri Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Rusya İmgesi", (Master's Thesis, Kafkas University Institute of Social Sciences, 2006); Eray Alaca, "Türkiye'de Siyasi İktidar Değişiklikleri ve Ortaöğretim Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı Algısı (1970-1980)" (PhD diss., Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences, 2015); Eray Alaca, Cumhuriyet Dönemi Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı İmajı (1950-2020)", *Asya Studies* 6, no. 21 (2022): 1-10; Hasan Işık & Abdülcemil Gök, "Students' Opinions and Arab Perception of Arabs in History Textbooks in Turkey", *Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Education* 6, no. 1 (2017): 196-211; Mustafa Şahin, Mehmet Soysal, "Soviet/Russian Image in History Textbooks in Turkey", *Journal Of International Social Research*, 11, no. 61 (2018): 332-339; Şimşek, *Images in History Textbooks*.

<sup>39</sup> Neval Akça, "Demokrat Parti İktidarından 1980 İhtilaline Eğitim Politikaları ve Bu Politikaların Tarih Ders Kitaplarına Yansımaları" (Master's Thesis, Çukurova University Institute of Social Sciences, 2007); Hakan Akdağ, "Tek Parti ve Demokrat Parti Dönemi Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarının Muhtevası" (Master's Thesis, Selçuk University Institute of Social Sciences, 2005); Erdal Aslan, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin İlk Ders Kitapları", *Journal of Education and Science* 35, no. 58 (2010): 215-231; Ali Sinan Bilgili, "Eğitim Programlarımızda Türk-İslâm Sentezi Meselesi (1980-2000 Yılları Arasındaki Tartışmalara Bir Projeksiyon)", *Kafkas Üniversitesi E - Kafkas Eğitim Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2014): 1-13; Seher Boyko, "Türkiye'de 1939-1945 Yıllarında Tarih Öğretim Programları ve Tarih Ders Kitaplarının İncelenmesi", *Uludağ University Faculty of Arts and Sciences Social Sciences Journal* 12, no. 21 (2011): 157-181.

<sup>40</sup> Erdoğan Aydın, *Fatih ve Fetih Mitler-Gerçekler* (Istanbul: Everest Press, 2013); Franz Babinger, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed ve Zamani* trans. Dost Körpe (Istanbul: Oğlak Bilimsel Kitaplar, 2008); Feridun M. Emecen, *Fetih ve Kıyamet 1453* (Istanbul: Timaş Press, 2016); Nedim Gürsel, *Boğazkesen* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2016); John Freely, *Büyük Türk İki Denizin Hâkimi Fatih Sultan Mehmed*, trans. Ahmet Fethi (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2011); Halil İnalçık, *Kuruluş Dönemi Osmanlı Sultanları* (Istanbul: İSAM Press, 2011); Stefanos Yerasimos, *Kostantiniye ve Ayasofya Efsaneleri, (Lafondation de Constantinople et de Sainte Sophie dans les traditions turques)*, trans. Şirin Tekeli (Istanbul: İletişim Press, 1993); Hakan Değirmenci, *Türk Romanında Fetih ve Fatih* (Ankara: Akçağ Press, 2021); Mehmet Alper Cantimer, "Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Fatih İmajı" (In) *History Ders Kitaplarında İmajlar-Devletler, Halklar, Kişiler*, ed. Ahmet Şimşek (Ankara: Pegem Akademi Press, 2019); Ahmet Şimşek & Emel Akbaş, *Fetih ve Fatih: Tevarihden Tarihe Popülerden Kültür Endüstrisine* (Istanbul: İBB Kütüphane ve Müzeler Müdürlüğü Press, 2023).

is to examine how the narratives about the life story and character of Sultan Mehmet II (Mehmet the Conqueror) are included in high school history textbooks from Tanzimat to the present day in the context of historiographical differences.

## **1. Method**

### **1.1. Research model**

This study, which examines the differences in the historiographical presentation of the narratives about the life story and character of Sultan Mehmet II (Mehmet the Conqueror) in high school history textbooks from past to present, was conducted in the historical-descriptive case study design, one of the qualitative research methods and techniques. Case study is defined as an in-depth investigation of some phenomena or a few specific situations by using descriptive and explanatory research questions.<sup>41</sup> In Davey's classification of the case study design, which has many types, the descriptive description of the situation by examining one or more examples of a situation is expressed as a "descriptive case study".<sup>42</sup> In addition, in case studies, similar and different dimensions of a certain process can be examined<sup>43</sup> and data about a historical period can be collected and analysed.<sup>44</sup> In this study, the historical case study design was preferred since it aimed to examine the historiographical presentation differences of Mehmet the Conqueror narrative in history textbooks in depth through a large number of examples and to describe and define it in detail. Accordingly, this research, which analyses the character of Mehmet the Conqueror, who appears in textbooks as a historical actor, as a situation through a large number of history textbooks, can be described as a descriptive case study as well as a historical one.

### **1.2. Data collection tool and process**

In this qualitative research, document analysis method was used as a data collection tool. As it is known, document analysis involves the analysis of written materials containing information about the events or phenomena targeted to be researched.<sup>45</sup> The data source of this research is the history textbooks taught in the modern secondary education institutions of the Ottoman Empire and its heir, the Republic of Turkey. It is known that in this long period from the Ottoman Tanzimat Period to the present day, a large number of history textbooks have been prepared to be taught in modern schools belonging to the state. In order to address and analyse the subject of Mehmet the Conqueror as a problem in this large universe of material, a sample/selection of textbooks that are considered to represent the historiographical periods within the temporal boundaries of the research was formed. For the Ottoman period, especially the books taught in idadi-sultanates, which correspond to the secondary education level, were analysed. For the period of the Republic of Turkey, at least one high school history textbook for each ten-year period was taken into consideration. The history textbooks included in this selection are presented in chronological order in Table 1:

*Table 1. High School History Textbooks Used in the Research Process*

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1. Ahmet Vefik Pasha (1869), *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî*

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<sup>41</sup> Burke Johnson & Larry Christensen, *Educational Research (Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches)*, trans. ed. S. B. Demir (Ankara: Eğiten Kitap Press, 2014), 49; Ali Yıldırım & Hasan Şimşek, *Qualitative Research Methods in Social Sciences*, 9th edition (Ankara: Seçkin Press, 2013), 83.

<sup>42</sup> Lynn Davey, "The Application of Case Study Evaluations", *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 2, no. 9 (1991): 1-3.

<sup>43</sup> Linda T. Kohn, *Methods in Case Study Analysis* (Washington DC: Center for Studying Health System Change, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Peter Swanborn, *Case Study Research: What, Why and How?* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Yıldırım & Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma*.

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2. Sami, Aziz, Şevki (1877 / the rumi calendar (R.) 1293). *Mir'ât-ı Târih-i Osmânî*
  3. İbrahim Hakkı Pasha (1890 / R. 1308), *Küçük Osmanlı Tarihi*
  4. Abdurrahman Şeref (1897). *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*
  5. Ahmed Rasim, (1910 / R. 1326). *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*
  6. Ali Reşad & Ali Seydi (1911/R. 1327) *Tarih-i Osmani*
  7. Ali Nüzhet (1913 / R. 1329). *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*
  8. Mehmet Tevfik (1914/R. 1330). *Osmanlı Tarihi – Üçüncü Bin*
  9. İhsan Şerif Saru (1915/R. 1331). *Çocuklara Tarih-i Osmani*
  10. Ahmet Refik Altınay (1922 / R. 1338), *Osmanlı Mekteplerinde Çocuklar için Umumi Tarih*
  11. Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti (1931). *Tarih III, Yeni ve Yakın Zamanlarda Osmanlı-Türk Tarihi*
  12. Türk Tarih Tetkik Cemiyeti (1938). *Ortamektep için Tarih III*
  13. Arif Müfid Mansel, Cavit Baysun & Enver Ziya Karal (1942). *Yeni ve Yakın Çağlar Tarihi: Üçüncü Sınıf*
  14. Arif Müfid Mansel, Cavit Baysun & Enver Ziya Karal (1945). *Lise Kitapları, Orta Çağ Tarihi*
  15. Emin Oktay (1952). *Tarih Lise III (Yeni ve Yakın Çağlar)*
  16. Bedriye Atsız & Hilmi Oran (1956). *Yeni Lise Kitapları: Tarih 2, Orta çağlar*
  17. Emin Oktay (1962). *Tarih Lise II*
  18. Yılmaz Öztuna (1976). *Tarih III*
  19. Niyazi Akşit (1981). *Tarih III Yeni ve Yakınçağlar*
  20. Veli Şirin (1989). *Tarih Lise III*
  21. Şenol Kalaycı (1995). *Lise Tarih 2*
  22. Ahmet Güneş & Süleyman Özbek (2003). *Lise Tarih 2*
  23. Vicdan Cazgır, İlhan Genç, Mehmet Çelik, Celal Genç, & Şenol Türedi (2012). *Ortaöğretim Tarih 10. Sınıf*
  24. Erol Yüksel, Mehmet Ali Kapar, Ferhat Bildik, Kazım Şahin, Leyla Şafak, Murat Ardıç, Özgür Bağcı, & Süleyman Yıldız (2019). *Ortaöğretim Tarih 10 Ders Kitabı*
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The textbooks listed in Table 1 were accessed from Turkey's leading libraries such as Ferit Ragıp Tuncor Archive and Documentation Library of the Ministry of National Education, Istanbul University Library, Atatürk University Library, Turkish Historical Society Library, and National Library. Some of the textbooks were obtained by purchasing from bookshops.

### **1.3. Data Analysis**

In the data analysis process, descriptive analysis method was used in this study since the research questions sought to be answered on the data source were determined in advance. With the descriptive analysis technique used, it is aimed to present the findings obtained within the scope of the research to the reader in a summarised and interpreted form.<sup>46</sup> The themes used in the descriptive analysis process were developed according to the research questions and the research data were interpreted according to these themes. The following basic questions, which were determined based on the relevant literature, were determined as the analysis parameters of the research:

1. How is the first ascension of Sultan Mehmet II (Mehmet the Conqueror) to the throne and his subsequent abdication presented in the textbooks?
2. How is the process of Mehmet II's ascension to the throne for the second time described in the textbooks?
3. How is Mehmet II's behavior during the conquest of Istanbul included in the textbooks?

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<sup>46</sup> Yıldırım & Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma*.



4. How are the attitudes and behaviors of Mehmet II after the conquest (execution of Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha etc.) handled in the textbooks?

5. How are the personal characteristics of Mehmet II included in the textbooks?

6. How is the death of Mehmet II included in the textbooks?

High school history textbooks were analysed by both researchers according to these questions. In this analysis process, firstly, the discourses on the character of Mehmet the Conqueror were revealed and differences in historiographical presentation were identified. Afterward, the research data were interpreted and evaluated. The researchers acted comparatively, jointly and in harmony in the processes of identifying the data in the textbooks, coding and analyzing them in accordance with the research questions. In the process of analyzing the research data obtained from the textbooks and interpreting the findings, the political and social conjuncture of the period in which the textbooks were published was taken into consideration.

## **2. Findings**

In this section, the findings and interpretations obtained for each research question are presented under subheadings.

### **2.1. Mehmet II's first accession to the throne and his subsequent abdication**

The first examination question within the scope of the research is "How the first accession of Mehmet II to the throne and his subsequent abdication are presented in the textbooks". When the history textbooks from Tanzimat to the present day were analysed, the first information on the subject was found in Ahmet Vefik Pasha's work (1869).<sup>47</sup> According to the narrative in Ahmet Vefik's book, after concluding a peace treaty with the Hungarians, Murat II received the news of the death of his beloved eldest son Alaaddin and thereupon, "feeling weary and weary in his soul due to the difficulties of life", he left his crown and throne to his son Mehmet II. Instigated by the Holy Roman Empire, the Vatican and the Karamanids, János Hunyadi wanted to take advantage of Murat II's "seclusion in Manisa" and organized a sudden raid on the region up to Sofia. Hearing this, Sultan Murat quickly recovered and caught up with the enemy, and as a result of the battle that took place here, he was victorious in Varna. According to Ahmet Vefik's narrative, although Sultan Murat wanted to return to Manisa after the Varna victory, he was restored to the throne "with the pleading of the state elders and viziers", citing the disobedience of the soldiers as the reason.<sup>48</sup>

This narrative was continued in subsequent textbooks with some changes. For example, in the textbooks written by Sami, Aziz and Şevki (1877)<sup>49</sup> and İbrahim Hakkı Pasha (1890)<sup>50</sup>, developments other than Sultan Murat's ascension to the throne for the second time took place in the same flow. In Abdurrahman Şeref's book (1897), however, the insistent invitation of Grand Vizier Halil Pasha in the face of the approaching Hungarian danger is mentioned

<sup>47</sup> Ahmet Vefik Pasha, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Amire Press, 1869). For a republication of this work translated into contemporary Turkish, see Ahmet Vefik Pasha, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî: Bir Eski Zaman Ders Kitabı* republisher Ş. Babacan, (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Press, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Ahmet Vefik Pasha, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî*.

<sup>49</sup> Sami, Aziz, Şevki, *Mir'ât-ı Târih-i Osmânî* (Istanbul: Mekteb-i Sanayi Press, 1877 / R. 1293).

<sup>50</sup> İbrahim Hakkı Pasha, *Küçük Osmanlı Tarihi* (Dersaadet: Karabet Press, 1890 / R. 1308). For a republication of this work translated into contemporary Turkish, see İbrahim Hakkı Pasha, *Küçük Osmanlı Tarihi*, republisher Emre Gör (Istanbul: Lotus Press, 2016).

differently: "Halil Pasha and other sultanate officials requested Sultan Murat II to take over the state again against such a dreadful attack. Sultan Murat II had previously ignored the letters written to him on this subject. Sultan Murat II was invited back to the throne and the magnitude of the matter was explained to him again. Thereupon Sultan Murat II consented to ascend the throne again".<sup>51</sup> These statements implicitly explain that Halil Pasha and the other viziers were against Mehmet II's ascension to the throne at a young age and therefore persuaded Murat II to ascend the throne again. Moreover, the following sentences expressed in the continuation of this narrative complete this determination<sup>52</sup>: "*The Varna victory had removed the situation that had caused Sultan Murat II's sadness and grief. With the directives of Grand Vizier Halil Pasha, Sultan Mehmet II made an offer and supplication to his father to sit on the reigning throne again. Upon this, Sultan Murat II sat on the sultanate throne again. Mehmet II was sent to Manisa, where he had been before.*"

This event is presented in a very detailed narrative in the textbook of Ahmed Rasim (1910)<sup>53</sup>:

"The Ottoman Empire had entered a dangerous situation in its internal and external affairs, even though it had a very young sultan who sat on the throne at the age of 14 and a formidable Crusader army against him. Therefore, the Grand Vizier Halil Pasha and the viziers Şahabettin Pasha, Saruca Pasha, etc. decided to invite Sultan Murat to take over the state administration again. They explained the matter to Sultan Mehmet II in a sovereign and elegant manner. Letters were written to Murat II by both Sultan Mehmet II and the government officials. Murat II did not accept this invitation at first. Then Sultan Mehmet II, in his second letter, expressed his insistence in a logical style worthy of being the sultan: 'If you are the sultan, it is against the duties of the sultanate that you do not accept this at a time when religion and the state ask you for service. If I am the sultan, here I am ordering you, to come to arms. I warn you that you must obey.'"

The discourse here is important not only for providing the first detailed information on the subject, but also for shaping the narratives presented in the textbooks thereafter. Although Mehmet II became the sultan, the narrative of a group of statesmen, especially led by Çandarlı Halil Pasha, insistently inviting Murat II to become the sultan again becomes even more explicit here. Particularly noteworthy is the well-known discourse attributed to Mehmet II in the last chapter, which reads "If you are the sultan, take charge of the army; if I am the sultan, I order you to take charge of the army". Although there is no evidence for the veracity of this statement, it has been perpetuated in almost all textbooks since then as a kind of popular misconception. This discourse produced by the history writer Ahmet Rasim can be considered as an attempt to overcome a knot in Ottoman history with a revisionist approach and a formula that would not negatively affect Mehmet II's charisma.

In the continuation of his narrative, Ahmed Rasim further elaborates the fraudulent game set up by some state officials for Mehmet II with the following words<sup>54</sup>:

"On his return to Edirne, Sultan Murat left the reign to his son Mehmet II for the second time and traveled to Manisa. However, Janissary (Yeniçeri) soldiers caused a riot during a big fire in the city. Half an akçe each was given to these troublesome soldiers. It was also realised that Sultan Mehmet was too young to be obeyed by the soldiers. The men of state

<sup>51</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye* (Istanbul: Karabet Press, 1897). For a republication of this work translated into contemporary Turkish, see Abdurrahman Şeref, *Osmanlı Tarihi: Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye* republisher M. Sait Karaçorlu, (Istanbul: Volga Press, 2014), 30-31.

<sup>52</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi* volume 1, (Istanbul: Şems Press, İkbâl Kitabhanesi, 1910 / R. 1326), 116-152.

<sup>54</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116-152.

summoned Sultan Murat and swore allegiance to his authority and sovereignty in the sultanate in Buçuktepe in Edirne. Thus, Mehmet II abdicated and returned to Manisa..."

In the textbook prepared jointly by Ali Reşad and Ali Seydi, two of the textbook writers of the Second Constitutional Era, this issue is further clarified: "Grand Vizier Halil Pasha realised that things were going to get worse, so he dictated and sent an invitation by Sultan Mehmet to his father Sultan Murat to accept the sultanate again".<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, it becomes clearer that Grand Vizier Halil Pasha was the one who set up this game.

Ali Nüzhet, in his textbook, took this explanation even further and presented it even more clearly that Murat II was invited to the throne despite Mehmet II with the following sentences<sup>56</sup>: "*The Ottoman council of ministers thought that it was not possible to do business with such a young sultan and that Sultan Murat II must take over again and take control. Grand Vizier Halil Pasha had Sultan Mehmet dictate a letter of request to invite Murat II and had it sent to Sultan Murat II in Manisa. In this letter, it was written 'if you are the sultan, come and take control, if you are not, you should obey the order'.*"

Mehmed Tevfik Pasha (1914), on the other hand, presented this story with the following statements, which clearly indicate that it was a trick of Grand Vizier Halil Pasha: "Gazi Sultan Murat II wanted to retreat to Manisa again after the Varna victory. However, the Janissary soldiers rebelled under the guidance of Grand Vizier Halil Pasha, claiming that Sultan Mehmet II was too young. Thus, Sultan Murat II, who was tricked in a way, took back the state administration and sent his son to Manisa".<sup>57</sup> As can be seen, the judgement about the Grand Vizier's trick is clear in this narrative. However, in İhsan Saru's book (1915), it is understood that a more conciliatory path is followed<sup>58</sup>: "The statesmen were alarmed. They explained to the young Sultan Mehmet II how big this matter was and said 'Please let your father move from Manisa to Varna in a hurry'". This conciliatory approach is also seen in Ahmet Refik Altınay's book<sup>59</sup>: "In the face of this dangerous situation, Ottoman statesmen and commanders appealed to Murat II and asked him to lead the army. Because his son Mehmet II was only a 14-year-old boy. Therefore, he was not old enough to lead the Ottoman army. Murat II took back the command of the Ottoman army". As it is understood, Ahmet Refik, like Saru, tried to present the situation by reconciling it with courtesy.

This narrative continued in the textbooks of the Republican Era, with a lessening effect over time. For example, the following statements in the textbook of Mansel et al. (1942) are important<sup>60</sup>: "Murat II left his throne to his son Mehmet II. Hungary wanted to take advantage of this change of sultan. A new Crusader army was formed under the command of Hungarian King Ladislas. This army started to fight to expel the Turks from Europe. Murat II took the throne again to save the state from danger". This narrative is repeated in almost all subsequent textbooks. However, the failure of Mehmet II in his first ascension to the throne and the plot

<sup>55</sup> Ali Reşad & Ali Seydi, *Tarih-i Osmani* (Istanbul: İkdâm Press, 1911/R. 1327).

<sup>56</sup> Ali Nüzhet, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi* (Dersaadet: Artin Asadoryan ve Mahdumları Press, 1913 / R. 1329), 38-39.

<sup>57</sup> Mehmet Tevfik, *Osmanlı Tarihi – Üçüncü Bin, Konstantiniye* (Istanbul: Mekteb-i Harbiye Press, 1914/R. 1330). For a republication of this work translated into contemporary Turkish, see Fatihli Mehmet Tevfik Pasha, *Osmanlı Tarihi* republisher İsmet Sarıbal (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı Press, 2017), 80.

<sup>58</sup> İhsan Şerif Saru, *Çocuklara Tarih-i Osmani* (Istanbul: Kanaat Press, 1915/R. 1331). For a re-published version of this work translated into contemporary Turkish, see Kadriye Aşık, "II. Meşruiyet Dönemi İbtidai Mekteplerde Okutulan Bir Ders Kitabı Örneği (Çocuklara Tarih-i Osmani)", (Master's Thesis, Uludağ University, 2022).

<sup>59</sup> Ahmet Refik Altınay, *Osmanlı Mekteplerinde Çocuklar İçin Umumi Tarih* republisher Şefaattin Deniz et. al (Istanbul: Akıl Fikir Press, 2014), 110.

<sup>60</sup> Arif Müfid Mansel, Cavit Baysun & Enver Ziya Karal, *Yeni ve Yakın Çağlar Tarihi: Üçüncü Sınıf* (Istanbul: Maarif Vekaleti, 1945), 21-23.

against Mehmet II were mentioned implicitly in the textbooks of the Republican Period. In some textbooks, a narrative that adopts the revisionist approach first initiated by Ahmed Rasim is displayed. Emin Oktay's textbook is an example of this. In Oktay's (1962) book, which was taught in high schools for many years, the situation is discussed as follows<sup>61</sup> :

"In the face of this bad situation, state elders such as Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha and Saruca Pasha asked the young Sultan (Mehmet II) to call his father back to the throne. Both the sultan and the statesmen wrote letters to Sultan Murat, explained the situation and asked him to come to Edirne. Sultan Murat did not accept these calls at first. Thereupon, the young Sultan (Mehmet II) wrote a violent letter to his father and said: "If you are the sultan, it is against your duties not to be in charge at this bad time of the country. If I am the sultan, here I order you! Come to arms. I remind you to obey."

As can be seen, sentences beginning with "if I am the sultan..." are transformed into "I remind you to obey". Among the history textbook authors of the Republican period, only Atsız and Oran (1956) provided information outside this canonised approach<sup>62</sup>: "... *The situation was again in a state of crisis. An experienced and authoritative commander was needed at the head of the Ottoman Empire. Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha planned to put Murad II back on the throne. Together with some statesmen, they explained the current crisis situation to the child Sultan Mehmet II. Although Mehmet II did not want to, he had to accept this in the face of the pressure he was under*"

Especially the last sentence expressed here is quite meaningful. It is clearly stated that Mehmet II relinquished the throne to his father Murat II against his will.

This discourse on the subject is canonical in later textbooks. In Niyazi Akşit's (1981) textbook, the statement "In the face of this dangerous situation, at the insistence of Grand Vizier Halil Pasha, Murat II was restored to the sultanate."<sup>63</sup> In Şenol Kalaycı's (1995) textbook, on the other hand, a conciliatory narrative is maintained as "Upon the insistence of Grand Vizier Halil Pasha, Sultan Mehmet II persuaded his father Murat to take charge of the army"<sup>64</sup> . In the textbooks after the 2000s, a general narrative style was adopted as "Murat II regained the throne as a result of the insistence of statesmen in the face of danger".<sup>65</sup>

In high school history textbooks from the Tanzimat period until the 2020s, it is clear that the issue of Mehmet II's first accession to the throne and his subsequent removal from the throne, either through reconciliation or through a "game" with the influence of Çandarlı Halil Pasha and other statesmen, had a negative impact on his state of mind. It is thought that this situation had an effect on both Mehmet II's attitude and behavior during his ascension to the throne and his attempt to conquer Istanbul.

## **2.2. The second accession of Mehmet II**

Within the scope of the second research question, the narratives in history textbooks about the process of Mehmet II's ascension to the throne for the second time were analysed. Just as in the previous title, it is seen that the narratives on this subject in the textbooks examined within the scope of this study from the Ottoman period to the present day have differentiated in

<sup>61</sup> Emin Oktay, *Tarih Lise III (Yeni ve Yakın Çağlar)* (Istanbul: Remzi Press, 1952), 220.

<sup>62</sup> Bedriye Atsız & Hilmi Oran, *Yeni Lise Kitapları: Tarih 2, Orta Çağlar* (Istanbul: İnkılâp Press, 1956).

<sup>63</sup> Niyazi Akşit, *Tarih III Yeni ve Yakınçağlar* (Istanbul: Remzi Press, 1981).

<sup>64</sup> Şenol Kalaycı, *Lise Tarih 2* (Istanbul: Meram Press, 1995).

<sup>65</sup> Ahmet Güneş & Süleyman Özbek, *Lise Tarih 2* (Ankara: Tutubay Press, 2003), 15; Vicdan Cazgır, İlhan Genç, Mehmet Çelik, Celal Genç, & Şenol Türedi, *Ortaöğretim Tarih 10*, 4th edition, (Ankara: T.C. MEB Press, 2012), 23-24; Erol Yüksel, Mehmet Ali Kapar, Ferhat Bildik, Kazım Şahin, Leyla Şafak, Murat Ardıç, Özgür Bağcı, & Süleyman Yıldız, *Ortaöğretim Tarih 10 Ders Kitabı* (Ankara: T.C. MEB Press, 2019), 63.

the historical process. In addition, it can be said that the information given on this subject is elaborated according to the authors or some parts are omitted through generalisation. In this framework, Ahmet Vefik Pasha's (1869) textbook, which provides the first information on this subject, focuses on the success of Murat II, Mehmet II's father, during his reign. He implies that Murat II, as an Ottoman sultan, both reigned a reign worthy of his predecessor and left a strong legacy to Mehmet II, who succeeded him on the throne. However, without providing a more detailed description, he concludes by stating that Mehmet II ascended the throne again.<sup>66</sup> In Abdurrahman Şeref's book (1897), the situation is similar; Murat II's successful reign is mentioned, but the details of Mehmet II's ascension to the throne are not mentioned.<sup>67</sup>

Although the book by Sami, Aziz, Şevki (1877) is important in terms of showing an understanding of the period, it contains more detailed information about the second accession of Mehmet II to the throne. As a matter of fact, according to the book in question, Murat II went for a short stroll while he was resting in Edirne, and when he came back, he had a headache. Upon the increasing intensity of this pain, he "brought out a will he had prepared before, summoned Sultan Mehmet II from Manisa, and assigned Grand Vizier Halil Pasha to take the necessary action for Mehmet II to sit on the throne". When Sultan Murat's treatment failed and he died, his body was kept under guard for 13 days without being told to anyone until Sultan Mehmet II arrived from Manisa. Mehmet II ascended the throne in Edirne at the age of 22 (18 February 1451).<sup>68</sup> Although this narrative contains important details about the subject, it is especially noteworthy that Murat II left a written will regarding the accession of Mehmet II to the throne and assigned Halil Pasha to this task. So much so that these issues are not included in any subsequent textbooks. The fact that Murat II's body was kept waiting until Mehmet II arrived in Edirne was similarly repeated by Abdurrahman Şeref (1897) and Ahmet Rasim.<sup>69</sup>

When the information in these three textbooks is combined, it is seen that although Mehmet II was deposed by Grand Vizier Halil Pasha when he ascended the throne for the first time, his second ascension to the throne was the result of a process directly managed by him. However, at the end of it all, when Mehmet II took Constantinople, Halil Pasha was executed. If this narrative, which contains many contradictions, is considered to be true, the news of Murat II's death may have been kept secret from the public by the state officials (and therefore Grand Vizier Halil Pasha) until Mehmet II arrived in Edirne and took the throne, for reasons such as preventing possible rebellion attempts by the Karamanids due to their claim to the Ottoman throne and preventing the Janissaries from causing unrest. However, it has been determined that this narrative, which is included in the history textbooks of the Ottoman period, is not reflected in any of the textbooks of the Republican Period. The reason for this may be to show that the factor of Çandarlı Halil Pasha did not influence the success of Mehmet the Conqueror. Considering that Çandarlı Halil Pasha was executed after the conquest, this possibility can be better understood.

There are textbooks that provide different information about Mehmet II's arrival from Manisa to Edirne in order to ascend the throne for the second time. In Mehmed Tevfik's textbook, this process is described as follows: "The news of his father's death in Edirne was informed to Prince Sultan Mehmet II in Manisa. The Prince said, 'Whoever loves me should follow me!' and immediately jumped on a 'Yörük/Türkmen' horse and traveled to Edirne via

<sup>66</sup> Ahmet Vefik, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî*, 56-57.

<sup>67</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*, 30-31.

<sup>68</sup> Sami, Aziz, Şevki, *Mir'ât-ı Târih-i Osmânî*, 89-91.

<sup>69</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*, 30-31; Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116-152.

Gelibolu, where he was proclaimed sultan".<sup>70</sup> The only difference in Ahmed Rasim's textbook, which narrates this narrative as it is, is that the horse Mehmet II rode to Edirne was not a "Yörük/Türkmen" horse but an "Arab" horse.<sup>71</sup> This information is not included in any other textbook other than these two sources. It is understood that some epic narratives were presented in the textbooks of the Second Constitutional Era about the accession process of Mehmet II, who made his name known to the world by accomplishing important works during his reign. However, this approach was not adopted and continued by later textbook authors.

There are different narratives containing interesting information about the first thing Mehmet II did after ascending the throne. In this framework, according to Ahmed Rasim, the following developments took place when Mehmet II ascended the throne<sup>72</sup>:

"The prince Ahmet, who was born to Sultan Murat's wife from the Isfendiyaroğlu clan and who was in swaddling at the time, was drowned. Supposedly, when Prince Ahmet's mother came to congratulate the new Sultan Mehmet II, Evrenos Ali Bey strangled Prince Ahmet in the bathhouse. Upon his mother's complaint, Ali Bey was also executed. Sultan Mehmet II sent his mother Mara, a princess of Serbian origin, to her grandfather, the Serbian King..."

This narrative, which expresses the situation of Mehmet II's murder of his brother by implication, was expressed more explicitly and sharply in some textbooks in the Republican Period. In Emin Oktay's (1952) book, it is stated that "His first act was to have his brother, prince Ahmet, killed for fear that he would become a rival in the future" and the understanding of Mehmet II and the power of the period is summarised with a single pen.<sup>73</sup> Güneş and Özbek (2003) have quoted the same sharp statement as in Güneş and Özbek (2003).<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, the fact that Mehmet II's mother, the Serbian Princess Mara, was sent to her father, the Serbian King, stands out as a different and interesting piece of information that is not included in other sources. It can be said that the narrative of Mehmet II having his brother killed and sending his mother Mara to his grandfather after he ascended the throne was first created by Ahmet Rasim and was only included in a limited way in a few textbooks after the Republican Period.

There are also textbooks that provide different information about the number of times Mehmet II ascended the Ottoman throne. It has been determined that this different information, which is not seen in Ottoman period textbooks, first appeared in Emin Oktay's 1952 textbook. Accordingly, it is stated that "Mehmet II, who was the governor of Manisa upon the death of Murat II, sat on the Ottoman throne for the third time".<sup>75</sup> This determination is also found in Öztuna's book.<sup>76</sup> This information is also found in Şirin's book and it is claimed that Mehmet II ascended the throne three times in total by stating that "...he had been on the throne twice before in his father's lifetime".<sup>77</sup> However, this information was not included in later high school history textbooks.

Another historiographical issue found in the narratives in the textbooks is the age of Mehmet II when he ascended the throne for the second time. Abdurrahman Şeref's book states

<sup>70</sup> Mehmet Tevfik, *Osmanlı Tarihi*, 80.

<sup>71</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116-152.

<sup>72</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116-152.

<sup>73</sup> Emin Oktay, *Tarih Lise II* (Istanbul: Atlas Press, 1962), 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> Güneş & Özbek, *Lise Tarih 2*, 15.

<sup>75</sup> Oktay, *Tarih Lise III*, 1-2; Oktay, *Tarih Lise II*, 220-222.

<sup>76</sup> Yılmaz Öztuna, *Tarih III* (Ankara: T.C. MEB Press, 1976).

<sup>77</sup> Veli Şirin, *Tarih Lise III* (Istanbul: Gendaş Press, 1989), 8.

that Mehmet II was 22 years old when he ascended the throne for the second time<sup>78</sup>, Ahmet Rasim and Atsız-Oran's books state that he was 21 years old<sup>79</sup>, Öztuna and Şirin's books state that he was 19 years old<sup>80</sup>. As can be seen, there is no clarity on this issue in the textbooks.

### **2.3. Mehmet II's attitude during the conquest**

The third research question within the scope of this study concerns how the behavior of Mehmet II during the conquest of Istanbul is presented in history textbooks. Ahmet Vefik Pasha's book, which is the oldest dated textbook analysed, contains a narrative whose influence has largely lasted until today. According to this narrative, Istanbul, which was besieged by the Ottoman army from land and sea for 53 days, could only be captured as a result of the landing of ships. Mehmet II succeeded in the "conquest of Constantinople" by setting foot in the palace of the Byzantine Emperor. The collapse of the Byzantine Empire excited and "shook" the whole of Europe. Mehmet II "appointed a Patriarch for the Greeks in Constantinople, showed generosity by granting all kinds of favours, called the fugitives to the city, Galata, Silivri and other Greek cities surrendered completely and an atmosphere of peace began to prevail in Constantinople".<sup>81</sup>

Abdurrahman Şeref, in a presentation praising Mehmet II's personality, described the process after the conquest as follows<sup>82</sup>:

"Mehmet the Conqueror stayed in Istanbul for twenty-one days and made the necessary arrangements. No conquering monarch has ever shown as much mercy and generosity to the defeated nation as he did. Because he did not allow Istanbul to be looted. He prevented the Greeks from attacking their own sect and property. He appointed a patriarch for them again. He gave some privileges to the Greek patriarchate, the provisions of which lasted until our time. He secured all the rights of the Greeks living in Istanbul."

The narrative mentioned in this passage that Mehmet II "did not allow the soldiers to sack Istanbul" is found only in this textbook. These statements are not found in the other textbooks analysed. Moreover, this information is not true. It is commonly known that Constantinople was sacked for three days following its conquest, justified under Islamic law as the "right of the sword", which pertains to the spoils of war. On the other hand, the discourses developed in the passage about Mehmet II's granting freedom of sect and treating the Greeks living in Istanbul with tolerance and justice are repeated in almost all subsequent history textbooks. However, the emphasis in the narratives has become even stronger as we approach the present day. For example, the following statements in Akşit and Şirin's books are important in terms of showing that the emphasis in the discourse was increased as a product of the effort to glorify Mehmet II<sup>83</sup>: "*Entering the city, Mehmet II came to the Hagia Sophia Church. The people there, led by the patriarch, threw themselves on the ground and wept together. The Sultan said to the patriarch: 'Stand up. I, Sultan Mehmet II, say to you and your friends and all the people that from today onwards you will no longer fear my wrath for your life or your freedom!'*"

Oktay's (1952) narrative of the conquest of Istanbul, which strongly reflects the ideology of the Republican Period in his book, has an almost novelistic characteristic. In this textbook, the process in question and Mehmet II's behavior are expressed as follows<sup>84</sup>: "...*Mehmet II went*

<sup>78</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*, 30-31.

<sup>79</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116-152; Atsız & Oran, *Yeni Lise Kitapları*.

<sup>80</sup> Öztuna, *Tarih III*, 47; Şirin, *Tarih Lise III*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Ahmet Vefik, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî*, 57.

<sup>82</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*, 36.

<sup>83</sup> Akşit, *Tarih III*, 10; Şirin, *Tarih Lise III*, 11.

<sup>84</sup> Oktay, *Tarih Lise III*, 5-7.

straight to Hagia Sophia. Hagia Sophia was full of women and children. According to a superstitious belief, the people were waiting for the helper angels who would lead the Turks out of Constantinople. But when they saw the young 23-year-old Turkish Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, riding a white horse, they realised that it was all over and the end of Byzantium had come."

In this narrative, in addition to the novelistic style depicting Mehmet II riding a white horse, the special emphasis on his "Turkishness" is also noteworthy in terms of carrying a historiographical feature of the Republican Period.

#### **2.4. Mehmet II's attitude and behavior after the conquest**

Sultan Mehmet II, who took the title of "Conqueror" after the conquest of Istanbul, started to implement some punishments that he had postponed for a while. In this context, he first had Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil Pasha executed. According to the narrative in history textbooks, immediately after the conquest, Mehmet II dismissed Halil Pasha from his post and ordered his execution. The earliest textbooks give a very brief and unspecific account of Halil Pasha's punishment for an accusation that he had collaborated with the Byzantine Emperor and engaged in evil deeds.<sup>85</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref's book, on the other hand, provides very detailed information on this accusation. In the book, this issue is dealt with under the title of the assassination of Çandarlı Halil Pasha and the removal of the Çandarlı clan from the office of grand vizier. It is clearly stated that Halil Pasha was executed because of his opposing attitude towards the conquest of Istanbul, deceiving and misleading Mehmet II during his first ascension to the throne and some other political reasons.<sup>86</sup> As can be seen, it is noteworthy that the reasons for Halil Pasha's execution are accompanied by a sense of reckoning/revenge from Mehmet II's childhood years. In addition to this, Ahmed Rasim (1910) contributed to this issue with further information and interpretations. According to this, Halil Pasha is definitely accused of treason<sup>87</sup>: "*Çandarlıoğlu Halil Pasha was the first Grand Vizier to be assassinated in the Ottoman Empire for his treachery during the siege of Istanbul. It was found that he had 120.000 duka gold in his house and these gold coins were taken to the state treasury. Until then, the Çandarlı dynasty had a say in the Ottoman vizier position, but this honourable position was taken away from them...*"

In addition to this, Ahmet Rasim also claimed that Halil Pasha sabotaged the conquest of Istanbul and received bribes from the Byzantine Emperor in return. This information is presented more explicitly in the textbook by Ali Reşad and Ali Seydi (1911). Accordingly, Halil Pasha tried to extinguish Mehmet II's "deep and ardent desire" for the conquest of Istanbul. Mehmet II, who perceived this situation as a betrayal, did not raise his voice at first. In fact, Mehmet II waited for the appropriate time to punish Halil Pasha even though he had seen some of Halil Pasha's negative behaviors during the conquest of Istanbul. When things were settled after the conquest, he had Halil Pasha executed.<sup>88</sup>

Regarding this issue, Ali Nüzhet recorded the following<sup>89</sup>:

"Since the time of Sultan Murat I, the office of grand vizier has been given to the Çandarlı dynasty by succession. When Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror expressed his ideas about the conquest of Istanbul to Halil Pasha, Halil Pasha endeavoured to change and transform his ideas. He even betrayed the Sultan and conveyed his ideas to the Byzantine Emperor. This

<sup>85</sup> Ahmet Vefik, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî*, 58; Sami, Aziz, Şevki, *Mir'ât-ı Târih-i Osmânî*, 91-108.

<sup>86</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*, 42.

<sup>87</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116-152.

<sup>88</sup> Ali Reşad & Ali Seydi, *Tarih-i Osmani*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> Ali Nüzhet, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 49.



behavior of Halil Pasha increased Mehmet the Conqueror's distrust of him. Some people in the palace reported to the Sultan that Halil Pasha took bribes from the emperor. After the Sultan conquered Istanbul and put things in order, he had Halil Pasha executed. Thus, a grand vizier was assassinated for the first time in the Ottoman Empire. Considering the services of the House of Çandarlı to the Ottoman state and nation, it seems highly unlikely that Halil Pasha committed treason."

As can be understood from this narrative, according to Ali Nüzhet, the reasons for Halil Pasha's execution are completely different compared to the previous narratives. The author acknowledges the disagreements between Mehmet II and Halil Pasha, but does not give the possibility that Halil Pasha was a traitor. In this narrative, widespread rumour, accurate information and interpretation are presented in a truly mixed manner. In the Ottoman Period textbooks discussed so far, the narratives about the execution of Halil Pasha after the conquest of Istanbul are centred on different points and the reasons for the execution vary according to the textbook. On the other hand, rumors are presented as objective information in some textbooks.

On the other hand, although the issue of Halil Pasha's execution is a topic covered in Ottoman textbooks, it is not included in any of the textbooks of the Republican Period, except for the book by Yüksel et al. In the aforementioned book, the following narrative is presented under the title "The conquest of Istanbul and central authority"<sup>90</sup>:

"The conquest of Istanbul enabled Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror to eliminate some powerful families. With the execution of Grand Vizier Çandarlı Halil, the period of power-sharing by the established families came to an end. Thus, Mehmet the Conqueror, who gathered all the power in his hands, strengthened the central authority of the state. Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror disciplined the Janissaries, who rebelled against him during his ascension to the throne, after the conquest. He brought people directly subordinate to him to important institutions of the state such as Grand Vizier and Janissary Agha."

In this passage, it is stated that after the conquest of Istanbul, Mehmet II sacrificed Halil Pasha in order to secure an important position in domestic politics, strengthen his authority and institutionalise the central order. It is also stated that this passage in the textbook is summarised from an academic article directly related to the subject. As here, the approach of creating a new narrative based on a quote from a scientific source is a situation encountered especially in recent textbooks. This situation can be interpreted as a sign of historiographical transformation in today's history textbooks.

Especially in the textbooks published after the 1980s, the discourse that Mehmet II spent a great deal of effort on war technology and that this attitude was effective behind his success was mostly expressed. For example, in Şirin's book, "The conquest of Istanbul proved to the whole world the importance of artillery in wars. This military revolution, whose ballistic calculations were made by Mehmet the Conqueror himself, paved the way for the collapse of the feudal regime in Europe and the establishment of national unions..."<sup>91</sup> This narrative, which emphasized and highlighted the military genius of Mehmet II, was continued in later textbooks with subheadings such as "conquest and European intellectuals".

In the book by Yüksel et al. (2019), a passage from an academic work by historian Halil İnalçık (edited) states that after the conquest of Istanbul, Greek intellectuals and conservative

<sup>90</sup> Yüksel et. al, *Ortaöğretim Tarih 10 Ders Kitabı*, 130.

<sup>91</sup> Şirin, *Tarih Lise III*, 12.

clergy were treated well at the court of Mehmet II. However, it is also emphasized that some Byzantine Greek intellectuals emigrated to Italy after the conquest of Constantinople.<sup>92</sup>

## **2.5. Mehmet II's characteristics**

The fifth examination question within the scope of the research is related to the determination of how Mehmet II 's characteristics are reflected in the textbooks and how the narratives reflected in the textbooks have changed and transformed in the historical process. In the first textbooks analysed within the framework of the research, it is seen that Mehmet II's name is mentioned as "Fatih-i Konstantiniyye Sultan Mehmed-i Sani".<sup>93</sup> In other words, Mehmet II's name has always been mentioned with great respect together with the title of "Conqueror of Istanbul". In fact, in a textbook, this situation is described as "...Sultan Mehmet is called "Conqueror". But they do not give this title to every country conqueror. If they did, the world would be full of conquerors. For example, many of the Ottoman sultans conquered many places; but only one sultan was given the title of "Conqueror". Because Mehmet II conquered Istanbul...". As can be seen, the character of Mehmet II seems to be fully integrated with the phenomenon of the conquest of Istanbul.<sup>94</sup>

An emphatic account of Mehmet II's characteristics is first encountered in Abdurrahman Şeref's book (1897). In this book, Mehmet the Conqueror is described as one of the rare great men in the world in terms of his observance of rights and law, his perspective on education, and his deep knowledge of politics. He was familiar with six languages. His teachers Molla Hüsrev and Molla Gürani were among the great scholars of his century".<sup>95</sup> As can be seen, a discourse that glorifies Mehmet II by including the adjectives "law-maker, caring about science, having a vast state management and political skills, knowing six foreign languages, well educated..." has started to take its place in the textbooks.

In Ahmed Rasim's (1910) book, which is presented with a wide content, the direct physical characteristics of Mehmet II are given<sup>96</sup>: "...He was of medium height, thick-boned, broad between the shoulders, long torso, long legs, high and curved eyebrows, white and bright like fire, black and curly hair and beard, short neck and bent to the front, open forehead, bright eyes, small mouth, curved nose like a hawk's beak...". In the portrait of Mehmet II, which Ahmed Rasim tries to draw with direct quotations from Namik Kemal, more interesting information and comments other than his physical characteristics are included in the narrative. Accordingly, he gained a great experience from his first ascension to the throne in his childhood years and his subsequent dethronement "against his will". However, Mehmet II was extremely heartbroken by this bad and humiliating event. However, due to all these, he devoted himself to science with great ambition and developed himself in many fields by undergoing an intensive education process. Mehmet II was knowledgeable enough to "establish an unprecedented civilised state and to advance the art of war". Mehmet II was a great figure who "with his might, knowledge, courage and skill, saw the future of the nation not only in the heroism on the battlefield but also in the value he gave to education and industry...".<sup>97</sup> He proved that he was "truly a Turkish prince" with his bravery and valour in battles, his tireless activity, his excessive ambition to conquer, the height and refinement of his political ideas, and his favour and generosity towards his army.<sup>98</sup> Such details about Mehmet II's physical appearance, character,

<sup>92</sup> Yüksel et. al, *Ortaöğretim Tarih 10 Ders Kitabı*, 129-130.

<sup>93</sup> Sami, Aziz, Şevki, *Mir'at-ı Târih-i Osmânî*, 91-108; İbrahim Hakkı, *Küçük Osmanlı Tarihi*, 33.

<sup>94</sup> Saru, *Çocuklara Tarih-i Osmani*.

<sup>95</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmaniyye*, 44.

<sup>96</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116.

<sup>97</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116.

<sup>98</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116.

skills and equipment first appear in Ahmed Rasim's book. It is noteworthy that Mehmet II is interpreted as a "Turkish prince" in this book prepared during the Second Constitutional Era. This situation can be associated with the Turkism movement and the government of the period, the Committee of Union and Progress. Therefore, it can be said that Turkism started to be reflected in textbooks in this period. Of course, the textbooks of this period and the emphasis on Turkishness in the context of the subject matter are not as sharp as it was in the Republican Era.

According to the narrative in Ahmed Rasim's history textbook, Mehmet II was a knowledgeable and skilful person who could speak "Turkish, Greek, Slavic, Arabic, Persian". Mehmet II had a deep knowledge of geography, history and the art of warfare of the time. He was very generous in building charitable buildings (such as mosques). He showed favour and respect to Greek and Italian artisans. He respected and honoured scholars very much. He used to kiss his teacher's hand as a sign of respect. Even when he saw the famous Molla Hüsrev, one of the greatest scholars of the time, in the mosque, he would stand up and show his respect for him.<sup>99</sup>

The style and narrative in this direction started to change with the textbooks published in the 1930s during the Republican Period. In the textbooks prepared by the Turkish History Research Society, there is a statement such as "Mehmet II was one of the princes who ascended the Ottoman throne during the Renaissance Movement in Italy...". As can be seen, the implication of Mehmet II as a prince of the Renaissance and the lengthy description of the importance and value he attached to art and artists is one of the first indicators of the narrative change in this period.<sup>100</sup> Similar to the previous textbooks, this textbook includes the information that Mehmet II brought Centile Bellini from Venice, Italy to Istanbul to have his own painting made and to decorate his palace. In this book, unlike the previous ones, the relief paintings of Mehmet the Conqueror on horseback and as a bust made by Italian sculptors are mentioned. It is as if a narrative has been constructed that Mehmet II showed great interest in Western arts such as painting and sculpture.<sup>101</sup> Perhaps, in the background of the discourse in question, the approach of creating a basis for the legitimacy of Turkish modernization, finding a ground origin by drawing strength from history, and setting an example (especially from the character of Mehmet the Conqueror, to whom conservative segments of society attach particular importance) may have been pursued.

In Şirin's textbook prepared after the 1980s, information about the characteristics of Mehmet II is presented under a separate title called "The Personality of Mehmet the Conqueror" and in a more emphasized manner<sup>102</sup>:

"Mehmet II was a great statesman who showed his power to friends and enemies with his high ability and genius as well as his title of Fatih (the Conqueror). He did not leave a Christian state in Anatolia. He completely conquered the Balkans, including Bosnia. Sultan Mehmet, who was the conqueror of Istanbul at the age of 23, was a person of determination and will, cautious, and a person who implemented his decisions absolutely. He was harsh in state administration. He knew how to conceal his feelings, he would keep his military moves secret until they were put into practice and then he would suddenly reveal his intentions... He was brave in war, he would step forward to prevent defeat when necessary and in case of danger, he would encourage the soldiers. He knew how to maintain his

<sup>99</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116.

<sup>100</sup> Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti, *Tarih III, Yeni ve Yakın Zamanlarda Osmanlı-Türk Tarihi* (Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1931), 30-31.

<sup>101</sup> Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti, *Tarih III*, 30-31; Türk Tarih Tetkik Cemiyeti, *Ortamektep için Tarih III* (Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1938), 2.

<sup>102</sup> Şirin, *Tarih Lise III*, 16.

composure and restraint. He was knowledgeable, fluent in several languages (Arabic, Persian, Greek etc.) besides his mother tongue Turkish and he was also a poet. He was free-minded and without prejudice, he used to have scholars write articles and analyse them. He used to read philosophical works translated from Persian and Greek into Arabic. He used to exchange ideas with the scholars he invited and brought to him. He used to make all kinds of sacrifices in order to bring scholars of whatever religion and sect to Istanbul... He was the first Ottoman sultan to stop wearing the dresses worn by Ottoman sultans and to start wearing special dresses for scholars. He loved scholars very much and spent most of his time chatting with them..."

As can be seen, in the narrative on the personal characteristics of Mehmet II, his knowledge, skills, and the importance he attached to science were emphasised. However, for the first time in this textbook, the following is recorded as different information<sup>103</sup>:

"The role of his father Sultan Murat II in the upbringing of Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror as a very high personality must be remembered. Sultan Murat II's advice to his son Mehmet II is in the form of a small booklet, the end of which reads as follows: 'O my son, sultans are like a person who measures with a balance. When you, as a sultan, wish to use the scales correctly, Almighty Allah wishes you well. Everything is known to Allah, everything can only be known by Him... (Advice to Mehmet the Conqueror)..."

In this narrative, as a product of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis understanding of the period, an advice supposedly coming from the mouth of Murat II is included. The emphasis in this passage, which is constructed with an intense religious content, shows itself in the foreground.

## **2.6. Death of Mehmet the Conqueror**

Within the scope of the last research question, it was investigated how the death of Mehmet II was presented in the textbooks. In Ahmet Vefik Pasha's textbook (1869), it is stated that the life of Mehmet the Conqueror, who led the army on a campaign for the conquest of Rhodes Island, ended as soon as he reached Gebze.<sup>104</sup> The process of Mehmet II's death was also mentioned in Abdurrahman Şeref's book in exactly the same way.<sup>105</sup> In Ahmed Rasim's book, a small detail is added to this narrative<sup>106</sup>: Mehmet the Conqueror left Istanbul with the army, keeping secret whether he was travelling for the Anatolian campaign or for the conquest of Rhodes, and died when he reached the place called "Hünkar Çayırı" on the Gebze side after passing Üsküdar.

It is noteworthy that the details of Mehmet II's cautious behavior and secretive character during the decisions to be taken and the implementations to be carried out are included here. In addition, the information that Mehmet II died around Gebze while he was on an expedition departing from Istanbul is presented in Ottoman Period textbooks with a short one-sentence statement.<sup>107</sup>

Oktay's 1952 textbook is the one that provides the most extensive information about the details of Mehmet II's death. In this textbook, it is stated that there were two major issues that bothered Mehmet II very much before his death. The first of these was the recent deterioration of relations between the Ottomans and the Mamluk State in Egypt. The reason for this was that the Mamluk sultan was uncomfortable with Mehmet II's patronage of his brother-in-law Şehsuvar Bey, a member of the Dulkadiroğulları Principality. In addition, pilgrims belonging to

<sup>103</sup> Şirin, *Tarih Lise III*, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Ahmet Vefik, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Osmanî*.

<sup>105</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref, *Fezleke-i Tarih-i Devlet-i Osmanîyye*, 44.

<sup>106</sup> Ahmed Rasim, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 116-152.

<sup>107</sup> Ali Nüzhet, *Resimli ve Haritalı Osmanlı Tarihi*, 60.

the Ottoman people complained to Mehmet II that they were having a lot of trouble travelling to Hejaz because of the Mamluk State and asked him to find a solution to this problem. This problem could not be solved although Mehmet II made a diplomatic attempt with the Mamluk Sultan. The second issue that bothered Mehmet II was the failure of the Ottoman navy in the Rhodes expedition. Mehmet II, who was not in good health at that time, was very upset about these two major issues. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1481, he led his army and set off on an expeditionary journey. However, he did not tell anyone where the expedition would take place. It is possible that this expedition was launched against the Mamluks in Rhodes or Egypt. On the other hand, when the army arrived in Gebze, Mehmet II fell ill (his illness increased), so the army camp was established in a place called Hünkâr Çayırı. Mehmet II lay here for days due to his illness and finally died in 1481 in his tent in the camp.<sup>108</sup>

The narrative of Mehmet II's death due to illness in Oktay's statements is also repeated in Akşit's (1981) book.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, Öztuna's (1976) book puts forward a quite different discourse<sup>110</sup>: "...The Sultan died by poisoning on 3 May 1481 while in his camp between Maltepe and Gebze. He was 49 years old...". According to this information, which was encountered for the first time in Öztuna's book, Mehmet II was poisoned to death not due to illness but as a result of a conspiracy. Another source sharing the information that Mehmet II was killed by poisoning is Şirin's (1989) textbook.<sup>111</sup> Accordingly, rumors that Mehmet II's death was caused by the negligence of his doctor and some statesmen and that he was deliberately killed caused great confusion at that time.

On the other hand, Güneş and Özbek's (2003) textbook presents a completely different information. According to this, Mehmet II was poisoned to death by a Venetian spy on 3 May 1481.<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, the information that the person who poisoned Mehmet II was a Venetian spy is included in the narrative. In today's textbooks, on the other hand, there are statements such as "Upon the death of Mehmet the Conqueror in 1481..." and no other details about the death of Mehmet II are included. As a result, the information about Mehmet II in the textbooks is formatted in accordance with the purpose. Sometimes this information was increased through some kind of fiction and sometimes it was deliberately reduced.

### **Conclusion**

High school history textbooks have a decisive function in terms of what and how to teach, both in terms of the teacher's planning and implementation of the lesson and the student's free time. At the same time, history textbooks serve the formation of collective memory. This important mission has led to political and bureaucratic interventions in history textbooks.<sup>113</sup> As a matter of fact, those in power in modern education systems have always utilized these opportunities. It can be said that this is also the case in Turkey.

In this study, in which history textbooks taught in a long historical period from the Tanzimat Period to the present day were examined, the differences in the narratives about Mehmet II, who carried out the conquest of Istanbul, were identified and analysed. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the differentiation in the narratives in the textbooks was closely related to the political and cultural power of the period. This clearly shows that history textbooks are tools that are shaped by the direct influence of power. In addition, it is extremely

<sup>108</sup> Oktay, *Tarih Lise III*, 15.

<sup>109</sup> Akşit, *Tarih III*, 17.

<sup>110</sup> Öztuna, *Tarih III*, 68.

<sup>111</sup> Şirin, *Tarih Lise III*, 16.

<sup>112</sup> Güneş & Özbek, *Lise Tarih 2*, 18.

<sup>113</sup> Gündüz, *Türkiye'de Ders Kitapları Tarihi*.

important in terms of showing how differentiation can occur according to periods even in the presentation of the most "known" subjects of Turkish history such as Mehmet II.

The narratives on Mehmet II in history textbooks first published in the Ottoman period during the reigns of Sultan Abdülaziz (1861-1876), Sultan Abdülhamit II (1876-1908) and the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1923) can be considered as the basis for the narratives in the textbooks of later periods. However, even in the history textbooks of this period, there is no uniformity in the presentation of content.

For a more precise evaluation of Ottoman textbooks, some points about Mehmet II's role in the conquest of Istanbul can be pointed out. It is quite understandable that Mehmet II, as an Ottoman sultan, had a decision-making profile that led the war. However, it is noteworthy that the narrative of the preparations for the conquest is constructed entirely through the subject Mehmet II. In Ottoman Period textbooks, there are statements such as "After Sultan Mehmet completed these works, he besieged the city from land and sea..."<sup>114</sup>, "Sultan Mehmet lowered the warships in the Bosphorus from Beşiktaş to Kasımpaşa, that is, to the Golden Horn..."<sup>115</sup>. This narrative fiction and style can be interpreted as subject-centred historiography. It can be thought that the subject-centred approach serves to make Mehmet II more prominent and legendary in history textbooks over time.

In the textbooks, the information about Mehmet II was sometimes hidden and concealed, and sometimes formatted by trimming in accordance with the conjuncture of the period in the historical process. Although there are differences in some of the information contents, it can be said that the history textbooks of the Ottoman period formed a basis for the textbooks published in later periods.

It is seen that this historiographical construction style, which started with the Ottoman period textbooks, has continued until today. However, it is possible to say that the narratives about Mehmet II have differentiated to a certain extent since the Republican Period and have become more blunt. For example, in Ahmet Refik Altınay's textbook, which is one of the textbooks of the pre-Turkish History Thesis period (1923-1931)<sup>116</sup>, which refers to the preparatory process leading to the formation of the Turkish History Thesis, it is seen that the narrative about the preparations for the conquest of Istanbul is made with an event/fact-centred fiction. In this textbook, statements such as "They gathered a large army in Edirne... They besieged Istanbul with the army from land and the navy from the sea... They cannonaded the city fiercely..." are included. In these statements, it is understood that the style and editing style that expresses that Mehmet II did all the work as an active or active subject has been abandoned. Instead, a narrative structure that presents the work done/event that took place by putting it at the centre has been adopted. It is possible to say that this narrative style has been adopted in the books prepared afterwards, albeit to a certain extent. When we come to the present day, it is seen that narratives are created with a form of fiction that presents both the subject and the event/phenomenon at the centre. Of course, this situation can be associated with the change in historiographical approaches from the Ottoman Empire to the present day.

The period characterised as the Turkish History Thesis (1931-1938) is the period in which the emphasis on Turkishness was predominantly effective in the historiography created with the

<sup>114</sup> Ali Reşad & Ali Seydi, *Tarih-i Osmani*, 28.

<sup>115</sup> Ali Reşad & Ali Seydi, *Tarih-i Osmani*, 28.

<sup>116</sup> Erdal Aslan, "Atatürk Döneminde Tarih Eğitimi-I: 'Türk Tarih Tezi' Öncesi Dönem (1923-1931)", *Eğitim ve Bilim* 37, no. 164 (2012): 331-347, s. 110.

efforts of Kemalist ideology.<sup>117</sup> The characteristics of this period were clearly reflected in the history textbooks analysed. As a matter of fact, the religious content that had been included in the previous narratives was trimmed in this period. Instead, a new discourse aimed at glorifying national identity was produced. In the so-called humanist period (1938-1960), in which a universal synthesis with the Western cultural world was tried to be created in addition to the emphasis on Turkish history<sup>118</sup>, the emphasis on Turkishness in the books continued as in the previous period. In addition, the discourse on Mehmet II reflected his "fondness for science and art as a modern Turkish prince".

When it comes to the period referred to as the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (1970-1993), it is seen that Turkishness consciousness is integrated with the Islamic religion in the textbooks as a reflection of the historiographical characteristics of this period. In fact, it can be stated that a new synthesis was created by putting the phenomenon of religion before nationalism.<sup>119</sup> Although the religious discourse in the textbooks continued to a certain extent in the Second Constitutional Era, it can be said that the narratives were reshaped with extraordinary destruction after 1970.

In the post-Cold War "globalisation" process (1993 and onwards), the approach arguing that the history of nations constitutes the history of humanity has been effective. In Turkey, especially after 2010, the government's increase in culturally conservative discourses has led to an arrangement in history curricula and textbooks in this direction. Accordingly, quantitative indicators such as Ottoman history being spread over two separate courses stand out. In addition, it can be said that traces of an "ideal" Ottoman presentation can be seen, which is a separate subject of examination. All these developments undoubtedly affected the presentation of the Mehmet II phenomenon as a content in textbooks.

In the 2018 history textbooks written according to the History Curriculum, while presenting the content of Mehmet II, the academic works of historians (such as Halil İnalcık, Feridun Emecen) who are experts in the field of the subject are referred to, albeit very limited; it is noteworthy that paragraphs and texts from their works are quoted. Although this approach seems to add richness and scholarship to the subject content, it can also be considered as a kind of "guiding" endeavour. In other words, behind a narrative decorated and equipped with strong references, idealised information can sometimes be presented for a purpose. This is exactly the situation that was noticed in the textbooks analysed within the scope of this research.

Historiographical periods are very important not only for understanding the spirit of historical periods but also for guiding the formation of collective memory. When this situation is evaluated in terms of the distortion dynamics in collective memory determined by Schudson<sup>120</sup>, it can be said that the processes of *distanciation*, *instrumentalisation*, *narrativisation* and *conventionalization* are fully involved in the textbooks examined within the scope of this research. For example, in some of the textbooks examined, Mehmet II's personal characteristics and his attitude during the conquest process were handled as "sanctification and institutionalisation of the past through idealisation". In this way, the narratives about Mehmet II were shaped in a desirable way through the interventions made in the historical process in accordance with the ideology of the period. On the other hand, the narratives in the textbooks about the siege of Istanbul and the role of the character of Mehmet the Conqueror in this process

<sup>117</sup> Eranlı, Büşra, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de" Resmi Tarih" Tezinin Oluşumu (1929-1937)* (İstanbul: İletişim Press, 2018); Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993) Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine 'De l'Adriatique à la mer de Chine'*, trans. Ali Berktaş, 3th edition (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Press, 2016).

<sup>118</sup> Boykoy, "Türkiye'de 1939-1945 Yıllarında", 157-181.

<sup>119</sup> Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında*.

<sup>120</sup> Schudson, "Kolektif Bellekte Çarpıtma Dinamikleri", 181-193.

manifested itself as "using the past for certain purposes". This situation can be evaluated as another dynamic of distortion, instrumentalisation, has also entered the circuit. In the narratives in the history textbooks analysed in this framework, some elements were deliberately selected and highlighted, or were ignored through cropping, suppression and censorship and shaped in accordance with the mentality of the period in which they were written. Within the scope of the dimension of distortion referred to as *narrativisation*, religious and mystical elements were frequently used in the narratives about Mehmet II, adding an epic quality to the narratives about him. When analysed in terms of the process of *conventionalization*, which Schudson refers to as the last distortion dynamic, it can be said that the narratives in the textbooks are exhibited by being rearranged and reproduced each time according to the historiographical periods.

In conclusion, within the scope of this research, the narrative of Mehmet II in high school history textbooks from Tanzimat to the present day has been analysed. According to the findings, it can be argued that the narratives about Mehmet II are shaped according to the spirit of the historical period and the dominant ideology of the government. It has been observed that there are significant continuities and differences in the narratives according to the late Ottoman period, the Turkish History Thesis Period and Humanistic Period, the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis Period and finally the conservative Islamist power periods. This situation showed that the representation of the character of Mehmet II in history textbooks differed according to the period. In addition, it can be said that the representation and narrative of Mehmet II in history textbooks are compatible with the approaches of the governments of the period to education and history.

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