

## "When grocers, porters and other riff-raff become soldiers:" Janissary Artisans and Laborers in the Nineteenth Century Istanbul and Edirne

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**Abstract:** This article examines the existing literature on the abolition of the Janissary Corps. It tries to answer to the question "why the majority of modern Ottoman historians uncritically chose to accept the official viewpoint on janissaries?" Rather than portraying the nineteenth century Janissary Corps as "a corrupted institution" of the Classical Age, this article focuses on the social and political functions of janissaries within the early nineteenth century Ottoman polity. It argues that only by examining the social and political roles of janissaries, we can provide an alternative to the official view on the abolition of the Janissary Corps.

**Keywords:** Janissaries, Late Ottoman History, Economic and Social Life in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Istanbul and Edirne.

### Introduction

Within two days following the destruction of the janissaries on 15 June 1826, the Grand Vizier Mehmed Selim Pasha oversaw brief interrogations of nearly two hundred janissaries in his pavilion located near to Sultan Ahmed mosque. After each interrogation, his men dragged the suspect to the nearby cellar under the mosque and there executioners routinely practiced their craft. After this grim process, the dead bodies of the janissaries were put to public exhibition in the Sultan Ahmed square (Yilmazer, 2000: 611). This public exhibition intended to convey a clear message: The Janissary Corps had become a corrupt institution, unable to perform its basic functions as an effective army. Janissaries were responsible for defeats at the hands of the enemies of Islam. Notwithstanding their ineffectiveness, they also became a body of lawless rogues terrorizing law-abiding subjects and the state. Thus, the abolition of the corps was a crucial service both to the Ottoman society and the state and anyone sympathizing with their cause or criticizing their abolition was likely to meet similar punishment.

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The majority of the twentieth century Ottoman historians have been too eager to accept the image of janissaries as conveyed in this message. They have uncritically adapted the official viewpoint that janissaries were a “parasitic” group that had no links with the rest of Ottoman society. Although some have paid lip service to the close links between *esnaf*<sup>†</sup> and janissaries, the majority of contemporary Ottoman historians chose to regard janissaries as “parasites” living on the state treasury and ordinary people.

In this paper, I will argue that even though the Janissary Corps was established as a professional army at the outset, starting from the late sixteenth century it eventually evolved into an urban militia whose members were primarily engaged in crafts and trades. As janissaries merged with the various elements of urban society by establishing organic relations with *esnaf* in major Ottoman cities, they became one of the possible avenues for various groups within urban society to defend their interests and autonomy against the ruling elite. As such, they were the major obstacles to the central authority implementing its agenda of reforms in the nineteenth century, i.e., centralization in political structure, efficient tax collection, and uniformity within Ottoman society.

The first part of this paper provides a critique of the existing literature on the janissaries. I try to explore why the majority of contemporary Ottoman historians since the 1940s have tended to reproduce the official views on the early nineteenth century janissaries. I will argue that the persistence of the official image is closely linked to specific uses of history by modern historians in different contexts. The second part is an attempt to situate janissaries within the early nineteenth century Ottoman urban structures by looking at the links among *esnaf*, guilds, and janissaries.

### **1. Modern Historiography on the Abolition of the Janissary Corps**

İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı was the first Ottoman historian who devoted a monograph to the *Kapıkulu Ocakları*, or the Ottoman standing army (Uzunçarşılı, 1943). In his detailed study, Uzunçarşılı composed a survey of the *kapıkulu* troops from its origins to the *Vak'a-i Hayriyye* (the abolition of the janissaries in 1826). Briefly mentioning various units within the *kapıkulu* troops, he gave his main emphasis to the Janissary Corps, which he considered as one of the main agents in the political life of the Ottoman Empire. As a latent follower of *vakanüvis* (*official court chronicler*) tradition, his work was a skillful and exhaustive compilation of

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<sup>†</sup> *Esnaf* is a broad term, referring a variety of small businesses from peddlers, shopkeepers to artisans and unskilled laborers such as porters and boatmen.

information from Ottoman chronicles and archival documents on janissaries. The logical consequence of this method was the repetition of the official view on the Janissary Corps in Uzunçarşılı's work. Uzunçarşılı presented the janissaries of the early nineteenth century as a degenerate group which continuously terrorized the Ottoman state and society. As they were responsible for the military failures and political turmoil within the Ottoman Empire, it was necessary to abolish their corps in order to revitalize the state and to carry out necessary reforms. It should be pointed out that Uzunçarşılı did not merely copy the relevant information from Ottoman chronicles and official documents, but he consciously presented them within an explanatory framework in his narrative. Although he did not consciously follow any theoretical model in his studies, his works were a part of the grand project of the 1940s, which aimed at studying the origins of Turkish modernization (Tanzimat I, 1940). Guided by this research agenda, Ottoman historians of the time regarded the Ottoman reforms of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries as the roots of the modern Turkish State. Since it was mainly janissaries who opposed these reform attempts, they became the main villains accused for delaying Turkish modernization by the historians of the early Republican Era. These historians argued that the janissaries of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries were composed of the "riff-raff" or the criminal elements of Ottoman society, thus their actions targeted and harmed not only the central authority but also the people. This argument, which was directly transferred from Ottoman primary sources, deliberately downplayed the close relations between janissaries and urban populations in the Ottoman Empire. Starting from the seventeenth century, the amalgamation of janissaries and certain urban groups reached to a degree which was impossible to dismiss.

H. A. R. Gibb and H. Bowen were the first modern historians who drew our attention to the relationship between janissaries and artisans in their study on the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire (Gibb and Bowen, 1950). In their study, Gibb and Bowen pointed out that the guilds were not merely a tool to control society in the hands of ruling elite. They argued that artisans could resort to various alternatives from passive resistance to armed uprisings to protect their interests against the ruling elite. The close links between artisans and the Janissary Corps played a key role in this process. Drawing upon European travel accounts and Jabarti's history, Gibb and Bowen asserted that in major Arab cities such as Damascus and Aleppo nearly all the members of the guilds were janissaries or from janissary origin (Gibb and Bowen, 1950: 278-280). Even though these generalizations are difficult to prove with the evidence that Gibb and Bowen presented, they draw our attention to a historical process, which was visible enough

for the contemporary observers. Although Gibb and Bowen's narrative distanced itself from the concept of oriental despotism by drawing our attention to possible avenues of resistance to the government, it portrayed Ottoman society as an unchanging entity, which would start to change only with the impact of the West as the title of his book openly suggested. By articulating the idea of unchanging traditional society, Gibb and Bowen paved the way for the next generation historians to elaborate on modernization theories for the Ottoman case.

The leading names of the next generation historians, such as Bernard Lewis and Niyazi Berkes, were deeply influenced by modernization theories of the 1950s. In the eyes of Lewis and Berkes, the Ottoman Empire of the early modern period was characterized with a static society and political structure (Lewis, 1961; Berkes, 1964). They argued that the political and social structures of the Ottoman State remained unchanged since the late medieval era. Both Lewis and Berkes resorted to the essentialization of Ottoman society in order to explain its 'failure' to produce successful social and economic modernization. By characterizing the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries as a period of decline in traditional order, both historians considered the nineteenth century reforms as the first serious attempts toward emancipation from 'backwardness' and 'ignorance.' Their narratives praised reforming elite and focused on the personalities and motives of the reforming sultans and bureaucrats without paying any attention to the rest of the population. Lewis, for example, offered a simplistic approach to the problem of transformation in Ottoman society by depicting it as a struggle between reactionary forces and reformers. Lewis saw the Janissary Corps as a corrupt military institution that cooperated with other reactionary forces – the *ulema* and the ignorant populace of Istanbul- to preserve the *status quo*. His portrayal of the political situation after the rebellion of 1807 reveals his assumptions on Ottoman polity and society:

The reforming Sultan was deposed, his new-style army disbanded, his reformist ministers dead or hiding. In their place the Chief Mufti and the janissaries ruled the city- two forces most bitterly opposed to social and military change (Lewis, 1961: 73).

By presenting the janissaries and the *ulema* as the reactionary forces which possessed curious powers to prevent any form of change in Ottoman society for two hundred years, Lewis also prepared his readers for their deserved destiny, once the complete and radical change started in the nineteenth century under the reign of Mahmud II. Parallel to the Ottoman official view of the early nineteenth century, Lewis regarded the janissaries as "the terror of the Sultans and their law abiding subjects." (Lewis, 1961: 79) In this context, Lewis regarded the janissaries as a status group without any connection to the rest of the society and he presented them

as one of the forces preventing change and modernity, which the ruling elite helplessly were trying to implement within the traditional order.

Another major contributor to modernization theory, Niyazi Berkes, emphasized the wider social bases of the conservative groups, although sharing Lewis' basic assumptions on Turkish modernization. Throughout his narrative of Turkish secularization, Berkes kept drawing a dichotomy between conservatives vs. reformists as these two engaged with each other in a constant struggle. He presented Turkish modernization as a linear process towards the Enlightenment ideals of progress and secularization. Berkes' typical *ex post facto* approach-seeing the Ottoman modernization as a precursor of Turkish modernization, secularization and Westernization- easily condemned any opposition to the reforms under the label of reactionary or conservative.

Unlike Lewis, Berkes did not disregard the social bases of the janissaries or their connections with artisans. Relying on Cevdet Pasha's *Tarih*, he noted that the Janissary corps became an instrument through which "impoverished *esnaf* (artisans, petty tradesmen, and men of odd jobs) could live parasitically off the government treasury" (Berkes, 1964: 52). He argued that many of the rebellions in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were carried out by impoverished artisans through their janissary connections. Yet as an advocate of secularization and the Westernization process, he was openly hostile to these popular groups that cooperated with the *ulema* for the preservation of their 'parasitical' status (Berkes, 1964: 61-62). He failed to question the causes that led to their impoverishment and merging with the janissaries and the guilds. Within his conceptual framework, his sympathies apparently lied with state-centered conclusions. Oftentimes his usage of language also betrayed these sympathies as he kept describing artisans and lower classes with pejorative words like 'parasitical,' 'men of odd jobs,' or "reactionaries."

Howard Reed's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation distinguishes itself as the only monograph on the abolition of the Janissary Corps (Reed, 1951). His erudite use of primary sources as a consequence of his competence in Ottoman Turkish and the major European languages produced a detailed account of the political events from the accession of Mahmud II to the destruction of the janissaries. Although it is not a 'meta-narrative' of Turkish modernization like that of Lewis and Berkes, Reed's study regarded the destruction of the janissaries as a watershed in the teleological process that led to the founding of the Turkish Republic (Reed, 1951: 357). Similar to Berkes and Lewis, Reed considered the destruction of the janissaries as a key event for the defeat of the traditional order. In Reed's narrative, Mahmud II was the main agent of the reform program who was occasionally assisted by open-minded bureaucrats. Reed tried to show that Mahmud II's main goal was the reorganization

of the Janissary corps. He believed that the Sultan only resorted to a more radical solution when he met with strong resistance by the janissaries. Along with his references to the Janissary-guild connections, his detailed study also raised several issues on the complex relations among different military units, the ruling elite and the ulema in the capital.

In two articles published in the 1970's, Robert Olson emphasized the role of the *esnaf* in the rebellions of 1730 and 1740 (Olson, 1974; Olson, 1977). Following Serif Mardin's model of center-periphery relations in Ottoman politics, Olson argued that the 'realignment' of the *esnaf* was a decisive factor in the political turmoil of 1730-31. For Olson, the strict categorization of the military elite and the *ulema* in the center and the urban dwellers and nomad society of Anatolia on the periphery was incompatible with the realities of Ottoman politics. The *esnaf*, who supported the 1730 rebellion against the harsh fiscal policies of Ibrahim Pasha and Sultan Ahmed III, opposed the uprising of 1731 as a result of the economic guarantees that were given by the new Sultan, Mahmud I. Olson further argued that the janissaries, whose leadership represented the interests of the center, started to gravitate "toward the periphery in opposition to the center" (Olson, 1974). Olson was aware that it was difficult to place the janissaries into Mardin's 'center-periphery' model because of the merging of the janissaries with the *esnaf*. Yet he insisted on applying this model and treats the *esnaf* and the janissaries as completely separate entities. He simply contradicted himself when he argued that in the uprising of 1731, the *esnaf* "not only supported the Sultan, but they opposed the janissaries and the masses who were rebelling" (Olson, 1974). Considering his emphasis on the Janissary-*esnaf* link, it should have been clear to Olson that it was quite impossible to differentiate between janissaries and *esnaf* in the eighteenth century Istanbul.

In his second article, in which he dealt with the rebellion of 1740, Olson kept his strict division between janissaries and artisans. By arguing that majority of the artisans were Jews and Christians in Istanbul, he made a dubious statement that is quite impossible to prove with his available data (Olson, 1977). Olson's article showed that the rebellion of 1740, which started in a market place with attacks on shops, was easily quelled by the interference of janissaries. The exile of the immigrant population to Anatolia as well as measures taken to prevent future immigration to Istanbul may well indicate that the main actors in the uprising of 1740 were probably the desperate and famine stricken immigrants. The quick reaction of the janissaries to the rebellion may also be result of the attacks against shops and the *esnaf* to whom they had close connections. Despite his generalizations, which cannot be backed by reliable evidence, Olson's major

contribution was to draw our attention the role of the *esnaf* in Ottoman politics. His articles clearly show that rather than being passive bystanders, the artisans of Istanbul took part as actors on the political stage and they tried to resist oppressive fiscal policies on the part of the ruling elite.

A different approach to the janissary-*esnaf* relations came from Cemal Kafadar who focused on the process of "commercialization" of janissaries (Kafadar: 1981). Kafadar considered the Janissary Corps as a military institution that "was not only merely degenerating but also giving way to the formation of a social group." Accordingly, he traced infiltration of newly urbanized migrants, who engaged in petty trades or were actively seeking for jobs, to the Janissary corps as a result of the breakdown of the traditional order. Kafadar called this process as the "commercialization" of janissaries and traces it back to the end of the sixteenth century. Kafadar considered the janissaries as a social group with specific demands and interests in Ottoman politics. These demands and interests were directly related to their economic pursuits and social bases. Kafadar maintained that the janissary-artisan links were limited to a small group, which he called "*lumpenesnaf*," i.e., petty tradesmen such as porters, fruit peddlers and boatmen (Kafadar, 1981: 80-91; Kafadar, 1994: 474). Whereas the main support of the janissaries came from these groups, the guild *esnaf* kept their distance from by usually remaining neutral in the Janissary instigated revolts. The only cases that the guild *esnaf* chose to join these revolts were when their economic interests in danger (Kafadar, 1981: 113).

Although the category of *lumpen esnaf* can be useful to look at the earlier stages of janissary infringement upon crafts and trades in Ottoman urban centers, it is inadequate to explain janissary involvement in commercial activities for later periods. The relations between janissaries and *esnaf* became a complex phenomenon from the seventeenth century onwards when janissary started to engage in a wide variety of crafts and trades in Istanbul as well as to become members of the guilds. Moreover, even for the earlier stages of the janissary involvement in commercial activities, we need more detailed evidence supporting Kafadar's argument on the tensions between janissaries and guild members. A study by Eunjeong Yi on the seventeenth century Istanbul guilds showed that janissary presence among the tradesmen and the guilds was strikingly high. Depending on the Istanbul court records, Yi showed that 18 out of 37 guilds which collectively appealed in Istanbul courts in the 1660s had members who carried military titles (Yi, 2004: 132-133). At least for the sixteenth century, Yi confirmed Kafadar's argument that there were problems between janissary tradesmen and Istanbul guilds. For Kafadar, the reason behind the tensions between janissaries and the Istanbul guilds was the violation of the established market rules by janissary tradesmen. For that reason the guilds

resisted to the membership of janissaries. While accepting these arguments, Yi also added that janissary tradesmen also kept their distance from the guilds, since they did not want to share tax obligations and duties imposed upon guild members. According to Yi, during the seventeenth century the intermingling of Istanbul tradesmen and janissaries came to such an extent that it was not possible to differentiate these two groups in marketplaces. After a period of tension and assimilation, janissary craftsmen and tradesmen became an integral part of the guild structure. Yi pointed out that there were no more complaints about intrusion of janissaries into the guilds in the court records in the seventeenth century. (Yi, 2004: 137-139) Yi's study showed that Kafadar's emphasis on the cleavage between the janissaries and the guild member *esnaf* should be carefully treated. It is reasonable to assume that the infiltration of janissaries to the guilds was accompanied by conflicts and disputes. Yet once janissaries became regular members of the guilds, the division between janissary *esnaf* and the guild member *esnaf* probably became less problematic. On the other hand, it should be noted that Kafadar's treatment of the janissaries as a social group with economic and political interest within the Ottoman polity was a very important contribution.

Along the same lines with Kafadar, Donald Quataert also emphasized the social and economic functions of janissaries during the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries (Quataert, 1993). According to Quataert; "the janissaries began to enhance their economic and political interest only after 1740; it then accelerated very rapidly near the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century." Yet he did not provide any explanation why he regarded the 1740 as a turning point in the use of Janissary influence in Ottoman economy and politics. He also argued that the janissaries represented the Muslim lower-working class strata, mainly unskilled and semi-skilled urban workers such as day laborers, boatmen, porters and fruit-peddlers (Quataert, 1993). This view was very similar to Kafadar's description of the janissary affiliated 'lumpenesnaf,' majority of whom were new immigrants from countryside engaging in petty trades in order to survive in Istanbul. At the same time, there was a striking difference between the overall conceptual framework of Quataert and Kafadar's. Quataert's sympathies lied with popular classes and laborers. In Kafadar's study, there was a strange amalgamation of a 'state-centered' view and an interest in the revolutionary masses.

Quataert tended to see the janissaries as an organized labor force representing the interests of workers. It is quite interesting to compare two different interpretations of a same set of data by Kafadar and Quataert. As Quataert put it:

When a construction of a building began, a Janissary labor foreman (*irgat basi*) arrived and drew the insignia of the battalion at the site, indicating it to be under that particular group's authority. The foreman negotiated the wage rates with the property owner, collected the payroll each week and distributed it to the workers (Quataert, 1993).

Whereas Kafadar interpreted the same event as:

The *haraç*-collecting gangs would simply leave an axe with the emblem of their mess in a construction site or in a ship, which entered the harbor, signifying that the construction site could not continue or that the ship could not unload its goods unless the soldiers received their tribute (Kafadar, 1981:113)

For Quataert, the elimination of the janissaries represented a turning point in Ottoman state policy in favor of the integration with European capitalism. (Quataert and Keyder, 1992). Quataert also raised questions about the effects of the so-called 'Auspicious Event' on guilds, small artisans and laborers. Unlike Kafadar who suggested a clear cut division between the guilds and the janissary *esnaf*, Quataert was able to see the close connections between the guilds and the Janissary Corps. He argued that once the central administration eliminated the janissaries there was no organized group left to protect the guild privileges. Although Quataert shares the assumption that the janissaries remained 'largely lower working class in composition,' unskilled and semi-skilled urban workers such as porters and boatmen who were affiliated with the Janissary Corps, he suggested that there was a mutual alliance between the janissaries and the guilds against encroachments of the state. Quataert seemed to favor the explanation that janissaries were instruments of popular sovereignty and protected urban populations against the arbitrary power of the dynasty and its functionaries.

The most recent treatments of the abolition of the Janissary Corps represent a drastic return to the Ottoman official discourse on janissaries in the twenty first century. It is not surprising that these works came from Turkish historians who internalized statist and highly romanticized Ottomanist approaches in their works (Arslan, 2002; Arslan, 2005; Beyhan, 1999). Siding with the Ottoman state and its ruling elite, both Arslan and Beyhan chose to reproduce the biases of their primary sources. Like the functionaries of the Ottoman state, they consider any attempt to challenge the authority of the Ottoman state (or the ruling elite) as illegitimate. Within this framework, the attempts of janissaries to share political power with the ruling elite during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was related to the decline of the Janissary Corps' discipline. These historians chose to put the blame for the troubles of the empire in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century on janissaries and other centrifugal forces. Parallel to their political beliefs on the priority of a strong central state, they show no sympathy to the possibility of a divergent path which would limit the central authority's power. Thus, the abolition

of the Janissary Corps still continues to represent an 'Auspicious Event' for these historians. For example, Mehmet Ali Beyhan's article on the abolition of janissaries repeats the official view which he chose to take uncritically from his sources. Beyhan's chain of reasoning perfectly goes hand in hand with the arguments presented in the primary sources. He presents janissaries as a "riff-raff," who terrorized the Ottoman state and people (Beyhan, 1999). He argues that the Janissary Corps became an institution threatening the Ottoman state and society. He does not question whether or not the interests of state and society should be the same, let alone the diversity of interests within these two structures. He uncritically repeats the argument that the subjects of the empire were alienated from janissaries because of their lawless acts and oppression. Beyhan asks no questions about the function of this argument at that time, i.e. demonizing janissaries and detaching them from society.

The majority of the twentieth century historians chose to reconstruct the history of janissaries along the lines provided by the official Ottoman view. This uncritical acceptance is only explainable by different social and political uses of history at certain temporalities. Several exceptions that attempted to present a relatively different view, on the other hand, failed to provide a detailed account on janissaries. The role of janissaries in Ottoman history cannot be understood without dealing with important issues such as everyday life and social formation in urban centers. Rather than looking at the events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in abstract and general terms as state formation or emergence of a modern bureaucratic state, there is a need to focus on the struggles and tensions among real historical agencies at a particular conjuncture. As one of the major actors in the early part of the 'long nineteenth century' (1789-1918), janissaries took part in a struggle to shape Ottoman political and social life. Underlining their agency in Ottoman political and social life is an important task which will significantly contribute a deeper understanding of the period. Janissaries were major actors in a process which promoted an increasing base of popular participation in the political, economic and social life of the late Ottoman Empire. Wrapped in the rhetoric of "custom," janissary opposition to central authority not only defended privileges and interests of various urban groups, but also made further claims to have a voice in the government. Contrary to essentialized assumptions on Ottoman political system as a static and unchanging 'Oriental despotism,' the evolution of the Janissary Corps offers a good case study for illuminating the process of social and political change which the Ottoman polity experienced in early modern period.

## 2. Janissaries and Artisans in the Early Nineteenth Century Istanbul and Edirne

*"From now on, all Muslims will be in unity and regard each other as brothers. There will not be any division among them..."*

*All ex-janissaries will be regarded same as common people and liable to show obedience to vüzerâ, mir-i mirân, hükkâm, mütesellims, voyvoda and other officials who are appointed in accordance to the şer'iat and sultanîc orders. Everybody will behave properly and engage in his own business whether it is agriculture, trade, or crafts..." (Uzunçarşılı, 1943, 670).*

*"Umum ahali Yeniçeri olduğundan umuma karşı hareket ca'iz değildir" (Lütfî, 1873, 154).*

Historians traced back Janissary involvement in trades and crafts in urban centers as early as the late sixteenth century (Ergin, 1922; Altınay, 1935; Uzunçarşılı, 1943; Kafadar, 1991; İnalçık, 2002; Yi, 2004). They argue that with the depreciation of janissaries' daily pay many of the janissaries sought to enter crafts and trades in order to protect their standards of living. At the end of the sixteenth century the authorities had great difficulty in mobilizing these *esnaf* janissaries. It is also interesting to note that this process coincides with large-scale immigration of peasants to cities in the face of crisis in the late sixteenth century. Contemporary observers such as Mustafa 'Ali pointed settlement of thousands of formerly peasants in cities as craftsmen and shopkeepers (El-Haj, 1991: 17).

In the dearth of any detailed study on the subject, it is difficult to speculate about the nature of this process and the involvement of janissaries in crafts and trades from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. For the aims of present study, it is sufficient to note that the process of Janissary involvement in crafts and trades urban can be traced back as early as the late sixteenth century. The second part of this paper concentrates on the abolition of the Janissary Corps and its composition in Istanbul and Edirne in the early nineteenth century. It would not be possible reconstruct the details of the transformations taking place in the composition of the Corps and its involvement in urban activities from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries in such a short paper. Yet if we consider that the time period in question is more than two centuries, one can expect considerable variations and complexities in the process.

The abolition of the janissaries and their involvement in crafts and trades can only be understood by looking at the nature of social formation in urban centers. In the early nineteenth century, Janissary involvement in crafts and trades became one of the prevalent characteristics of urban life in many of the Ottoman cities. As a result

of the transformations from the late sixteenth century onward the janissaries put down roots in urban economy and society in major urban centers such as Istanbul, Edirne, and Damascus. By using the privileges of their military status, they became one of the substantial forces in urban centers that the Ottoman State was compelled to come to terms with. In this regard, the abolition of the janissaries by Ottoman State can be seen as an attempt to eliminate a social force rather than merely modernization of the army.

One of the ways to analyze the janissaries as a social force is to ask the question who really they were? Except at the most superficial level, we do not have any detailed account about the identities of janissaries. For the thousands of janissaries, who actively took part in economic and political life of the Empire, we have only bits and pieces of information which was generally provided by official documents and Ottoman chronicles. Even though it is impossible to have detailed evidence on identities of janissaries in a given time, we can nonetheless gather enough information to form a picture of a certain portion of janissaries. This is a very essential and basic job that Ottoman historians have not attempted so far. Even beyond having an idea about the composition of the Janissary Corps, we need to turn our attention exclusively to aspects of daily life that individual janissaries experienced on a conscious level. We can easily speak about janissaries at a certain level of generality, but what really challenging in terms of our sources is to explore possible avenues for reconstructing the janissary experience as a way of knowing the past.

The second part of this study represents an effort to get a snapshot of the janissaries on the eve of their abolition in 1826. The aim is specifically to form a profile of the janissaries in Edirne and Istanbul. A specific imperial register concerning the exiles in the years between 1826 and 1833 as well as various imperial decrees dated to 1826 were used to provide necessary data in this study. The imperial register lists exiled janissaries along with other convicts ranging from prostitutes to troublesome *'ilmiye* members. It contains information on the names and the titles of janissaries as well as their original places of settlement and the places of their exile. Luckily enough, the register sometimes gives the names of janissaries' original hometowns. The imperial decrees include reports from provincial governors, which often contain the names of exiled or executed janissaries in their administrative districts. Our set of data consists of 490 janissaries who were seen as liable for punishment by the central government. Although some sources claimed that nearly twenty thousand janissaries lost their lives during the abolition of the Janissary Corps, a more reasonable estimation was given by Esad Efendi who duly noted that nearly five to six thousand janissaries perished during

the abolition of janissaries. Considering this estimation, it should be accepted that the set of data used in this study is comparatively small. Still, even such a small figure should give us some idea about the identity of the janissaries who were targeted by the central authority.

There are also some problems concerning the nature of evidence which we had to work with. One of the problems concerning the data in the exile register and the imperial decrees emerges when there was no information on the occupation of the janissary in question. In this case is it feasible to assume that particular janissary had no link with crafts or trades? Yet, several entries show that janissaries without artisan or small shopkeeper title might also be engaged in crafts and trades (BOA, A.DVN.KLB, 929-A, 20). Another problem is related to question of how to categorize the janissaries whose paternal names indicate that their fathers were artisans and small shopkeepers. Even though these entries are not necessarily indication of their occupations, they probably point to close link among artisans, shopkeepers and janissaries.

As mentioned earlier our data consist of 490 janissaries who were punished following the abolition of Janissary Corps. 221 of those were from the city of Edirne and 50 from Istanbul while the remaining 219 were from various urban centers such as Saraybosna, Kayseri, Antep. The distribution of these figures directly contradicts the argument that there was no resistance to the abolition of janissaries outside Istanbul (Beyhan, 1999, 269). This view is directly taken from the early nineteenth century Ottoman historians such as Esad Efendi and Şirvanlı Fatih Efendi who came from the higher echelons of the *ulema*. Since this group gained considerable benefits from their cooperation with Mahmud II in the abolition of janissaries, it was natural that their works provided a certain image of janissaries, which justified their destruction by the ruling elite. Moreover, both Esad Efendi and Şirvanlı Fatih Efendi described the abolition as a smooth process which all elements of Ottoman society were gratefully willing to accept.

Perhaps the most questionable part of the prevailing assumptions on janissaries is the argument that janissaries had no links or relations with the rest of Ottoman society. The utmost form of this hypothesis is the one that portrays janissaries as parasites living on the state treasury and common people. There is little doubt that some janissaries built up protection rackets aimed at milking the retailers and merchants. When we consider the administrative functions of janissaries in the market place, it can be argued that janissaries used this status to appropriate certain portion of tax resources for their benefit in the process of decentralization that the Ottoman State underwent in the course of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. From this perspective, one can argue that they did not necessarily live on

ordinary people but tap some of the resources which were supposed to be directed to the state and the ruling elite.

The next step of analysis is to turn our attention to the link between artisans/shopkeepers and janissaries. As I mentioned before, the exile register and the imperial decrees usually indicate the titles of convicts along with their names. From these titles, it is often possible to understand if a given janissary had an occupation as an artisan or a shopkeeper. As we see in Table I., 130 out of 271 janissaries in Edirne and Istanbul, carry an artisan or shopkeeper title.

**Table 1 The distribution of exiled or executed janissaries with *esnaf* title in the exile register of 1826-1834**

	Number of janissaries exiled/ executed	Number of janissaries with <i>esnaf</i> title
Istanbul	50	37
Edirne	221	130
Other	219	167
Total	490	334

Source: BOA, A.DVN.KLB, 929-A

This means that nearly half of the exiled janissaries from Edirne involved in trades and crafts. When we consider the problem with the titles, it is safe to assume that this percentage must be taken as minimum. Some of the janissaries without *esnaf* titles might have been engaged in crafts and trades. The distribution of the figures between Edirne and Istanbul shows that 103 out of 221 janissaries carry an *esnaf* title in Edirne whereas this figure is 27 out of 50 janissaries having *esnaf* titles in Istanbul. Our figures for other Ottoman cities also show a similar trend. 167 out of 219 janissaries, who were exiled or executed in major urban centers such as Antep, Kayseri, and Tokat, carried *esnaf* titles.

Another question that can be asked in connection to our data is the distribution of janissaries with *esnaf* title along different occupations. What were the characteristics of janissary affiliated *esnaf*? Were they unskilled or skilled laborers? Were they running shops or were they small-time shopkeepers and peddlers? Our set of data indicates that nearly all the janissaries with *esnaf* titles were skilled craftsmen and small shopkeepers. Among them were carpenters, bakers, greengrocers, pastry shop owners, coffeehouse owners, tinsmiths, locksmiths, shoemakers, tanners and masons. Only exception is the existence of several peddlers in the exile register. It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean that there were no unskilled

laborers and peddlers among the janissaries but our findings demonstrate an overwhelming majority of skilled artisans and shopkeepers.

The presence of several guild wardens who were persecuted for their membership in the Janissary Corps indicates that janissaries occupied important positions in the guilds of Edirne. The wardens of pastry makers, blacksmiths, leather tailors, round-cake makers, and bakers in Edirne were punished following the abolition of the Janissary Corps (BOA, A.DVN.KLB, 929-A). Similar evidence is available for Istanbul, where nine guild wardens were sent to exile with the accusation of janissary-affiliation nearly three years after the abolition of janissaries. This time wardens of locksmiths, turban makers, greengrocers, felt sellers, woolen cloth sellers, barbers and catgut makers became the targets of the central administration. In the wake of military failures in Ottoman-Russian War of 1829, these wardens were apparently criticizing Mahmud II's policies and questioning his decision to abolish the Janissary Corps. This evidence confirms Eunjeong Yi's findings that janissaries became an integral part of guilds during the seventeenth century. It is reasonable to assume that janissary presence in guilds must have increased the negotiation power of guilds against external powers, such as central administration, other guilds and non-affiliated *esnaf*. Like guilds in other Ottoman urban centers, the guilds of Istanbul and Edirne existed in a system of privileges and obligations which were always open to negotiation. In distribution of economic benefits and resources, guilds tried to keep and expand their privileges against rivals, such as tradesmen and artisans trying to function outside the guild structures, other guilds claiming priority on access to raw materials, and the central administration forcing certain regulations and price control.

One striking point about janissaries in Istanbul is the places of their origin. Some of these janissaries carry titles indicating their hometowns in Anatolia such as Mehmed of Kayseri, Mustafa of Nevşehir, etc. Almost all these titles of origin in the exile register and the imperial decrees point that the overwhelming majority of these persons were from Anatolia. We do not observe the same trend in the janissaries in Edirne. One should ask the question what was the significance of having a title indicating one's hometown. It can be argued that the place of origin constituted a major element in identity formation of these immigrants. The group solidarity among the recent immigrants is still an observable behavior in today's Istanbul. These people not only tend to share same districts of the city for settlement, but also tend to specialize same trades and crafts. It has been argued that immigrants to Istanbul came from a very limited number of regions in the Empire in the early nineteenth century. Kırılı argues that the typical characteristic of chain migration, necessity to have someone to rely upon at the point of destination, plays major factor

in this trend. He also points the close relation between janissaries and immigrants in Istanbul. Drawing on an example in *Cabi Tarihi*, he argues that “each janissary mess was largely composed of those who migrated from the same province” (Kırlı, 2000: 126-127). Yet, it is impossible to prove or disprove these arguments with our present state of knowledge.

In order to suppress any opposition to the abolition of the Janissary Corps, the central administration resorted to use of violence in different parts of the Empire. The government’s violence was most visible in Istanbul and Edirne which were major janissary centers. In Edirne where janissaries were deeply rooted in the guild structures as well as in urban society, the central administration seemed to make careful calculations about people’s reactions to the abolition. After realizing that the janissary power in Edirne could not be easily eliminated without coercive methods, the government initiated a series of executions and exiles, nearly six months after the abolition of the Janissary Corps (BOA, HAT, 17402, 17 Cemaziyye’l-evvel 1242/17 December 1826). The governor Esad Pasha was especially worried about the guild of tanners, which had a close ties with janissaries. He ordered the stationing of more than hundred *sekban* troops in the tanneries of Edirne (BOA, HAT, 17321, 17 Cemaziyye’l-evvel 1242/17 December 1826).

Contemporary Ottoman historians estimate that nearly twenty thousand people were expelled and sent to their home provinces during the abolition of the janissaries (Akşin, 1990: 104-105). When they mentioned about these deportations, the language of these contemporary historians is as insensible as the language of the official documents. One can get no idea whatsoever about the implications of the government’s decision on individuals and their experiences. Nonetheless, we can still retrieve individual cases from primary sources to have a better understanding of the exile policy. In June 1827, for example, nearly one year after the abolition of the Janissary Corps, authorities of Istanbul arrested a certain Mehmed from Nevşehir, a greengrocer and ex-janissary. It appeared that Mehmed had been exiled to his hometown during the abolition as being one of troublemakers among the janissaries. After spending a short period of time in his hometown, Mehmed managed to get necessary documents through his connections with a local judge to return to Istanbul and resumed his previous occupation (BOA, A.DVN.KLB, 929-A, 21). We have similar accounts telling us about the limitations of government policies in different regions of the empire (Douwes, 2000: 109-110).

Still, the government closely monitored the public’s reaction to the abolition and people had to pay special attention for not using janissary titles, terms and symbols which had deeply penetrated to the daily usage and culture. During the central administration’s paranoia over anything related to the janissaries, it was possible, for

example, for a coffeehouse owner in İzmit, who was disobedient enough not to fully destroy a janissary regiment insignia from his coffeehouse, to undergo long interrogations and be executed in front of his coffeehouse (BOA, HAT 17335, 3 Zi'l-kade 1242/28 June 1827; HAT, 17496, Undated). Another ex-janissary coffeehouse owner from Edirne, a certain Turnacı İbrahim, who was reported to be openly criticizing the abolition of the Janissary Corps in his coffeehouse met with a similar fate. The governor of Edirne ordered Turnacı İbrahim's execution by hanging in front of his coffeehouse. The executioners duly placed a placard on his body informing the public about his crimes, the normal practice with the public executions of the day. The patterns shown in these examples are repeated by different reports from Ayıntab, İzmit, and Saraybosna (BOA, HAT, 19334, 11 Zi'l-kade 1241/29 June 1826; HAT, 17496 A/B, n.d.; HAT, 17399, 3 Receb 1242/31 January 1827; HAT, 17452-B, 28 Şaban 1242/27 March 1827; HAT, 17402-G, 23 Şevval 142/20 May 1827). These individual examples of resistance against the central authority's decision to abolish the Janissary Corps contradict the ideal picture drawn by the official discourse. The necessity to rebuild experiences and identities of real historical agents becomes more obvious when we regard the dominance of such idealized pictures in Ottoman studies. Most often historians tend to simplify 'agency' into an abstract totality by speaking about state, central administration, or janissaries without identifying real agents and their experiences. For thousands of janissaries who took part in the everyday life of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Istanbul and Edirne, our sources only provide bits and pieces of information. In the absence of contemporary accounts left by janissaries, it is difficult, for example, to explore the consciousness of the groups which formed janissaries. On the other hand, in order to provide alternatives to the official views on janissaries, there is a dire necessity to explore the experiences of subaltern groups such as immigrants, small artisans, and day laborers.

In their attempt to delineate Ottoman reform and modernization, majority of the twentieth century historians turned a blind eye to the difficulties inherent in the daily practice of nameless individuals. One can label the actions of janissaries as "reactionary" and "parasitical" only by disregarding realities of everydayness for ordinary people such as immigrants in major urban centers. Like official reports and bureaucrats, modern historians have been also insensitive to the lives of these individual which were marked by insecurity and a continuous quest for securing the minimum standards of living in big cities.

This paper has attempted to give an evaluation of the existing scholarship on the abolition of the Janissary Corps. It tried to explain the prevalence of official views in the twentieth century Ottoman history writing. It also tried to show possible avenues

for understanding the role of janissaries in Ottoman history. The history of the Janissary Corps cannot be treated apart from social formation and everyday life in urban centers of the Ottoman Empire. Concentrating on individual agents and their daily lives does not necessarily mean that historians should abandon their efforts to underline the effects of general structures and processes in historical events. In contrast this will provide better opportunities to understand implications of these totalities. One of the most noticeable shortcomings of the existing literature on the Ottoman Empire is the essentialist approaches to Ottoman society and politics. In the case of janissaries, many of these essentialized views draw from the official interpretation of Ottoman history. Thus, a better understanding of the abolition of the Janissary Corps can only be possible by overcoming the conventional explanations proposed in official historiography. After all, whatever the contemporary historians and official reports wrote about the Ottoman public's willingness to accept *Vak'a-i Hayriyye* outside Istanbul, poems written by janissary poets to ridicule Istanbul was still circulating among people in Erzurum during the Russian invasion of 1829. (Puskin, 1974: 81-82).

**"Hamal, Bakkal ve Çakkal Makulesi Asker Olduğunda:" 19. Yüzyıl İstanbul ve Edirne'sinde Esnaf Yeniçeriler**

**Özet:** Bu çalışma Vak'a-i Hayriyye olarak da bilinen yeniçeriliğin kaldırılması konusunda mevcut literatürün bir değerlendirmesini yapmaktadır. Yeniçeriliğin kaldırılması hakkındaki resmi görüşün neden çoğu modern tarihçi tarafından sorgulanmadan kabul edildiği sorusuna cevap aramaktadır. Bu çalışmada Yeniçeri Ocağı'na Osmanlı'nın Klasik Dönemi'nin bozulmaya uğramış bir kurumu olarak bakılmıyorsa, ocağın Osmanlı siyasası içindeki toplumsal ve siyasi işlevleri üzerinde yoğunlaşılacaktır. Çalışmanın temel argümanı yeniçeriliğin kaldırılması konusuna alternatif bir yaklaşımın ancak ocağın bu toplumsal ve siyasi rolünün anlaşılması ile mümkün olabileceğidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yeniçeriler, Geç Dönem Osmanlı Tarihi, On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl İstanbul ve Edirne'sinde Sosyal ve İktisadi Hayat.

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17319, 17321-A/B, 17331, 17332, 17335, 17335-A/B/C/D, 17338, 17343, 17345, 17346, 17347, 17353, 17356-B, 17381, 17388, 17392, 17393, 17394, 17399, 17402, 17402-A, 17402-G, 17402-H, 17402-L, 17412, 17414-E, 17436, 17452-B, 17475-A, 17493, 17496-A, 17496-B, 19334.

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