

JANET:

**OSMANLI LİMAN ŞEHİRLERİNDE YENİÇERİLER:
YAKINÇAĞ AKDENİZİNDE MÜSLÜMANLARIN MALİ VE
SİYASİ BAĞLANTI AĞLARI**

Yer/Venue: İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi
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BİLDİRİ ÖZETİ



JANET:

**JANISSARIES IN OTTOMAN PORT-CITIES: MUSLIM FINANCIAL AND
POLITICAL NETWORKS IN THE EARLY MODERN MEDITERRANEAN**

SEPTEMBER 14-15, 2022

2022 JANET WORKSHOP - ISTANBUL

ABSTRACT

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2022 JANET WORKSHOP, ISTANBUL MEDENİYET UNIVERSITY

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 14-15, 2022

ABSTRACTS

SEPTEMBER 14

SESSION I: JANISSARIES AND THEIR PROVINCIAL NETWORKS

Istanbul Janissaries and their Trans-Provincial Connections: Two Janissary Letters Intercepted during the 1821 Greek War of Independence

Yannis SPYROPOULOS

This paper presents glimpses into the lives of four Janissaries living in Crete and Istanbul by analyzing two epistles exchanged between them. Both letters under investigation were discovered in the Greek General State Archives (GRGSA) in Athens in two separate collections, namely “Maritime Court” and “Archive of Ministerio/Secretariat/Ministry of Justice, Capodistrian Administration.” The letters were compiled in 1824 and 1825 and were both dispatched with ships, one of which departed from Istanbul and the other from Crete, going to Crete and Istanbul respectively. Both vessels were intercepted en route by Greek revolutionaries who confiscated their cargoes, along with any letters/documents that were found on board, and this is how the two epistles ended up among the archives of the Greek government.

The first of the two letters examined here was sent by Süleyman, a Janissary of the 59th *bölük* to Civelek Osman Ağa, his brother and member of the same *orta*, who was serving in the army units dispatched from the imperial center to Crete in order to fight the Greek revolutionaries on the island. The second letter presented here, on the other hand, contains part of a commercial correspondence between Odabaşızâde Derviş Ali Efendi and Muradoğlu İbrahim, residents of Istanbul and Kandiye respectively, business partners, and members of the 14th *cemâ'at*.

By analyzing the content of these two letters my goal is to highlight the role that first person narratives can play in our effort to deepen our understanding of the activities and everyday lives of those who operated within the framework of Janissary networks. In this context, I argue that evaluating the content of such sources together with that of official Ottoman archival material can help us study the building blocks of these networks, namely ordinary Muslims, who constituted a large part of the social fabric in Istanbul and the Ottoman provinces.

The transformation of the Janissary networks in the steppe-frontier region of the Black Sea.

Anna SYDORENKO

This paper will focus on the Janissaries of the northern port-cities of the Black Sea, examining the systematic processes of change and readjustment of the previously established networks between neighboring powers due to the gradual penetration of the Russians in the region. The impact of Russia's imposing presence resulted in deep changes in the relations between Janissaries, Crimean Tatars, Zaporozhian Cossacks, and Ukrainians. Based on primary sources from the Ukrainian archives, the paper intends to show the policies of Moscow in the region and its methods of control, development of dependency, and intervention in steppe-frontier life. It also explores the response of the Janissaries and other actors of the frontier to the forced changes. The depth, way, and means of the transformation of the Janissary's networks would reshape the world of the steppe.

SESSION II: SOME ASPECTS OF JANISSARY INVOLVEMENT IN ISTANBUL'S ECONOMY

Some Remarks on the Istanbul *Esame* Market (1750-1826)

İrfan KOKDAŞ

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Based on an analysis of Istanbul Ahi Çelebi and Davud Paşa court registers, this study explores the workings of the *esame* market in the 1750-1826 period. In Ottoman scholarship, pay tickets (*esames*) have been usually associated with the Janissary corps and their circulation in the market has been interpreted as a sign of their corruption. This interpretation also echoes the rhetoric of the New Order and reflects the disrespect of Janissaries – especially their commanders– for “ancient laws, order and legal regulations.” This study, however, suggests that the functioning of the *esame* market should not be reduced simply to the discourse of immoral and illegal actions by the Janissaries. It also shows that the market largely involved the *esames* of other Kapikulu corps. Despite political uncertainties over the validity of the *esame* sales, the transfers of pay tickets (*esame ferâğı*) were regularly approved and recorded by the courts, which became a standardized legal practice even in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at a time when the Ottoman statesmen desperately attempted to ban this practice. The study claims that this legal process went hand in hand with the standardization of “*esame* prices” in the market.

Janissary-Artisan Relations: The case of Istanbul Boatmen's Guild (1677-1752)

Abdulgennan M. ALTINTAŞ

Due to its geographical features, Istanbul was in a very advantageous position in terms of maritime transport, and during the Ottoman Empire period, boatmen were one of the largest artisan groups in this city. Many soldiers from various military units, especially the janissaries, worked as artisan among the boatmen. In this study, the activities and socioeconomic relations of the janissaries and other military groups among the boatmen will be evaluated by focusing on the Istanbul boatmen inspection registers of 1677 and 1752. The Ottoman Empire conducted inspections for taxation, public order, and immigration control. The information recorded in the boatmen inspection has particular importance as it contains valuable information about the identities of the boatmen. This information also reveals the socioeconomic status of the military-origin artisans working in the boatmen guild, as well as their relations based on their regional allegiance (*hemşehrilik*) and military affiliations. In addition, the statistical data obtained from the inspections are essential in showing the military units of the soldiers in the boatmen' guild and their distribution in the Istanbul piers. From this point of view, this study will discuss whether the esnafization of the soldiers is a phenomenon specific to the Janissary corps.

SEPTEMBER 15

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SESSION I: SOCIAL AND EVERYDAY LIFE OF JANISSARIES IN ISTANBUL AND PROVINCES

Personal Worlds, Sense of Belonging, and the Society: The *Vasiyets* of Janissaries and Their Families in Istanbul (1750-1826)

Yahya ARAZ

Based on the records of certain courts in Istanbul from the middle of the 18th century to 1826, when the Janissary Corps was abolished, this paper tries to shed light on the personal worlds, sense of belonging, charitable tendencies, and social relations of the Janissaries and their families through the *vasiyets* they left behind. The *vasiyets*, being the products of people's interactions with their societies, were outcomes of the belief systems, life practices, and social needs of the time period in question. While these *vasiyets* bring together individual desires and social expectations, they also reflect the diversity of the identities of the Janissaries, who came from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. These *vasiyets* allow us to describe the Janissaries as ordinary residents of the districts, neighborhoods, and streets they inhabited. Just like the others, the Janissaries had a great sensitivity to social expectations, which they carefully reflected in their *vasiyets*. In this respect, there were no significant differences

between the *vasiyets* of the Janissaries and other segments of the society in terms of priorities, perceptions, and charitable tendencies. The *vasiyets* of Janissaries and their families consistently followed and strongly reflected the trends of the society they lived in. Transformations affecting daily life preferences and consumption habits throughout the period influenced the Janissaries and effectively shaped their *vasiyets*.

Depicting the Profile of Wealthy Janissaries in Salonica of the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: Properties, Entrepreneurial Strategies, Familial and Social Networks, and Debts

Demetris PASTAMATI

Our paper will emphasize on well-off Janissary officers either stationed temporarily or living permanently in Salonica in the years 1750-1800. On the basis of local probate inventories, the size and composition of the properties along with the primary capital sources and investment methodology of members of this particular Janissary elite will be displayed. Moreover, important occupational, social and familial aspects as well as business strategies and economic affiliations with local power brokers and entrepreneurs from other regions of the empire developed by these privileged Janissaries will be analyzed. Finally, some indicative examples of these magnates, as distinctive agents of a new proto-capitalistic reality in the Ottoman eighteenth century, will be discussed. All serial data used for the presentation have been taken down in the pertinent data base.

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The Universe of Janissary Poets and the World of Galatalı Hüseyin Ağa, One of the Last Janissaries

Süreyya Uzun PEKŞEN & Mehmet SAVAN

The making of Ottoman literature draws from numerous contributors from various segments of the social order, i.e. from sultans to the *ulema*, from soldiery to the *esnaf*, and even illiterate individuals. Such literature preserved its existence for centuries through three main traditions, namely classical literature, folk/minstrel literature, and Sufi literature. Making the bulk of the Ottoman army, the Janissaries composed poetry in all these three traditions, and yet no comprehensive study has so far been carried out to provide an overview of corps members involved in literature. With the aim of addressing this gap, the present study has two main objectives, and it is subsequently divided into two parts. The first part introduces the universe of Janissary poets in a

nutshell through tables that offer a survey of their names and pen-names (*mahlas*), historical periods, respective literary tradition(s), works, careers, sect (*tarikat*) affiliations, and relations with the people in power. In doing so, it attempts to provide an inventory of those Janissaries who penned literary works. Hence, we identified a total of 114 poets, 81 of whom were private soldiers (*nefer*) and 33 served as grandees of the corps (*ocak ricâli*). It was found out that Janissary poets were predominantly active in classical literature, and, save for one exception, grandees of the corps, who received a better education, entirely belonged to the tradition of classical literature. Nevertheless, Janissary minstrels gained some importance during the transition from the 16th to the 17th century, and it was possible to observe the convergence between classical literature and folk/minstrel literature also in the case of Janissary poets. Furthermore, the study also shows that many Janissaries were professionally involved in music and calligraphy, regardless of whether they were private soldiers or grandees of the corps. In order to illustrate an exemplary case of the vast literature produced by corps members, the second part of the study aims to present a hitherto unstudied copy of the *destan mecmuası* by Galatalı Hüseyin Ağa – one of the last Janissaries – whose work allows us to draw certain conclusions about the Ottoman society during the first quarter of the 19th century. Hüseyin Ağa, a historical personage known to us thanks to Reşad Ekrem Koçu, was one of the representatives of the transition from traditional minstrel literature to *külhanbeyi* literature. Not only because of the Auspicious Event (*Vak'a-i Hayriyye*) and the subsequent destruction process but also because of the decline of oral culture in the 19th-century Istanbul, his *destans* constitute some of the few and last extant examples of Janissary culture. These poems, revolving around 80 young *esnaf* boys in the capital city, thus constitute a remarkable example of the synthesis of the classical *şehrengiz* genre with the popular *destan* genre and serve, in many respects, as a historical extension of the homoerotic literature and subculture of the previous centuries. Lastly, they also provide us with certainly valuable clues concerning the society of his time such as to the so-called *esnafization* of Janissaries as well as to “hometown professions” (*memleket meslekleri*) created through the networks of fellow-countrymen.

SESSION II: ISTANBUL TURNED UPSIDE DOWN – JANISSARY INVOLVEMENT IN REBELLIONS AND VIOLENCE

The Notorious Soldiers of Istanbul: *Sipahs*, Armorers and the Janissaries

Aysel YILDIZ

The imperial city of Istanbul has a unique place in the history of Ottoman uprisings. A systematic study on the identity of 549 individuals who were involved in the Istanbul rebellions from the 16th to the early 19th century reveals that the key element of upheaval was rather the soldiers of the city. An overwhelming majority of them (375 individuals) were members of the military corps (*sipahs*, *cebecis*, or the Janissaries). While the *sipahs* were initially very active in the incidents of the 17th century, they were gradually superseded by the *cebecis* and Janissaries in the subsequent century. In contrast, the Janissaries participated in the uprisings of the earlier centuries but dominated those of the early 19th century. Contrary to some assumptions, the civilian-military distinction was not that much blurred among the Istanbulites. Despite the so-called *esnafization* process of the Janissaries since the 17th century, the Janissaries and other corps preserved their institutional identity and jealously tried to safeguard their institutional privileges. Even though civilians were also involved in some of these upheavals, their participation was mostly confined to passive support.

The soldiers and junior officers of Ottoman military corps (Janissaries, *sipahs*, *cebeci*, artillery and the *bostancı*), on the other hand, were very active and acted as the key figures in the instigation, escalation and negotiation phases of almost all uprisings of the city. Keeping their military identity, the Ottoman soldiery, by means of protest or open revolt, usually aimed to reassert their basic individual or collective rights (e.g. regular payment of their salaries) or acquire some additional privileges (tax-collections, trusteeship of *vakfs* etc.); or reacted to threats to the very existence of their corps. Given the role of the military corps in triggering the course of events and their active involvement throughout the process, the Istanbul uprisings can also be considered as of a military nature, i.e. very similar to those that took place in other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, as the administrative center of the Empire that was home to the Sultan and his high-ranking decision-makers, Istanbul changed the nature of these incidents, turning a military uprising into a more political, palace-centered event that targeted either the Sultan himself or his servants and thereby creating empire-wide impacts.

Street Battles among Janissary Regiments in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Istanbul

M. Mert SUNAR

The transformation of the recruitment method of the Janissary Corps from devshirme system to the mass recruitment of Muslim-born subjects was an important turning point in the history of the Ottoman Empire. The integration of janissaries into the social and economic fabric of Ottoman urban centers was one of the unintended consequences of this transformation. Although keeping the Janissary Corps under control had been a concern for the Ottoman sultans and governments from the very beginning, the change in the social composition of janissaries presented totally new and complex issues for the Ottoman governments from the seventeenth century onwards. Although the immediate effects of such a change began to be felt in the seventeenth century, it was mainly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the unruly and uncontrollable character of the janissary element became a crucial concern for centralizing bureaucrats of the Sublime Porte.

As more and more janissaries became involved in economic life of Istanbul, some of them did not hesitate to resort to violence to resolve commercial and labor disputes as members of the privileged military class. Even though there were innumerable cases of individual violence committed by janissaries, this presentation focuses on the cases of group violence in which janissary regiments engaged in pitched street battles against each other in pursuit of their economic interests in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Istanbul. Although such street battles were limited in number and often caused ignorable casualties and damage, they caused greater upheaval and panic among government officials and ruling elite circles. The sultans and their officials resented such events as they further confirmed the negative image of the Ottoman state as a feeble state which was unable to control its own soldiers and capital.

NOTES