



## From Missionary Tradition to Liberal Leadership: Robert College, 1918–1970\*

Ali Erken

**To cite this article:** Ali Erken (2023): From Missionary Tradition to Liberal Leadership: Robert College, 1918–1970\*, British Journal of Educational Studies, DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2023.2210640

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2210640>



Published online: 30 May 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 97



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



## FROM MISSIONARY TRADITION TO LIBERAL LEADERSHIP: ROBERT COLLEGE, 1918–1970\*

by ALI ERKEN, *Institute of Middle East and Islamic Countries, Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey*

*ABSTRACT:* This article analyses the transformation of Robert College, the first American college founded abroad, from 1923 to 1970. Based on a careful investigation of Robert College archives and personal accounts of the College staff, it contends that the school's missionary character acquired a new identity after the foundation of Republican Turkey. Robert College gradually abandoned its missionary tradition to become an institution of liberal learning in the service of westernizing Turkey. The College presidency and trustees have long elaborated on the new context and trends in liberal education in the United States. At the same time, the Turkish officers and graduates quickly adjusted to this new character immersed in secular values. The College's transition involved a shared commitment going beyond political partnership, reflecting an intellectual vision that came out of long years of negotiations within the College establishment.

*Keywords:* Missionaries, liberal education, history of United States, history of Turkey

### INTRODUCTION

Diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and the United States of America date back to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In 1830, American citizens were granted commercial rights in the ports of the Ottoman Empire as a result of assistance offered by the US Navy to the Ottoman Empire (Covey, 2019, pp. 54–55). Several missionary groups also came to the area with the increasing activities of American traders in Anatolia, the Balkans, and Arabia where the Ottoman rule still prevailed. William Goodell, a Massachusetts missionary who traveled from Beirut to Istanbul, was one of the first missionaries to reach Istanbul (Hamlin, 2014, p. 28). Christopher Rhineland Robert, an American businessman who conducted business in the region, and Cyrus Hamlin, a missionary in Istanbul, collaborated in 1863 to establish Robert College, the first American school abroad (Hamlin, p. 287–300). Missionary schools became gradually accepted by the Ottoman administration as they provided non-Muslim citizens with an option for education and the number of American schools in the Ottoman Empire reached nearly 500 (Agoton, Master, 2009, p.387). Robert College, where the children of Muslim citizens started to be enrolled as well, gained credibility among the Ottoman

political elites (Gates, 1940, pp. 223–224). However, during and after the Balkan Wars and World War I, the College staff had to deal with financial difficulties, safety concerns, and political suspicions (Gates, 1940, pp. -204–207).

With the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a new era began for the American schools operating in Turkey. The secularization reforms limited religious instruction in schools and prohibited the use of religious symbols, dressing in religious attire, and celebrating religious holidays. These measures were put into practice to limit Islamic teaching and symbols in schools, but Turkey's new founding elite did not treat missionary schools with the same accord as the Ottomans, having demanded they comply with the requirements of the new secular model of education. Some missionary schools shut down, and a school in Bursa shut down due to its missionary activities. Despite being a missionary school Robert College remained open, thanks to its prestigious standing among Turkish politicians and its strong backing from US political elites. The College's administration and Trustees were unwilling to abandon the College's missionary character, and as a result had to deal with the changing socio-political realities of Turkey during that period.

In the Ottoman Empire, most students at Robert College came from non-Muslim minorities, but after the establishment of the Republic, Muslim students gradually increased in number. By the 1950s, the majority of students were Turkish, coming from rich and elite families of the new republic, who could afford the College's high tuition fees. In other words, Robert College as a private boarding school attracted the children of new elites in Republican Turkey. Initially, Robert College offered a seven-year program to boys (grades 6–12), but in 1957, it gained the status of a private "High College" (*Yüksek Okul*), which was equivalent to university status in Turkey and awarded BA/BS degrees in engineering, business administration, sciences, and foreign languages. This '*Yüksek Okul*' section was transferred to the Turkish Ministry of Education in 1971 and converted to Boğaziçi University whereas Robert College's High School continued to offer its seven-year high school program in a different campus and is still active today. The American College for Girls (ACG), which had been founded in 1873 in Istanbul, continued its operations independently from Robert College, but both Colleges were united under a single Presidency in 1932, and under the same Board of Trustees in 1959.<sup>1</sup> Since then, a small number of ACG graduates started to enroll the Robert College *Yüksek Okul* and the number of female students studying for undergraduate degrees gradually increased. Along with Robert College, there were a few high schools run by old French and German missionary foundations that continued to exist after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and most of these schools were located in Istanbul. As the only high school teaching in English in Istanbul with a missionary background, Robert College quickly gained a reputation among the others, thanks to its alumni and socio-political

climate favouring Turkish–American relations. Moreover, no other French or German colleges could offer graduate education in the Republican era, as Robert College did.

Turkey's quest for Westernization provided a new ground for the College staff in revising the school's mission as well, coming to terms with the expectations of the Turkish ruling elite. After the end of World War II, Turkish–American relations entered a new phase within the ideological rivalry of the Cold War. President Truman's speech 1947 which established the Truman Doctrine signaled the beginning of a new political term in the Near East and the Balkans, where Turkey would act as a bulwark against the Soviet Union. This new political term was furthered by the Marshall Plan, an economic recovery plan aimed at preventing communist movements from rising in Europe (Holm, 2016; Karpat, 1959; McGhee, 1990). At this time, it was also becoming apparent to U.S. political and intellectual elites that winning the hearts and minds of the people would be crucial in the post-War ideological competition, and the wider acceptance of liberal values. Education proved to be a significant tool in the Cold War context, and various initiatives served this end, including the introduction of the Fulbright Act, the Peace Corps Program, and the revision of old American missionary colleges (Richmond, 2003; Giles Scott-Smith, 2008; Palmer Peterson, 2011; Karen, 2022). Also, after WW II, the Rockefeller, Ford, and Carnegie Foundations increased funding for area studies, humanities, and mass communication (Parmar, 2012; Berman 1983). This process involved re-evaluating Robert College's aims in Turkey in relation to advancing US strategic goals in the Cold War. As a result of the growing investment in liberal arts and humanities in the United States, as well as the westernization of Turkish society and politics, Robert College took on a new mission – to promote liberal and democratic ideals. The governing bodies both in the United States and Turkey aimed to situate the College within this wider transformation, but the process required a great deal of negotiation and nuanced changes within the curriculum and faculty staff. Although the governing bodies struggled to collect missionary funds, thanks to the Cold War context, they were able to receive funds from US Foundations and agencies.

The role of schools as westernizing instruments in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods has drawn a lot of attention in the literature, but studies exploring Western scholars and instructors have only recently begun to expand (Regine, 2000; Reisman, 2006; Sabev, 2014). Robert College as a social and cultural agency in the Republican period has not been subject to scholarly examination in that regard. Available literature generally deals with the Ottoman Empire's missionary activities, whereas they are a limited number of studies on the Republican period (Grabill, 1971; Heather and Doğan, 2011; Ellington, Reeves, Sklar, Shemo *et al.*, 2010; Acun and Gürtünca, 2016). Orlin Sabev's research on Robert College presents a comprehensive survey of the school's curriculum, students, and philosophy of education in the late Ottoman period

(Sabev, 2014). The only available piece to cover the post-1923 period was John Freely's monograph on the history of College (Freely, 2009). Freely served at Robert College as a teacher of physics from 1960 to the 1980s, and his account offers a detailed survey of the important developments in the College's history. Lastly, a number of recent studies have investigated the nexus between missionary schools, US foundations, and cultural diplomacy, and explored how American global agencies and foundations collaborated with missionary schools in different contexts (Lian, 1997; Okkenhaug and Sanchez-Summerer, 2020).

The official Robert College records, which date from 1858 to 1986, are at Columbia University Library and contain a wealth of information almost exclusively in English. The collection is composed of nineteen different series, each of which focuses on different administrative units, personal collections, and correspondence of trustees and college officials in Istanbul and the US. Correspondences in general concern educational issues, financial matters, and political tensions, including commentaries on the modernization of Turkey. Thus, Robert College records do not only deal with the history of an institution of education but also stand as a significant source of social and political history. In addition, some officials and instructors in the College released memoirs covering their experiences with Robert College.

On the basis of the extensive use of archives and biographical accounts, this article offers a detailed analysis of the College's transformation from 1918 to 1971. In the first part, it highlights the negotiation among the College management, the Trustees, Turkish graduates, and politicians on both sides, focusing on the gradual change from a missionary institution between 1930 and 1945. The second part deals with the role of Robert College in Turkey's new path in Westernization during the Cold War. The Cold War era saw both the US and Turkey assume new roles within international contexts during this time, with the US becoming a global superpower and Turkey, as a westernizing Muslim country, becoming a strategic partner.

#### TURBULENT YEARS AND ABANDONING MISSIONARIES: 1918–1945

Until the early 1920s, College operations had relied on human and financial resources, mostly drawn from missionary organizations in the United States. John Stewart Kennedy, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Robert College between 1895 and 1909, had donated \$1,500,000 to the College. Likewise, Cleveland Dodge, his successor from 1909 to 1926, sponsored the construction of several buildings in the campus. American public opinion, however, was rather occupied with the non-Muslim minorities in the region and due to the changing demographic and political picture after 1923 it was no longer possible to attract the old missionary audience for the survival of the College.

Robert College's President Caleb Frank Gates (1903–1932) had come from the missionary tradition, lived the last days of the Ottoman Empire,

witnessed World War I, and even took part in the Lausanne Peace talks as an advisor to Admiral Bristol (Gates, 1940, pp. 287–289). Educated elites in Turkey, thus, knew President Gates very well. However, Gates was still confused about the new political leadership in the early years and there were moments when he fell into ambiguity about the future direction of Robert College. On the other hand, he was also assessing that this new situation might offer new chances for the continuation, even the development, of Robert College.

Gates had to convince himself, the College Trustees, and potential benefactors in the United States, as well as the newly established Turkish government, that a change in the College's mission was necessary. His up and downs were visible throughout the reports he wrote to the Board of Trustees. In a special report, he wrote to the Trustees, President Gates informed the American side about the latest developments and questioned the new mission of the College:

The government representatives expressed the opinion that Robert College does not conform with the requirements of the educational law, which stresses that no student shall be required to attend any religious exercise of a denomination other than his own. The government abolished all religious instruction in its own schools even for Muslims and could not permit such instruction in foreign schools. The standpoint of Robert College is as follows:

1-The Charter of Robert College prescribes the scripture shall be read and prayer offered every school day in the presence of all students and teachers. The faculty have excused Muslim students. If chapel services are abolished the Charter would be violated.

2-Robert College conducts no propaganda to win students from their own churches.

3-Religious exercises are planned for the building of character and not with any view to proselyting its students.

4-In view of these contradictions, we do not see how we can abolish religious instruction without being guilty of violating the charter and trust funds (Gates, 1932).

It could be seen that President Gates dwelled on 'character education' rather than invoking a religious mission, which would, he believed, be of help to convince the Republican administration. It was understood that College officers sought to catch the latest developments in the field of education in the United States as well. Thanks to Dr. Marion Talbot, who acted as dean of Women at the University of Chicago for nearly 30 years and after retirement served as the head of American College for Girls in İstanbul in the late 1920s and early 1930s, ACG and Robert College faculty members held a joint workshop on education to discuss 'general trends of liberal arts colleges in the United States' (Fisher/Staub/Deering, 1931-1933). In this conference, College instructors read papers, presented findings and discussed their views on 'what trends in American Colleges

might be adopted by the Colleges in Istanbul'. Talbot also wrote that his recent trip to the United States was helpful in terms of being familiar with the latest educational changes in the United States (Fisher/Staub/Deering, 1931-1933).

In some other reports, President Gates displayed a more positive tone about the future of Colleges. Once he wrote that though the impression in the United States was that current difficulties would make it impossible to carry on the work of Colleges, actually 'it was not the case' as there was 'an enlarged opportunity' for Robert College thanks to the Westernization reforms. Gates concluded: 'there is in Turkey freedom of thought and inquiry such as has never been known before' (Freely, 2009, p. 17). In another report of Gates to the Trustees, he reiterated this optimism:

We should be optimistic, the bureaucrats at the Ministry of Education say that if Robert College was to become like a Turkish high school, it would lose its *raison d'être* . . . that is they appreciate that the Robert College has a culture and a moral influence in character building, which is valuable to them (Gates, 1932).

One of the reasons President Gates was a little hopeful was the content of Robert College's education, as the school had started to provide instruction in basic sciences and engineering from the beginning of the 1900s. Especially the engineering school, which was opened in 1912, offered Turkish students quality engineering education in English. Science and engineering courses, Gates thought, brought an advantage to the College as it became a rare source for the training qualified human power necessary for the development of Turkey. (Gates, 1940, pp. 204–207)

It was not only President Caleb Frank Gates who struggled with this transition from missionary tradition to a new concept. Cleveland Dodge, who served as the influential Chairman of the Board of Trustees for nearly 20 years and his family, contributed to the building of the school's missionary character (Biographical information on Dodge family and on E.D.H. Clarke, 1976). The Dodge family had been the patrons of the American College of Beirut and Robert College since the mid-1800s, and this connection was not limited to financial contribution only. Family members took over various roles as an educator or administrator in the development of colleges. William Dodge, Cleveland Dodge's father, had been an active participant in missionary activities and was one of the early benefactors of the Syrian Protestant College (Biographical information, 1976). While Cleveland Dodge, as a prominent businessman in the mining industry, served as the Chairman of Robert College's Board, Gracey Hoadley Dodge, his older sister, was appointed as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American College for Girls in Istanbul. Bayard Dodge, Cleveland Dodge's son, travelled to Syria to serve at the Syrian Protestant College and acted as the College President for a number of years (Biographical information, 1976). Cleveland's daughter Elizabeth Dodge

was married to George Huntington, who served at Robert College between 1916 and 1934 in different capacities, and moved to Istanbul to teach at Robert College for a long time. (Huntington-Dodge, 1979, pp. 82–84).

Like Gates, the Dodge family was worried about the developments in the Near East. Cleveland Dodge's close friendship with President Woodrow Wilson between 1913 and 1921 had helped generate a political atmosphere in which the College operated as usual even during the War years (Huntington-Dodge, 1979, p. 131; Grabill, p. 256). With the death of Cleveland Dodge in 1926, the missionary activities of the Dodge family began to decline, but Elizabeth Dodge Huntington continued to stay in Turkey. Not willing to abandon the school's missionary character, Cleveland Dodge Huntington pondered the College's possible role in transmitting Western values in the newly formed Turkish Republic. In her memoirs, Elizabeth Dodge Huntington recounted a ball she attended in Istanbul at the invitation of the Governor of Istanbul, where she observed how people behaved according to Western customs and played American-style music. She also noted that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk organized a ball in Ankara, and invited the ruling elites in the city on the condition that attendants will bring with them an unveiled lady (Huntington-Dodge, 1979, pp. 170–171). This was, in her view, an example of the role of Robert College's education in the transformation of a society's customs by the example 'of the upper class' (Huntington-Dodge, 1979, p. 211). Thus, she thought, Robert College would continue to offer Western values to Turkey in its quest for sociocultural change (Huntington-Dodge, 1979, pp. 211–214).

After the death of Cleveland Dodge, Henry Sloane Coffin took over the role of Chairmanship of Robert College's Board of Trustees. Henry Sloane Coffin came from a theological background, having served as the President of Union Theological Seminary, one of the oldest seminaries in the United States. In addition, Bayard Dodge, formerly head of Syrian Protestant College, took over the role as the President of the Near East College Association,<sup>2</sup> which would oversee the financial and administrative needs of Colleges in the region, including Robert College (Dodge Family Sketch, 1950). In other words, despite the changing content of education, ideological orientation and student profiles, the missionary character of the Colleges did not reduce immediately. This search for a new direction was also evident in a letter by Albert Staub, who was the executive secretary of the joint office of the Robert College and Syrian Protestant College and later Director of the New York Office of the Near East College Association, to Henry Sloane Coffin, which explained that a representative of the College Trustees visited Ankara to meet with politicians. However, İsmet İnönü was not happy with inquiries about the possibility of religious instruction and reported saying, 'there would be no direct or indirect religious instruction, not even to Christian students'. (Correspondence Staub/Coffin, 1932-1934).

A similar examination in educational policy took place in choosing President Gates' successor. After the retirement of Gates, Trustees were looking for candidates to replace him, and they were also 'facing serious problems in determining the religious policy of the College'. Floyd Black, President of the American College of Sofia, emerged as a possible candidate as he had dealt with similar problems in Bulgaria and knew the Turkish context well due to his previous work at the Robert College (Correspondence Staub/Coffin, 1932-1934). In a letter President Gates wrote to Henry Coffin, he suggested Black as the most appropriate successor to himself but warned that because of suspicions among the Turkish elites towards Bulgaria, this choice might cause trouble for the College administration. Gates added that Floyd Black's being a religious minister could be another problem for the College (Correspondence Staub/Coffin, 1932-1934). Following initial consultations, the Trustees did not choose Floyd Black and appointed Paul Monroe (1932-1935) as the President.

Actually, the two Presidents after Gates were the signs of change for the missionary tradition of the College. Paul Monroe, Gates' successor, was a scholar interested in modern educational sciences who did not have any missionary background and who had taught abroad for many years (Freely, 2009, pp. 43-44). Walter Livingstone Wright (1935-1943), appointed as the President after President Monroe, left for health reasons, was a historian of the Ottoman Empire and taught history at the College (Freely, 2009, p. 54). It was thus possible to say that Caleb Gates was the last person representing the missionary tradition to be Robert College's President.

Aside from debates over the content of education, the College administration struggled with the wavering nationalist fervor of the new Republican regime. The deportation of Edgar Fisher, the second principal of Robert College, because of his criticisms about the new Turkish state, was another challenge during this period. The school administration tried to defend Fisher but was met with a non-conciliatory response from authorities. According to the Turkish officials, Fisher interfered with the country's internal affairs, having made insulting statements (Monroe, 1933a). In response, Monroe (1933a) asked that publicity should be avoided, especially in the United States as it would 'injure the interests and appreciation of the cultural and political developments now going on in Turkey' and might hinder the College's efforts in 'its promotion of cultural advancement in Turkey'. Monroe (1933a) wrote in a warning tone that the College trustees 'were entrusted with the control of College's interests, and the continuation of this would raise doubts about 'whether the College is either wanted or needed in Turkey'. Finally, Monroe (1933b) reiterated to the Ministry of Education that 'none of these institutions of the Near East College Association is connected with any religious organization' and that they were dependant on 'gifts from individuals who are interested in contributing to the cultural development in the Near East'.

Despite this tension, some encouraging news was coming from Ankara. In another letter to Henry Sloane Coffin in 1933, Monroe recounted his conversation with acting Minister of Education Refik Saydam (Minister of Health), who replaced Reşit Galip. Indeed, the Robert College staff were closely following changes within the Turkish bureaucracy, and the appointment of Reşit Galip as the Minister of Education had caused caution as Staub described him 'an able man, but more extreme nationalist' (Correspondence Staub/Coffin, 1932-1934). According to Monroe, Refik Saydam personally informed him about the approach of Mustafa Kemal, stressing that he and Mustafa Kemal, and the rest of the ministers, were very friendly towards Robert College from the first day, and appreciative of what they had done and were doing for the country. Monroe noted that this was a kind of statement that had never been made before, and led him to think that Fisher case did not reflect the general attitude among the ruling elite (Monroe, 1933a).

In another letter to Coffin, Albert Staub quoted his conversation with Orhan Halid, the new Turkish ambassador to the United States, in which Halid stated that 'new opportunities for colleges will come', and that while the Turkish government followed the departure of other foreign schools with pleasure, they 'did not want to lose' the Robert College. Halid attributed this attitude mainly to the Turkish leaders' interest in the Anglo-Saxon culture and the fact that American influence was more preferable to British. (Correspondence Staub/Coffin, 1932-1934). Besides, Atatürk was known to send his adopted daughters to Robert College so that they could be educated in an American institution (Freely, 2009, p. 22). Despite such relieving messages and gestures, nevertheless, the College administration still sought to make a clear sense of the underlying motivation of the new regime. Right before his resignation in 1933 Gates shared his final observations with Henry Sloane Coffin:

Turkey is passing through a combined renaissance and reformation movement comparable to that of Western Europe during the sixteenth century; here, however, government and church are hostile to each other instead of being allied with each other as in the struggle in Western Europe . . . in the conflict with the Muslim church the Turkish government has suppressed the caliphate and the Turkish headship of the Moslem world, suppressed all the monastic orders, and escheated to the state all Muslim church property; . . . a secularization movement . . . so in the light of all of these tremendous changes the existence of one or two small institutions such as our American colleges becomes really a very small affair . . . I believe that their attitude toward our maintenance of religious interest and activities is largely due to the fact that they interpret this a defiance of their wishes and their fundamental policy and of a continuance of what they resent more than anything else, namely, the mentality of the capitulations . . . (Correspondence Staub/Coffin, 1932-1934).

Despite the fact that college officers were becoming more confident about the future, the government's decision to increase tax rates posed another serious

challenge in 1938. President Wright asked John MacMurray, the US ambassador in Ankara, to speak to President Roosevelt and ask him to write a personal note to Atatürk as a last resort. Furthermore, he wrote to Henry Sloane Coffin requesting him to inform Munir Erteğün, the Turkish ambassador in Washington, about the case so Erteğün could speak with the Turkish government about ‘possible effects on American public opinion’ that the closing of the Colleges would have (Correspondence Wright/Ambassador John V.A. MacMurray/Professor E.W. Kemmerer, 1938-1943).

The transfer of power to İsmet İnönü after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s death in 1938 did not cause a worry for the College trustees because İnönü like Atatürk, had a favorable view of Robert College, as well as of the United States as a political ally. Soon after İnönü’s ascension to power WWII began, but unlike WWI, Turkey avoided engaging in military conflict. With the increasing financial pressure, the only encouraging development for the College in the early 1940s was the decision of the Turkish Ministry of Defence to send its officers to the Robert College preparatory school to learn English (General correspondence, 1957). Young military officers, with an increasing number in language school, became familiar with Robert College, and the school earned a positive reputation among the bureaucratic staff (Freely, 2009, p. 56; Correspondence to scott from black, 1948-1955). Thus, the College management began to consider English language as tool to influence the Turkish elites with the possibility that English might replace French, which had maintained its position as the primary foreign language among educated circles until the early Republican period.

In the restructuring of the College’s mission, secular values were to replace the Christian focus and the target group was the Muslim population instead of non-Muslim minorities (Freely, 2009, p. 56). Acknowledging this transition from 1923 to 1939, Walter Livingstone Wright’s letter to the Trustees described the College’s new focus:

... it is an easy matter to reorganize our programs of studies in conformity with those of the national education system, but extremely difficult task to persuade Turkish officials and public opinion that we are in hearty sympathy with them, have no proselytizing motive, that we are no longer the perhaps unconscious focus of separatism and revolutionary developments among the Christian minority peoples (Freely, 2009, p. 56).

After the end of the WWII, however, mainly because of financial difficulties and ideological ambiguities in the new Republic, the Board of Trustees had to decide whether to continue operations or shut down the College. It seemed, at that point, that the Turkish–American relations entered a new phase in the ideological context of the 1950s, one which rendered a new start for the College plausible.

## ROBERT COLLEGE AS THE HARBINGER OF LIBERAL VALUES: 1945–1971

In the post-1945 context, the Turkish government and educated elites were now more convinced in the new mission of the College. The College's American leadership too, felt confident about the political attitude of Turkey's rulership towards US institutions. İsmet İnönü's political rapprochement with the United States along with his friendly attitude to the Westernised culture were reassuring signs for the College (Freely, 2009, p. 63). As a result, the time was apt to discuss the school's role in the process of Turkish westernization, which was also intended to attract further support from American benefactors for the continuation of Robert College. Carter Davidson, President of Union College, and Paul Dodd, Dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of California, Los Angeles, prepared a comprehensive report on Robert College's new mission and asked: 'What can be identified as the contribution of the two colleges to Turkish liberal education beyond merely quantitative?'. The report continued:

The core program at both Colleges must afford a liberal education at the level of and on minimum standards of a first-class liberal arts college in America. Therein rests, we believe, the chief justification for their continuance in Turkey (Davidson and Dodd, 1957)

Walter Livingstone Wright, due to personal concerns during the War years, had submitted his resignation from the Presidency and Floyd Black (1944–1955) was appointed as the President of the College.<sup>3</sup> President Black's appointment was still indicative of the prevalence of the missionary tradition, but after long years of experience in Sofia American College, Floyd Black seemed to be driven by 'humanitarian' and 'westernization' concerns. Defining the new mission of Robert College and ACG, President Black stressed that they were representing 'American Humanitarianism' in both 'American' and 'Turkish' form:

almost half the members of teaching staff are American, the College is American in origin, buildings were given by the American citizens, and the College is Turkish, nearly all students are Turkish citizens, a large number of staff are Turkish (Black, 1946)

The fundamental purpose of the College was, according to President Black: to educate and train young citizens to be useful, progressive and broad-minded citizens of their country, moved by the broad humanitarian impulses as a result of which these colleges were founded (Black, 1946).

This transition to a new framework involved the 'provision of means of a broad and liberal education for young women to about their 20<sup>th</sup> year' and to teach students 'one of the world's greatest languages as well as their own languages to acquire a broad humanitarian outlook' (Black, 1946). Moreover, President Black underscored the content of education offered to girls, highlighting the College's role in the Westernization of Turkey. In a proposal, the

College submitted to get funding from the Point IV Program in 1951, it was stressed that Robert College was established at a time when education for women in Turkey was quite limited and that the College served to help provide general and scientific education for Turkish women (Hardy, 1951).

President Black closely followed political developments in Turkey and held frequent talks with politicians in Ankara. In a report, he sent to the Trustees, Black explained his meetings with the Minister of Public Instruction and Minister of Finance, university scholars, who showed a 'friendly' interest in the work of the College. According to him, people in Ankara demonstrated a good will to cooperate in education matters and encouraged the continuation of College operations (Black, 1946).

As a result of being included in the Truman Doctrine and then the Marshall Program, Turkey was becoming an important pillar within Cold War ideological rivalry. Such global developments affected domestic politics as well. The CHP's (Republican People's Party-*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*) single-party rule of 27 years ended with the victory of the Democrat Party (DP) in the 1950 elections. As a result, Celal Bayar, one of Atatürk's closest friends, became president, while Adnan Menderes became prime minister. The DP government embraced a more liberal economic policy, having received a considerable amount of loans and financial aid from the United States (Karpas, 1959, pp. 418–421). Lastly, the government acted quickly to send Turkish soldiers to the Korean War that broke out in 1952, and in part as a result, Turkey's long-awaited application to the NATO membership was accepted.

In 1955, President Floyd Black retired resigned from the College presidency and Duncan Ballantine, the President of Amherst College, one of the leading American institutions in liberal arts, was appointed as the President of Robert College.<sup>4</sup> At a time, Turkish-American relations were at perhaps their most cordial, President Ballantine (1955-1961) made an ambitious start, poised to transform the College into an institution of liberal education and a source of knowledge and human power for the development of modern Turkey. Additionally, Ballantine put a good deal of effort to restructure the College's academic programs; the 'high school' was made comparable to a Turkish lycée, and the collegiate division was allowed to grant BA and BS degrees equivalent to a university degree in the Engineering School, School of Business Administration, School of Sciences and School of Foreign Languages.

In fact, the changing position of the United States in world politics led to a reevaluation of the cultural importance of American institution of education abroad. Ballantine started touring relevant organizations in the US, often invoking the US geo-political interests and the 'strategic' location of Robert College to appeal to American benefactors and decision-makers. In a letter, he wrote to Postmaster General Arthur Summersfield, Ballantine praised the work Robert College did as the: 'first institution of higher education established overseas [whose] educational philosophy, and methods are on American lines' (General

Correspondence Ballantine, 1957–1958). Ballantine also wrote that Robert College ‘made a major contribution to the promotion of democratic ideas and the modernization of Turkey and other countries in the region’. Randolph Burges, who had served as US ambassador to NATO and been long a member of the College Board of Trustees, sent another letter to Summersfield about Robert College and described its mission as ‘interpreting Western civilization to the Turkish people and winning their friendship’ (General Correspondence Ballantine, 1957–1958). Furthermore, the fact that the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the College in 1963 took place at a time when the Soviet-American rivalry reached its peak seemed to motivate American and Turkish parties again.<sup>5</sup> Averell Harriman, US Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, was one of those politicians who gave a speech praising the mission of the College in Turkey:

... we recognized the importance in education for growth in our own country and in assisting the development of other countries ... Robert College has had most graduates in engineering which is essential in the creation of modern industrial nation envisaged by Atatürk ... and without the loss of understanding of life, which requires humanities (Harriman, 1962).

During his visit to Robert College General Cemal Gürsel, who became President of the Republic after Celal Bayar, passed similar messages:

These foundations are the sincere devotion of the people of our two countries to the principles of freedom and democracy and their sacrifice for the safeguarding of these ideals. (Gürsel, 1961)

Though the College’s popularity was improving among students, for the College management to make new investments in different departments it would no longer be possible to rely on funds from the Near East College Association or rich trustees like Cleveland Dodge. President Ballantine invited several experts from the United States to Istanbul to prepare reports for the College’s development plans and got in touch with the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, which were expanding the scale of overseas projects after 1945.<sup>6</sup> Again, the College officers centred on liberal values and economic development. A proposal submitted to the Ford Foundation Ballantine underscored that the Robert College School of Engineering and Department of Business Administration contributed to the technical and economic developments of the country ‘in a way not duplicated in Turkey, by the combination of liberal education and professional training characteristic of American institutions’ (Ballantine, 1956b). To maintain and strengthen the global position of the United States, Ballantine argued, the ‘well-being of other liberty loving nations’ should be enforced along with ‘the promotion of democratic values’ (Ballantine, 1956a). The Colleges,<sup>7</sup> a report concluded, have taught a ‘democratic culture’ in Turkey and the ‘social and economic principles of democracy against a background of Turkish pride and culture’ (Raising Report and Recommendations by Kersting, Brown and Company Inc, 1957).

The emphasis on the merging of American values with Turkish character now defined the new framework for the College. Explaining the question ‘in what spheres of activity should the Robert College engage?’, another report drew a clear outline: ‘provision of the best possible programs of instruction in the light of the developments in America, which would offer a general liberal education, professional training in certain fields’ (Perspectives for the Future, 1954–1955). Another report recommending potential paths of development for the College highlighted that the success of Robert College springs from the fact that ‘it has remained as an American institution of learning and at the same time has been responsive to the needs and opinions of the country and peoples it has served’ (Ballantine, 1956a). The College, Ballantine wrote, has offered a concept of education, ‘which is the best expression of our American culture, the liberal education of mind and character’, which did also represent the best standards of education practice and ‘the highest principles of the American ethical heritage’ (Ballantine, 1956b).

Overall, Ballantine was expecting that ‘liberal tendencies’ in Turkish education would become stronger than before. As could be understood, during his Presidency Ballantine attributed great importance to improving the scale of humanities and arts at the College. In an interview with National Geographic, he described the impact of Robert College on the ‘Turkish way of life’ as much more profound than any other institution in Turkey. He added that the College was giving the kind of education ‘necessary to put into effect the reform begun by Atatürk’ so that the ultimate goal of westernization could be pursued through the graduates of Robert College (General Correspondence and Ballantine, 1955–1958).

Ballantine again put a lot of effort towards obtaining financial assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation and, together with David Garwood, Head of the College’s Arts Department, held lengthy talks with John Marshall, the vice director of the humanities division of the Rockefeller Foundation, on which kind of services could be improved in Robert College (Robert college turkish faculty training: 1956–1959, 1961–1967). Ballantine (1955) believed that the College could ‘no longer rely on the leadership of imported people’ and should employ local staff, ‘trained in English’, who could carry out the school’s ‘Western and liberal’ spirit. Ballantine added that the College should train Turkish students in history, social science, and literature so that in the future they could operate a bi-cultural approach. Marshall, too, had been visiting Turkey quite often, had met prominent people in arts and humanities in Turkey, and strongly advocated the promotion of liberal values for the westernization of Turkey (Marshall, 1951). Marshall and Ballantine agreed that a new course in humanities should be developed and the Rockefeller Foundation awarded Robert College \$115,000 for the development of an advanced study in humanities at the College (Garwood, 1962; Robert college turkish faculty training: 1956–1959, 1961–1967). Franklin’s (1963) praised this ‘bio-cultural humanities program’ in the

College, which offered a comparative study of Turkish and American institutions and values with an emphasis on liberal education, similar to ‘liberal arts education in American colleges’ (Erken, 2018). In addition, the Foundation awarded David Garwood to visit the United States to observe the latest trends in literature and in humanities, so that he could apply a similar educational models and approaches at the College (Robert college turkish faculty training: 1956–1959, 1961–1967). The College, lastly, had a reputation for offering a high-quality theatre service, which was appreciated by the Rockefeller officers as well.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, not only did the number of Turkish scholars working at the College increased but also the impact of College graduates on social and economic life in Turkey became more tangible (Hardy, 1951). The College officers capitalized on this mounting power of the College alumni, some of whom became members of the school’s governing board. Considering this strong network as well as the encouraging messages delivered by politicians, it was possible to conclude that there was ‘overwhelming support of the Turkish authorities’ for the College. (Franklin, 1963, p. 18) The appointment of Orhan Mersinli as the Turkish vice President was another step in this regard as he was formerly the head of the Directorate of Turkish Highways, and a board member of the Middle East Technical University (Franklin, 1963, pp. 4–5). Strikingly, the Turkish officers and trustees were very enthusiastic about the College’s strengthening presence and, like their American counterparts, underscored the College’s role in developing a culture of ‘free thought’ and ‘democracy’ in Turkey. Orhan Mersinli described Robert College as an institution helping Turkish students ‘to serve in the commonwealth of free nations’ (Franklin, 1963, pp. 16–17). Other Turkish trustees like Mr. Edin and Mr. Kardam likewise held the view that the College promoted ‘the idea of freedom and democracy’, which was lacking not only in the other Turkish universities but also even in the institutions of education supported by the German and French governments (Franklin, 1963, pp. 12, 19).<sup>9</sup> According to them, the American Colleges in Turkey had the purpose of ‘imparting progressive education’ to the Turkish context and these places were ‘the only intellectual haven for progressive trends and development in Turkey’. (Franklin, 1963, pp. 21–23). In a report Carl M. Franklin, Vice President of the University of Southern California, wrote to the United States Department of State, he collected the views of other trustees, such as Akkoyunlu and Furgac, who also praised the College’s help in the ‘emancipation of women in Turkey’. Akkoyunlu added that other institutions of education in America, like Princeton Harvard, Columbia, should be imported to Turkey, if Turkey had a chance to follow the United States. (Franklin, 1963, p. 20)

President Ballantine’s era ended unexpectedly in 1963 and Patrick Malin, previously head of the Civil Liberty Union in the United States, was appointed as the 8<sup>th</sup> President of the College.<sup>10</sup> On the question of Turkish westernization

and development, and the role of American colleges in this quest, President Malin shared similar reflections with his predecessors:

Since the days of Atatürk Turkey has concentrated on national development in the Western tradition, and has looked especially to the US, for example, suggestion, guidance and assistance. The role of our colleges as a distinctive but integral part of Turkish education is to present in course and in the general life of the college community to students who desire our type of education a distillation of America's considerable experience in order that may help Turkey make the best possible progress along its chosen road ... (Malin, 1963)

Malin likewise dwelled on the issue of development and pledged that the Colleges would, in cooperation with Columbia University School of Business, train 'young Turkish citizens in modern management towards the increasing of production of good and services'. Such purposes, he concluded, were indispensable if Turkey was to be a member of the European Common Market (Malin, 1963).

Though Malin received widespread appreciation from the academic staff within the College, he started to struggle with financial difficulties that became further serious after 1965. Search for possible aids from the different agencies in the United States continued, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Ford Foundations. However, the possible closure of the College was again raised, and in consultation with the College trustees in New York the issue was in the end taken to the Turkish Ministry of Education. The financial crisis led to another change of Presidency, as Malin was replaced by John Scott Everton. In turn, the College operations experienced a total reshuffle when in Grabill (1971) the College properties were transferred to the Ministry of Education to become a university (Kuran, 2013, 10–43; Freely, 2009, pp. 170–209). It was Boğaziçi University, founded on the site of Robert College, which was to continue graduate education in those departments inherited from the College.

#### CONCLUSION

From 1863 to 1932, Robert College was led by a strong missionary leadership under the presidency of Cyrus Hamlin, George Washburn and Caleb Gates. The College's founders and major benefactors, namely John Stewart Kennedy and Cleveland Dodge, weighed upon the continuation of a missionary tradition in the Near East. The foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 brought about a set of challenges and opportunities. During his last years as President, Caleb Gates sought to meet the new Republic's demands and handled the situation with the Chairmen, Cleveland Dodge and Henry Sloane Coffin. The College leadership were unwilling to abandon its missionary character but finally figured out how to transform the school according to the Republican quest for Westernization.

The transformation of Robert College was not only driven by the changes in education models and curriculum development, but also served as an instrument for the Turkish leaders vision to westernize the country. Moreover, the College benefited from the promotion and internationalisation of American liberalism after 1945, receiving financial and personnel support from American foundations. The Cold War and the changing character of Turkish-American relations opened new prospects for the College as the Turkish leadership, eager to draw American ideas to the country, welcomed the role of the College towards this end.

College staff sought to transform the institution into a modern school of liberal education. As such, the College attracted the children of elite families, and gained the status of higher education, where successful Turkish students and potential leaders of the future, would acquire education and training to promote a 'liberal spirit' and 'democratic values'. The transition experienced by the College was been a process of negotiation that involved the College staff, Trustees, Turkish graduates, and officers, and which has required a nuanced adaptation to the changing social and political priorities in both the US and Turkish contexts.

Studies connecting American global expansion and Turkish westernization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have gained further insight from primary sources. The approach to missionary schools has diversified, mainly related to broader themes of intellectual and political histories. In that regard, an in-depth examination of the Robert College records reveals how an American educational institution founded abroad came to terms with the model Republican Turkish leaders envisioned, and has a lot to offer for the investigation of education's role in political transformations more generally.

#### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Reports were written for Robert College and the American College for Girls at the same time. The experts used 'the colleges' or 'both colleges' to describe both institutions.
- <sup>2</sup> The Near East College Association was established in 1919 by the trustees of eight American colleges in the Near East, (Athens College, Robert College, the American College for Girls, Damascus College, the American University of Beirut, American College of Sofia and the American School for Boys in Iraq) to support the development of schools.
- <sup>3</sup> In 1943–1944 Harold Scott, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, served as acting president until the of appointment of Black.
- <sup>4</sup> Soon before this change Henry Sloane Coffin passed away and Alfred Ogden, a prominent Lawyer based in New York, was appointed as the Chairman of Board of Trustees.

- <sup>5</sup> President John F. Kennedy, too, sent a statement to the College officers congratulating the anniversary of institution. Robert College Records, Box 51, Folder: 18.
- <sup>6</sup> After 1940 the Rockefeller Foundation increased its available funds for the development of humanities education, see ‘Analysis of Program in Relation to Changing World Conditions, October 7, 1942’ in ‘Program and Policy, 1942–1947’, RFA, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RG 3, Series 911, Box 2, Folder 14.
- <sup>7</sup> See footnote 1.
- <sup>8</sup> Charles MacNeal served in the College theatre department for more than 30 years until his retirement in 1962.
- <sup>9</sup> It was also noted the approach to education in American institutions, which was based on ‘research’, was different than the others in Turkey. In her report on Girls’ division, Rosemary Park (1955) wrote: ‘capacity to organize and participate will be taught not by the old-fashioned discipline and memorizing, characteristic of most Turkish schools, but better taught in the freer atmosphere of the American School’.
- <sup>10</sup> Before the appointment of Malin Harold Hazen served as the acting President.

## REFERENCES

- Acun, F. and Gürtünca, E. Ş. (2016) Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Robert Koleji’de Eğitim, *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, XXXI, (1).
- Ágoston, G. and Masters, B. (2009) *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* New York, Facts On File.
- General Correspondence Ballantine. (1955-1958) Robert college archives, Box 24, Folder 29
- Ballantine, D. (1955) “Report to the board of trustees of American colleges in Istanbul”, *Robert College archives, Box*, 40 File 3.
- Ballantine, D. (1956a) “*Scientific and Technical Institutions in Underdeveloped Countries*”, File16 Robert College archives, Box 42.
- Ballantine, D. (1956b) “Proposal to the ford foundation: the role of the American Colleges in Turkey”, *Robert College archives, Box*, 42 Folder, 3.
- Berman, E. (1983) *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy* New York, Suny Press.
- Biographical information on Dodge family and on E.D.H. Clarke, (1976), Robert College archives, Box 51, Folder 28.
- Black, F. (1946) “Correspondence to lauren seelye from black, 1945: a statement made at a staff meeting at the american college for girls, february, 1946”, *Robert College archives*, Box 32 Folder 18.
- Correspondence to Scott from Black, (1948-1955), Robert College Records, Box 30, Folder 4-5
- Correspondence Staub/Coffin, (1932-1934), Robert College Records, Box 39, Folder 91
- Covey, E. (2019). *Americans at War in the Ottoman Empire: US Mercenary Force in the Middle East* (London&Bloomsbury)
- Davidson, C. and Dodd, P. (1957) “A report to the ford foundation, 1957”, Robert College archives, Box 42, Folder 5.
- Dodge family sketch and interview with bayard dodge, (1950), Robert College archives, Box 51, Folder 29
- Erken, A. (2018) *American and the Making of Modern Turkey*. London, Bloomsbury
- Fisher/Staub/Deering 1931-1933, Robert college archives, box 29, Folder 18.
- Franklin, C. M. (1963) “Report to on the educational and financial pro folder of Robert college and the American college for girls, İstanbul, Turkey”, Robert College archives, Box 42, Folder 16”.

- Freely, J. (2009) *A History of Robert College Istanbul*, Yapı Kredi.  
Fund-Raising Report and Recommendations by Kersting, Brown and company inc: Robert college and the American college for girls, (1957), Robert College archives, Box 42, Folder: 4.
- Garwood, D. (1962) "An experiment in bilingual, bicultural education", *Liberal Education*, V.XLVIII, 1, March; "Robert College-Humanities, 1956–1965".
- Gates, C.(1932) Office of the president: new educational policies of the Turkish government, 1932" in *Correspondence to Staub from Monroe, L. S. Gates and Huntington, Robert College archives, Box 35, Folders*, pp. 39–40 1932-1933.
- Gates, C. (1940). *Not to Me Only* New Jersey, Princeton University Press.  
General Correspondence. 1957 Robert College archives, Box.31 Folder 24-38.
- Grabill, J. (1971) *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810-1927* (Minneapolis, Univ of Minnesota Press).
- Gürsel, C. 1961 "Message of General Cemal Gürsel, Head of State of the Turkish Republic on the Occasion of the Turkish-American Celebration of April 18th, 1961." Robert College archives, Box: 51, File: 17.
- Hamlin, C. (2014) *Among the Turks* Istanbul, Bogazici University Press.
- Hardy, R.(1951) Proposal point Iv request for ACG, 1951, *Robert College archives, Box, 39 Folder 110*.
- Harriman, A.(1962) "Excerpt from an Address by the Honourable Averell Harriman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Centennial Dinner of Robert College", Robert College archives, Box: 51, Folder: 21.
- Heather, S. and Doğan, M. A. eds.(2011) *American Missionaries and the Middle East Salt Lake City*, Univ of Utah Press.
- Holm, M. (2016) *The Marshall Plan: A New Deal for Europe* (Oxford&Routledge)).
- Huntington-Dodge, E. (1979) *The Joy of Service* New York, YWCA.
- Karen, L. 2022 Adaptations to global changes: strategic evolutions of an elite school, 1961–2011, *History of Education*, 512, 286–303. [10.1080/0046760X.2021.2002433](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2021.2002433)
- Karpat, K. (1959) *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kuran, A. (2013) *Bir Kurucu Rektörün Anıları - Robert Kolej Yüksekokulu'ndan Boğaziçi Üniversitesi'ne*, İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayinevi.
- Lian, X. (1997). *The Conversion of Missionaries Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932* (Pennsylvania; UPenn Press).
- Malin, P. M. (1963) "Robert college in its centennial year", Robert College Records, Box 51, Folder 19.
- Marshall, J. (1951) "The near east 1951," RFA, RG 3, Series 911, Folder 2, Box 15.
- McGhee, G. (1990) *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine and Turkey's NATO Entry Contained the Soviets* London, Palgrave.
- Monroe, P. (1933a) "Letter to henry sloane coffin" in "Correspondence re Fisher, 1933", Robert College Records, Box 39, Folder 91.
- Monroe, P. (1933b) "Letter to ministry of public instruction" in "Correspondence re Fisher, 1933", Robert College Records, Box 29, Folder 19.
- Okkenhaug, I. M. and Sanchez-Summerer, K. (2020). *Christian Missions and Humanitarianism in the Middle East, 1850-1950 Ideologies, Rhetoric, and Practices* (Leiden&Brill).
- Palmer Peterson, A.(2011) Academic conceptions of a United States Peace Corps, *Journal of the History of Education Society*, 402, 229–240 [10.1080/0046760X.2010.526966](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2010.526966)
- Park, R. (1955) Report on ACG, robert college records, Box 42, Folder 2.

- Parmar, I. (2012). *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* New York, Columbia University Press
- Perspectives for the Future, (1954-1955), Robert College Records Box 24, Folder 21.
- Regine, E.(2000) Politics behind scientific transfer between turkey and germany in the case of the yüksek ziraat enstitüsü in ankara, *SBF*, 552.
- Reisman, A.(2006)*Turkey's Modernization: Refugees from Nazism and Atatürk's Vision* Washington: New Academia Publishing 2006
- Richmond, Y.(2003) *Cultural Exchanges and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press).
- Robert college turkish faculty training: 1956–1959, 1961–1967; RFA, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RG 1.2, Series 805 S, Box 2, Folder 12– 13.
- Sabev, O. (2014) *Spiritus Roberti: Shaping New Minds and Robert College in Late Ottoman Society* (Istanbul&Boğaziçi University Press).
- Scott-Smith, G. (2008). *Networks of Empire: The US State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France and Britain 1950-1970* (Bern&Peter Lang).
- Shemo, C.Ellington, B.; R Sklar Keds.2010 *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire: 1812-1860* (Duke&Duke Unv Press)).
- Wright, W. L. "Correspondence Wright/Ambassador John V.A. MacMurray/ Professor E. W. Kemmerer, 1938-1943" Robert College Records, Box 24, Folder 10.

*Correspondence Ali Erken Institute of Middle East and Islamic Countries, Marmara Üniversitesi, Goztepe Kampusu, Kadıköy, İstanbul,*  
*Email: [ali.erken@marmara.edu.tr](mailto:ali.erken@marmara.edu.tr)*