

## **THE BOOKLET OF SAMI FRASHËRI ON TEACHING THE OTTOMAN ALPHABET – WRITING –READING**

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### **Abstract**

“Kyçyk Elif-Ba” – “The little Elif-ba” written by Sami Frashëri is a booklet to help teach the reading process and mastering the Ottoman alphabet, for the madrasas of that time. It was published in Istanbul on April 10, 1937, and was applied the same year, divided into 49 lessons. The book in question has no simplification, transcription or translation into Turkish, which means: it is neither written in Latin nor elaborated, so far, in any of the languages written by the author himself. Those significant elements that we notice in this booklet are Sami's method of teaching the alphabet and Ottoman literature; the reason for using that particular method; as well as the changes he has followed in his method compared to other Ottoman language lessons. The key method used by Sami Frashëri in this booklet is the simplest possible: a method that makes students memorize the alphabet very easily. He used the method of teaching through words, dividing the letters into several groups and including almost all the methods, from that time, of learning an alphabet. Then, he goes on teaching the letters, splitting the letters into short syllables and then long syllables; where Arabic lessons are also used, as an influential language in the Ottoman language; and also part of the Persian alphabet, used in the Ottoman alphabet. After learning the alphabet, reading the words, he adds some rules that are necessary for reading an alphabet, after which he adds reading texts to learn and reinforce the lessons even more.

*Keywords:* ottoman alphabet, teaching methods, letter acquisition, comparative methodology

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### ***A general overview of the Ottoman alphabet***

The Ottoman alphabet consists of Arabic and Persian letters, and one additional letter added by the Turks themselves. The acquisition of the Arabic alphabet came as a result of the necessity to write and read in the Ottoman language of that time, especially when considering the fact that Arabic itself was used as a language of science and religion, as well as Persian as a language of literacy and art. The Ottoman alphabet consists of 31 letters, among them, some consonants have the function of vowels. We also have cases where the same consonant has the function and expressions of some vowels. As in the case of the “ya” that expresses the vowel “i” and “ı” of the Turkish language.

The Arabic words used in the Turkish language are written as in the original, they do not change at all in form or letter, nor do the words in the Persian language. While the Turkish words are written according to some specific rules, and since there were no standard rules of the alphabet or the writing of the Ottoman language, as a result the Ottoman texts, it varies from author to author.

This alphabet has hard and soft consonants, whether they are completely different from each other or similar to each other. A single word in the Ottoman alphabet can be read in many ways, which makes it natural for students to guess, but in these cases, we adhere to the Siyak-Sibak rule, which means we delineate the word based on the context. The most specific letter of the Ottoman alphabet is “kef”, which is divided into four types, all usable. While the *kef* called *nasal nun* has been added by the Turks and is marked with three dots above the letter. Even the Arabic and Turkish genetic connections differ when they are written with this alphabet. There are some words that are solid and are written as such without any special rules. As for the Ottoman suffixes, they are written not based on the rules of the root of words but have special rules. Like the Arabic language that has different calligraphy, the Ottoman alphabet has been used with the *rik'a*, *thuluthi* and *divani* calligraphies, which are mostly examined in the Ottoman Paleography, where the object of study are the Ottoman manuscripts and inscriptions.

In other words, the Arabic letters have been fitted so much to the Ottoman alphabet and its broad lexicon, even preserving its rhyme and metric, that it has enriched its linguistic stylistics as a result of the interweaving and enrichment of this language with Arabic and Persian language.

### **Teaching methods and mastering the letters**

“Kyçyk Elif-Ba” – “The little Elif-ba” is a booklet written by Sami Frashëri to teach the reading and mastering of the Ottoman alphabet, for the madrasah "Hamidiyah", with reserved publishing rights. It was published in Istanbul on April 10, 1937, and was used in the same year, divided into 49 lessons. The book in question has no simplification, transcription or translation into Turkish, i.e. it is neither written in Latin nor elaborated, so far, in any of the languages written by the author.

The booklet begins with the title "bi aunihi teala" - "with the help of the Most Highest", it also shows that he wrote the booklet to be used by Hamidiyah madrasa and that the publishing rights are reserved, and before that, he also mentions that the school Hamidiyah is located in the Besiktas part of Istanbul.

The *Kyçyk elif-ba* begins with the first lesson entitled “Listed Letters”. Sami Frashëri has placed the Ottoman alphabet here according to the classical order.

The second lesson consists of the same letters but non-arranged.

The third lesson deals with the *ebced* alphabet, which had become a tradition to be taught in our mosque by previous generations. Ebced is the numerical value of letters which is mostly used in history to write the dates of the construction of monuments, Ottoman inscriptions, etc.

In the fourth lesson, the form of these letters is given without the diacritical marks. This is due to the fact that even the Arabic alphabet, before Islam and after the revelation of the Qur'an and its gathering in a *mus'haf*, was without diacritical marks, the usage of which came as a need after the spreading of Islam to the non-Arab nations. Thus, while reading the Quran, they used to make mistakes that changed the meaning of the verses. The author, however, presents here a sort of footnote to the diacritical marks of the alphabet to describe: which; how many; and where they are used, by representing them below or above the line.

Then in the fifth lesson, he focuses on explaining and illustrating the use of diacritical marks in detail, then he continues to divide the consonants which are carriers of these diacritical marks according to their number, respectively they are dots, such as those that carry a dot, two or three dots, then those that have dots above them and those that have dots below them. To do so, he has illustrated these in lines, as the Arabic to adhere to calligraphy, is written in three lines: respectively the dots may be above or below the upper or lower lines.

In the sixth lesson, he provided information on which letters are based on the Arabic alphabet, according to which some consonants change during the process of writing, and some others that do not undergo changes in writing.

After that, he gives some information about four *kef*-s dividing them into: *Kef-i Farisi*, *Kef-i arabi*, muted *Kef* and *Kaf-i Turki*

In the seventh lesson, he introduces the consonants again together with the Arabic vowels as the Arabic alphabet is taught in the classical way: e-i-u, be-bi-bu, te-ti-tu.

In the eighth lesson, he presents different letters with different vowels so that the students can learn to read the separate letters which he has given separately, without placing them together.

Lesson nine consists of very easy words built of only two letters that make up a syllable.

Lesson ten includes words consisting of three letters which again remain a syllable.

Lesson eleven includes difficult pronunciation letters and words examples to pronounce them

Lesson twelve continues with three-letter syllabus such as: E-re-de, i-re-de, u-ri-de.. And after these, examples of such three-letter syllabus words are given.

In lesson thirteen we find only examples of how to write letters with *huruf-i imla'*, (consonants that have the function of vowels)

Lesson fourteen also shows how letters are written with vowels, giving examples of one-syllable words.

Lesson fifteen focuses on how to write the letters that are connected after giving examples of two-three syllable words.

Lesson sixteen shows what the condition of the letters is when they are alone, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the words because of the change they undergo during the connection.

The author continues with lesson 20 which means from lesson 16 to 20, respectively lessons 17-19 have certainly been planned to be the exercises or practice of what has been taught so far. In the review of the booklet, the pages have been listed in numbers and we notice that there are no gaps or shortcomings, so it is not a matter of lost pages, but after lesson 16 there comes lesson 20 which continues with the consonants that are very difficult to learn and the letters that cannot be connected with the others.

In addition, in lessons 21-28, we find explanations about the letters that can be connected with the other letters that follow them; word examples where the student has to find where the letters are connected within those words; syllables to dictate to the students. Then, strong letters ending with *he* (which in Ottoman means e-a vowels), and continues with examples of words to read until lesson 29.

While in lesson 29 he brings syllables with three consonants and a vowel.

In lesson 30 he gave examples of *he* and *ya* '. While in the lesson 31, examples of how the short and long *i*; as well as the short and long *e* differ in writing.

Then he goes on to reading examples, wherein the following lessons, up to lesson 39, he examines issues related to *teshdid*-reinforcement; extensions; *tenvin*-nunation; hamzah; lam

as a definite article -al; shamsiya letters and prepositions, after which the most difficult texts follow.

### **Author's methodology compared to today's methodologies**

If we compare Sami's method and methodology on teaching the Ottoman alphabet and Ottoman literacy with the current method and methodology of teaching the Ottoman alphabet and literacy, the differences are obvious.

Sami Frashëri has used most of the methods that encourage the student to remember the alphabet; presenting them in every possible illustrative way; then dividing them into different categories; which leads to repetition of the same letters, in which case forgetting them becomes impossible. While today's teaching methods are not focused as much on the division of the alphabet into several groups, it's limited to a maximum of three divisions. Then, today's lessons examples are not chosen to follow a certain scale of difficulty, for example: at the beginning easier and then more difficult; but whole sentences can be chosen to clarify a certain rule.

The special importance that Sami Frashëri has given to the examples is shown by the fact that for each lesson, there are more examples than rules. Apparently, the details and clarifications of the rules have been left to the teacher of the subject. While today, the rules of reading and writing are given a little more space, such as: genetic connections; the way of writing suffixes; solid words; reading the Arabic and Persian words; reading proverbs; connectors; grammatical cases, etc.

The collocation of the lessons done by the author, which starts with a letter and then adds vocals and adds syllables to one, two or more, shows the ability to learn the correct alphabet of the Ottoman language and literacy of the Ottoman language; we can hardly find this in today's Ottoman language textbooks.

### **Conclusion**

For the sake of truth, we must admit that we still do not have a specialist in Ottoman Language, because there is no specific subject for this field of study, but we have some scholars of old Turkish literature and Ottoman history who have worked with such special devotion on Ottoman texts that they even become specialists on this matter. While Sami Frashëri's work in this booklet, his preparation and contribution in this field, make us question how efficient our teaching system or today's methodology on Ottoman language is.

Given the fact that the author could adapt to the age of the student and has prepared the text for students who, most likely, did not know the Arabic alphabet, adding to this the importance he has given to the collocation of the lessons from the simplest one to the most difficult and more complicated one, we can conclude that this would be a suitable methodology for learning the alphabet and literature of any other foreign language.

Therefore, we think that the elaboration of this book will not only enrich the author's bibliography and both the Albanian and Turkish libraries, but will also contribute to the literature and methodology of teaching of the Ottoman literature, both taught by Turks and Albanians, or even anyone else interested in learning it.