

Reforms and Social Changes / Education

Education was a central question in 19th-century European debate on issues of obligation and secularity. In the second half of the century, the colonial powers – particularly France and the United Kingdom – made efforts to advance these (to them) vital issues in their colonies, protectorates and spheres of interest in the Arab and Ottoman world. Sociopolitical movements on both sides of the Mediterranean attributed importance to the ultimate purpose of modern public education as a key factor in the economic, political and cultural advancement of society. Subsequently, in the Middle East, two systems came to coexist: Western-style public and private school education, which left little room for Arabic language and Arab culture, and traditional teaching in Qur'anic schools, which affirmed religious faith and Arab identity.



Working Number:	TN 071
Name:	Zaytuna University
Holding Museum:	Institut Supérieur d'Histoire Contemporaine de la Tunisie
Date:	19th century
Materials:	Paper
Curator Justification:	Traditional Islamic education emphasised memorisation of the Holy Qur'an, the study of hadith, grammar, Islamic jurisprudence, and other related subjects such as philosophy and astronomy. In the 19th century, European-inspired schools were founded in the Arab and Ottoman world, coexisting with traditional institutions.



Working Number:	MO 087
Name:	Photograph of a classroom at a traditional Qur'anic school
Holding Museum:	National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco
Date:	1914
Materials:	-
Curator Justification:	Traditional Qur'anic schools continued to exist alongside modern schools. Teaching was based on reading and memorising the Qur'an, with the students gathered around the teacher.



Working Number:	GR 029
Name:	Lesson at the Benaki Orphanage in Alexandria Egypt
Holding Museum:	Benaki Museum
Date:	1888–1921
Materials:	Photograph
Curator Justification:	The Greek community, which was very significant in 19th-century Alexandria, undertook much philanthropic work there, focusing in particular on education. The classroom at this orphanage enabled young girls to be taught the basics of geometry.



Working Number:	FR 079
Name:	Art exhibition at school, 12–25 June, 1904
Holding Museum:	National Library of France
Date:	1904

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This French poster, dated 1904, relates to the teaching of art in schools. Since 1879, harmonised curricula were introduced and specialist teachers recruited in order to systematically advance the democratisation of practical art appreciation and training.



Working Number: FR 177

Name: A teacher and one of his pupils

Holding Museum: National Library of France

Date: 1920

Materials: -

Curator Justification: In the 19th century, literacy was promoted among the Middle Eastern population primarily in Qur'anic schools: the Qur'an was learnt by heart, and writing was taught by copying out its verses. Fascinated by the use of the Qur'an for teaching purposes, French travellers and scientists photographed these scenes of learning, which were so different from those found in the secular state schools of France.



Working Number: LB 084

Name: Photograph "Under the Oak Tree"

Holding Museum: Oriental Library, Saint Joseph University (Usj)

Date: Late 19th century – early 20th century

Materials: Black and white photograph

Curator Justification: Among the European-style schools springing up across the Middle East in the 19th century were many Christian schools set up by their respective church authorities. This priest, Father Joseph Delore, taught at one of the many missionary schools set up in Lebanon during the 19th and early 20th centuries.



Working Number: ET1 027

Name: Secondary school students giving a sports performance during King Fu'ad I's visit to the Fayum Directorate

Holding Museum: Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Date: 8 May 1927

Materials: -

Curator Justification: There were two schools of thought regarding education in Egypt in the 1920s. One remained traditional, while the other was open to modern trends, encouraged by King Fu'ad I. Even sport – following the French and British model – was now encouraged in such schools.
