



Middle East Resources

INFORMATION FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE PRECOLLEGIATE LEVEL

Slaves of the Sultan: the Janissaries

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Janissary officers
1: Usta officer, 17th-18th centuries
2: Başçavuş officer of third rank, 16th-18th centuries
3: Kethüda Bey officer

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THE NEW SOLDIERS' CORPS

The Janissary Corps, *yeniceri ocak* or “new soldiers corps,” was one of two main branches of the Ottoman armed forces, the other being the *Sipahis* or provincial free-born Muslim cavalrymen, organized in the fourteenth century. The Janissaries were the *kapukulu*, “slaves of the sultan.” The corps members were educated and trained for the Ottoman military and government service and became the private standing army of the Ottoman Sultan. The Janissaries became an efficient and formidable fighting force and the most outstanding army in Europe. They attained tremendous political power in the Ottoman Empire. Over time the Corps’ essence and behavior and the empire’s needs changed and the corps was abolished in 1826.

THE KUL - SLAVE - SYSTEM

Pre-Ottoman rulers used war prisoners and slaves in their military and in administrative positions. The Turkish and Mongol rulers of central Asia employed the leaders of defeated enemies in their personal retinues. The Mongols took children in war and bought boys from families in times of famine, a custom that was Hindu in origin. The Byzantine and other Balkan Christian armies normally enslaved Muslim and pagan foes. Seen in this context, it was not unusual for the Ottomans to use prisoners-of-war and slaves in their armies and branches of government. But they also added something new to this practice: They instituted a system of conscripting Christian adolescent boys, chiefly in the Balkans, and then created a Palace school system of educating and training the boys, war prisoners and the slaves for service in the Sultan’s Palace, army, and branches of government. All of this was called the Ottoman *kul* - slave - system. These people were the *Kapukulu* ‘slaves of the sultan’ and they formed the Janissary Corps.

ORIGINS OF THE JANISSARIES

Sultan Murad I (r.1362-1389) is generally credited with organizing the first corps shortly after 1377. He wanted to supplement infantry needs in the struggle against the Byzantines and at a time when the Ottoman polity was taken on the characteristics of a state. The Janissary corps was first formed from the war prisoners and slaves that came to the sultan as one-fifth share of the booty taken by frontier warriors and which was allowed by the religious law of Islam. Because of the need for more men, Christian adolescent boys, as noted above, were taken on the basis of the *devshirme*, a levy, to fill the corps’ ranks after a lengthy period of education and training. The expanding corps became an extension of the Ottoman Sultan’s family, serving as the Sultan’s private standing army, loyal to him, and directly under his command. The corps would permit Murad I, and his successors into the fifteenth century, to lessen a reliance on frontier warlords and to suppress challenges posed by some of them; to enhance centralizing the Ottoman’s administration as it expanded its territory in the name of faith; and to become absolute rulers.

The Devshirme

The *devshirme* (“the gathering”) was the Ottoman innovative adolescent boy-levy on Christian sons imposed mainly on Balkan villagers, which began some time between 1383 and 1387. They would become Janissaries and therefore slaves of the sultan and they would become members of the *askeri* (military) class. Already in operation at the end of the fourteenth century, the *devshirme* continued to evolve through the fifteenth century. Ottoman officials would visit the villages in the Balkans every three to seven years, and according to need, gather Christian male adolescents from families who were engaged in agriculture. According to recent scholarly research, samples taken from Ottoman registers for 1495 and 1603 suggest that most of the boys were from fifteen to eighteen years of age. One boy in perhaps forty--or slightly more--families was taken, comprising an estimated yearly total of 1,000 to 3,000 draftees. The intelligent, strong, and handsome adolescents, in addition to those from prominent families, were chosen. Boys of medium height were preferred. Many of the chosen adolescents also had scars; perhaps, researchers speculate, Ottoman officials saw this as signs of a healthy aggressive boy.

During the selection, each boy’s name, along with his parents, and a description of the adolescent were recorded and noted in a register. Dressed in red uniforms (long robe with a hood), the boys were then taken in groups of one hundred to one hundred and fifty to Edirne and, later, Istanbul when it became the Ottoman capital in 1453. Since the Ottomans did not want to impoverish Balkan agriculture, the oldest or only boy in a family, an orphan, son of a widowed mother, married men, or more than a certain percentage from a village, were not taken. Restrictions would be eventually abolished.

Attitudes toward the devshirme

The government considered the *devshirme* as an extraordinary levy of the *reaya*, or taxpaying subjects, not as the enslavement of its own subjects. There were families who tried to avoid the *devshirme* by having their sons marry at age twelve, since married men were excluded in the recruitment. Sometimes boys tried to escape from the Ottomans while being taken to the capital city. There was a song noting the sorrow of the families:

*Be damned, O Emperor, be thrice damned
For the evil you have done and the evil you do.
You catch and shackle the old and the archpriests
In order to take the children as Janissaries.
Their parents weep and their sisters and brothers too
And I cry until it pains me;
As long as I live I shall cry,
For last year it was my son and this year my brother.*

A number of families, especially in poor, mountain districts, gave their sons of their own accord. More worldly families were delighted to see their children secure a footing on the Ottoman career ladder. As the education and training opportunities of being a Janissary

became well-known, Christian and Muslim families volunteered their sons and sometimes used bribes to have them selected. Bosnian Slavs themselves demanded to remain eligible for the “gathering” despite their conversion from Christianity to Islam. Slavery was less degrading in the Islamic than in the Christian world. The *devshirme* adolescents, later Janissaries, could not be sold or bought. They could also remain in touch with their village families.

The end of the devshirme

By the 15th century, converted Christian boys comprised 90 percent of the Corps. When more men were again needed, the *devshirme* was extended to Anatolia in 1512. But after 1537 it was greatly reduced and by 1648 the *devshirme* had effectively stopped. In the later half of the 16th century sons of retired Janissaries and free men were allowed into the corps.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

When the *devshirme* boys arrived in Istanbul, once it became the Ottoman capital, they were circumcised, and converted to Islam to insure their loyalty, as were the *pentchick* (war prisoners). They were put through another series of examinations to determine their intelligence and other capabilities. The best of them were selected as *icoglans* (pages) and sent to Palace schools in Edirne, Istanbul, Galata and Bursa. The Palace schools were an Ottoman innovative, special and unique institution of education for upbringing these future Janissaries. The remaining recruits, those who would be “regular soldiers,” were hired out to Turkish villagers for five to seven years to learn the Turkish language and customs and the Islamic faith before joining the Janissary Corps.

In the 16th century out of some 5-6,000 recruits only 1-200 in a year were chosen for the royal schools, the most illustrious in the land. Here students studied for two to seven years under strict discipline of eunuchs. At first they studied Islam and were given a general education by Turkish *Hocas* or “professors,” which also included instruction in arms. The line of study they pursued next depended upon what suited them best. European observers record that:

...the temperament and capabilities of each boy were carefully considered. Those who showed an ability in the religious sciences prepared for the religious professions; those with talent in the scribal arts prepared for a career in the bureaucracy.



Ottoman troops at the battle of Çaldıran, 1514, in a manuscript of c.1525. Four infantrymen carry long-bladed and hooked staff weapons. The two in front wear the red Janissary caps of the Silâhtar guard corps, which normally fought as cavalry; the others have the normal white cap of Janissary Cemaat units. Two of these infantrymen also have richly embroidered tunics, perhaps indicating officer status. (Selimname, Ms. Haz. 1597-8, f.113a, Topkapı Lib., Istanbul)

Some of the specific subjects taken by the *icoglans* included Turkish, Persian and Arabic literature, conversation, horsemanship, javelin-throwing, archery, wrestling, weight-lifting. Each student learned a craft or fine art for which he showed an aptitude. Special emphasis was also put on honesty, loyalty, good manners and self-control. At the end of this training there was a *cikuma*, a selection and promotion process. Those making the grade then would be selected and sent to the *Enderun* School located within the walls of the Topkapi Palace (or Campus). Those not qualifying for this high honor would join the field units that constituted the regular, professional Janissary Corps, which also included a naval infantry.

Enderun Kolej (School)

The incoming students were called *icoglanlar* (the inner boys). There were eighty in 1475 but the number later increased. At this school the very best were trained to take important positions within the Topkapi Palace and in the administration and leadership positions within the corps. According to one writer, who had been an *icoglan* (page), the Palace education aimed to produce:

'the warrior statesman and loyal Muslim who at the same time should be a man of letters and polished speech, profound courtesy and honest morals.'

But its fundamental aim was to instill complete obedience and loyalty to the sultan. At the *Enderun*, students received training in the sultan's personal service, while at the same time they received an academic education that was the finest in the Islamic world. Scholars were invited to teach the students. Physical training or martial arts suitable to the young men's aptitudes and interest as well as the fine arts like music, poetry, calligraphy were also studied. The discipline was strict and they were kept away from female company.

Working in the Sultan's personal services was part of the overall education and was extremely important to attaining the highest official positions in the empire. This in-service involved training in seven consecutive chambers or "departments" for one to two or more years each. Some of the chambers included the following: the "Big Room," preparing for promotion to higher room services; the "Hawk Room," caring for the sultan's hunting birds; the "Treasury Room," looking after the Sultan's valuables; and the seventh chamber, the daily "Private Room," involving valet services for the sultan. At the conclusion of each chamber term a selection process took place. The best were promoted to the next chamber and the remaining boys were sent to join the sultan's cavalry. The *icoglanlars* who finally made it through the seven chambers were appointed as provincial governors, directors of service organizations, or as commanders in the Janissaries. Some eventually became the Sultan's *grand vizier*, the executive director of the imperial council.

Education and Training of the future "Regular Soldiers"

The recruits who were not originally selected for the Palace schools and who were hired out to Turkish villagers as farm laborers for five to seven years received an education that was almost entirely military, with an overwhelming emphasis on obedience. Known as *acemioglan* (cadets), they were then sent to one of the *Acemi Ocak* or training corps when

vacancies became available. Some *acemioglans* had their initial education in the households of powerful *Beys* (title of a man with authority) that were miniature mirrors of the Palace schools. From here men were selected for the more technical units such as gunners or gun-carriage drivers. However the majority trained in teaching barracks as simple Janissary infantrymen but their classes still included basic mathematics. They also worked in the imperial kitchens or in naval dockyards, or in some other occupation needed for the military success. When the Janissaries were on campaign, the *acemioglan* policed the city and acted as its firemen.

The training for the *acemioglans*, now men, posted at the teaching barracks lasted at about six years. They were supervised by eunuchs and separated from women. Discipline was very strict, though they were allowed off-duty hours to relax and enjoy city life. The final promotion to operational units of the Janissary Corps occurred when a vacancy became available. At that time the *acemioglans* were given the distinctive Janissary hat of their unit and certificate of acceptance. The following evening, after prayers, each new Janissary would put on a soldier's coat and become a full member of the corps.

STRUCTURE OF THE JANISSARY CORPS

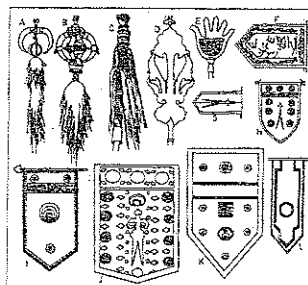
As the centerpiece of the Ottoman armies and administration, the estimated numbers of men in the Janissary Corps increased from about 6,000 in 1475 to 8,000 by 1527. The final structure of the corps consisted of 196 *Orta* battalions, which were further divided into divisions and units. The commander of the 196 *Ortas*, the Janissary Aga, was appointed by the Sultan and was a very important figure. It was usually someone from the corps who had been trained in the Palace schools. His instructions came from the Sultan through someone else.

Each *Orta* had the same basic internal structure: Each consisted of the *Orta's* commanding officer, called a *Corbasi* or 'soup man', supported by six officers and a larger number of non-commissioned officers plus an administrative clerk and an Imam or chaplain. Below these ranks were the ordinary (*Nefer* or *Yoldas*) soldiers who were placed in grades. From the highest to the lowest there were the 'pensioners,' who were not normally required to go on campaign and who were permitted to enter a trade, the 'veterans' selected for their proven valor, and the 'campaigners' who held the lowest grade.

Flags and Symbols

The Janissary *Ocak* or Corps developed its own system of flags and symbols. The main Janissary *Bayrak* or banner, called the Imam Azam was of white silk with the inscription:

'We give you victory and a sparkling victory. It is God who helps us and His help is effective. Oh Muhammad you have brought joyful news to True Believers.'



Ottoman standards and banners. (A-B) Horse-hair tuft with boars' teeth crests (Arsenal Museum, Vienna). (C) Horse-hair tuft, late 17th century (Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe). (D) Gilded standard-finial (Askeri Müze, Istanbul). (E) Early Ottoman bronze standard-finial (Topkapi Museum, Istanbul). (F) Unit flag (Arsenal Museum, Vienna). (G) Early 18th

century Janissary unit flag (after Marsigli). (H) Unit banner (Rathaus Museum, Vienna). (I) Late 17th century battle standard (after Teatro della guerra contro il Turco, Venice 1687). (J) Sancak provincial flag (private collection). (K) Ottoman battle standard cut down in size at a later date (Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe). (L) Simplified view of commander's flag (after Marsigli).

Other motifs on Ottoman banners included a sun, stars, geometric shapes, and the 'Hand of Fatima.' Another was the *Tug* or Turkish horsetail banner, whose attendants marched one day ahead of the main army. The most famous and unusual of Janissary symbols was the *Kazan*, a large copper cooking pot that was each *Orta*'s most treasured possession. Whenever the *Kazan* was carried on parade, every soldier and officer stood in respectful silence. Tipping over the *Kazan* was a sign of mutiny, and to take refuge next to it was to find sanctuary.

Uniforms

The Ottoman uniform was based on the Persian style and remained the same from the 15th to the 19th centuries. Each social class and ethnic, religious, civil or military group had a particular way of dressing. Rank was indicated by the head gear. A Western visitor, described early Ottoman costume as consisting of :

'... two or three thin, ankle length cotton robes one over the other. For a coat they wear a felt robe called a capinat. It is light and very water-proof ... They wear knee-high boots and wide breeches ... into which they stuff all their robes so that they will not get in the way when they are fighting or travelling or busy.'

The uniforms of Janissary soldiers were blue and largely made of wool. The hats' most distinctive feature was a simple wooden spoon attached to the front of the cap as a badge. The commander wore a ladle tied to his belt as a sign of rank. Senior officers wore jackets trimmed with fur. The soldiers wore red leather boots and the senior officers and privileged units wore yellow.

Barracks in Istanbul

The soldiers lived in a stone or wood barracks in a complex considered one of the power centers in Istanbul. They were described as "long buildings covered in tiles with marble doors and window frames and galleries lit by lamps. Doors led to courtyard holding fountains." Its emblem hung in a hall. There were also civilian workshops nearby. In the eighteenth century, there were sixty ortas in Istanbul capable of lodging 40,000 men. The supreme commander of the Janissary Corps, *Aga* of the Janissaries, lived in a palace so splendid that Suleyman the Magnificent once commented, *'If I could be Aga of the Janissaries for just forty days.'*

Promotions and Pay

Promotions were given every two to eight years, or on the accession of a new ruler, and were based on seniority. Promotion based on merit was also possible. Salary promotions or cash bonuses were given for distinguished service, along with a medal. The Janissaries were paid the second Tuesday every three months. Those at the palace received their pay in the palace courtyard. At the same time, the Sultan, who was the ultimate commander of the corps and enrolled in the 61st *orta*, received a wage, although he would quickly return it to the Janissary commander with more coins than were received. In the mid-fifteenth century ordinary

Janissaries also received cloth for a new pair of trousers, a larger amount of linen, a new woolen coat, and a new shirt. The Janissaries were also given money by the sultan when ascending the Ottoman throne.

Discipline

Discipline was very strict and it was said that 'forty were led by a single hair.' In the late 15th century Murad I laid down many rules for the corps, some of which were relaxed or ignored in later centuries. Some of the rules included the following: total obedience to officers, unity of purpose, strict military behavior, no extremes of luxury or abstinence, acceptance of only the best recruits, punishment only by their own officers, promotion by seniority, looking after their own dependants, no beards for ordinary soldiers, no marriage until retirement, living only in barracks, no other trades, full-time military training, and no alcohol or gambling.



'Punishing a man found drunk in public'; Ottoman miniatures album, c.1650–85. Janissary units included men and officers specifically responsible for punishing offenders. One of the most common forms of punishment was the falaka, a supple wand used to beat the soles of a convicted man's feet.

Punishment varied from kitchen duty to incarceration in the Dardanelles' fortress, although the most common was the beating of the soles of the convicted man's feet, with a *falaka*, a supple wand. Discipline on the march was even stricter, with any damage to property being cause for punishment, and compensation paid to the victims. Desertion in time of war resulted in execution.

Beliefs in Life and Death

Although converted to, and indoctrinated for, the defense of Islam, the Janissaries were not subject to, or protected by, the Islamic Law. They remained *kapukulu*, the sultan's "slaves" who had no chance to regain their freedom, but being a *kul* of the sultan in Ottoman society was considered honorable and a privilege. Moreover, the soldiers' upbringing had taught them that death in the sultan's service was the greatest blessing, and they held beliefs which gave meaning to their lives: They were brought up to...

'labor in God's path, and believed it their duty to make God's word reign in the world.'



If killed in battle, they would become a *sahid* or 'martyr,' and their dependants would be supported by a special government department through the man's *Orta*. This would include being given a weekly food ration, work for sons, and husbands for daughters. If disabled, the soldiers would be given easy jobs and remain honorary members of their *Orta*.

Retirement and Family

After years of danger and hardship on campaigns, the regular soldier could look forward to retiring on a pension in his mid-40s, engaging in Ottoman commerce, and enjoying the companionship of other Janissaries. If he had lived before the late 16th century, the retiree would be now permitted to marry and raise a family. The original rationale behind the prohibition of marriage until retirement was that he would remain focused as a soldier and loyal to the sultan; however, the rule concerning marriage was relaxed at the end of the 16th century so that the regular soldiers could be married while a Janissary. They then lived with their families but forfeited promotions. In contrast to the lower ranks, officers were never prohibited from marriage and could perhaps look forward to a profitable retirement by being given a *timar*. A *timar* consisted of a certain village or villages in which the *timar*-holder could collect the taxes and keep a portion for his income. The remaining revenue was sent to the imperial treasury. As members of the *askeri* (military) class, the Janissaries were exempted from paying taxes as opposed to the *reaya*, the taxpaying class which included the rest of the population.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE JANISSARY CORPS

The Janissary Corps, at its peak in the fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries, was the most outstanding military unit in Europe. The corps possessed excellent skills in bowmanship, archery, musketry, use of swords and hand guns, artillery, and in other occupations needed when on campaigns, such as road and bridge building. Their skills also extended to sea duty in the Ottoman navy beginning in the 15th century. Military campaigns were methodically planned which contributed to their successes on the field, as did their discipline and toughness. Bertrandon de la Broquiere observed the soldiers on a campaign in the 15th century and wrote the following:

"They are diligent and get up early in the morning [and say] the communal Muslim prayer and extend good fortune and health to the sultan, commanders, and officers. They are frugal when on the road and live on only a little food, a little badly baked bread and some raw meat, dried a little in the sun, or some curdled or otherwise-prepared milk, some cheese or honey or grapes or fruit or grass, or a handful of flour from which they make porridge for six or eight men for a day."

The Janissary Corps played a vital role in many battles as the borders of Ottoman territory expanded from southeastern Europe to the Arab lands, where Islam had originated, over to Egypt, and along the coast of North Africa to present day Algeria. One of the most important battles was their role in capturing the Byzantine city of Constantinople. In the past, many attempts were made to take this walled city, strategically placed on a triangular peninsula and to the east of it, the Bosphorus, a narrow waterway that separates Europe and

Asia. In 1453, led by Mehmed II, the Janissaries laid siege to Constantinople and, after almost two months of fighting, they captured the city. Mehmed II renamed it Istanbul.

The Janissaries also served as the key force used in centralizing the Ottoman administrative apparatus, and they were extremely important in maintaining the Ottoman flexible practices that accommodated the needs of different regions and cultures. Janissaries were named as provincial governors in such cities as Aleppo, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus. The soldiers were garrisoned in citadels or fortresses and usually stayed for nine-month tours of duty before returning to the capital. Once in the capital they resumed duties such as policing the city and surrounding areas, serving as firemen, or building sites and roads. Janissaries, long in touch with their families in the villages, sometimes helped relatives to come to Istanbul and to find employment.

The Janissaries also worked as civil servants and in the sultan's personal service in the Topkapi Palace, the seat of absolute rule and the principal creative source in Ottoman culture. Over the course of time, the corps attained important political power. A Venetian of the times wrote that the

"Janissaries take great pleasure in being able to say, 'I am a slave of the Grand Signior,' since they know that this is a lordship or republic of slaves where it is theirs to command."

They could influence the accession of future sultan, who, besides being the sovereign, assumed the role as protector of the universal Islamic community. The Janissaries went on to supply seventy-nine grand viziers, the highest official position; three Sheikh-ul Islam, chief religious dignitary, and thirty-six admirals of the Navy. They also produced the most famous architect in the Ottoman world Ma'mar Sinan (1490?-1588). He rose to the rank of colonel in the Janissaries and became the sultan's chief architect. Sinan designed numerous buildings in the empire, including masterpieces as the Suleymaniye and Selimiye mosque in Istanbul and Edirne.

CHANGES IN THE CORPS

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, but becoming more intense starting seventy-five years later, the Janissary Corps underwent some changes. The numbers of Janissaries increased over time, although estimated figures vary according to sources. In 1475 they were at about 6,000, by 1528 at 27,000, by 1591 at 48,088, and by 1806 at 109,971. But they were not all from the *devshirme* system. Beginning around 1568, the corps was open to the sons of retired Janissaries and by the end of the century they formed the majority of personnel. Because the Ottomans were at war with Iran, the Hapsburgs, or the Russians at various times and therefore in need of manpower, the corps was opened in 1582 to freeborn men who were permitted to become 'protéges' to the Janissary Aga (Commander). In 1594 the ranks were open to all Muslim volunteers.

The selection of the new members was neither as careful nor as vigorously trained as were *devshirme* recruits. Many were tradesmen or had some close relationship to commerce and

were more interested in the tax exemptions that they received as members of the corps and it showed in the battlefield. Their strong links to civil society undermined their loyalty to the sultan. Murad I's rules written in the late fourteenth century were mostly ignored. The soldiers lacked the discipline, skills, and *esprit-de-corps* that had existed with earlier Janissaries. They were married and lived with their families instead of in the barracks. Some of the positions of Topkapi Palace pages were filled by slaves who had been trained in the households of high ranking Janissaries and then found employment in the palace after the death of the head of household. Slaves from the Caucasus were also imported and trained as civil servants in the palace schools.

Revolts, Corruption and Financial/Economic Difficulties

Although Janissaries had rebelled during the years of raising stardom, their revolts became more frequent by the mid-eighteenth century usually rising out of Ottoman financial and economic (and sometimes political) problems. Wars, the costs of the armies and other swelling expenses, along with fiscal policies, increasing decentralization of the Ottoman administration and within the territories, damaging commercial treaties with the Europeans and the impact of their free trade system (mercantilism) put a tremendous strain on the imperial treasury. Imperial land policies also resulted in lowering the tax-base and resulting in decreased revenue needed to support the Janissaries and to meet other expenses. Inflation was also a problem. The debasement of the currency and increased devaluation affected the pays of the Janissaries. Pays also became irregular. As a result there occurred numerous revolts, which were frequently acted out by starting fires in Istanbul even though the Janissaries were its firemen. The shortage in revenue created an atmosphere that fostered bribery and other forms of corruption. People were robbed and assaulted and sometimes murdered. In the provinces the Janissaries collected *ad hoc* taxes from the villagers to support themselves.

Abolition of the Janissary Corps

Besides engaging in frequent revolts and corruption, some members of the Janissary Corps, and their allies, including the *Ulama* (religious scholars) resisted necessary reform and reorganization to modernize the corps in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They feared that it would lead to a reform of their own special privileges and those of other branches of the government. Some piecemeal corps reform, i.e., in weaponry, had taken place in the past, but more was needed. That more was required was vividly revealed during a long series of wars with the Hapsburgs in the sixteenth century and especially by the Russian defeat of the Ottomans in 1774 and in 1812. Russia had shared in European advances in artillery, discipline, supply and maneuver and had come to seriously outclass the tradition-bound Ottomans. Moreover, the corps' failure to crush the Greek insurrection in the early 1820s totally discredited them.

In 1826 the end arrived for the Janissary Corps. Some previous sultans had attempted reform and modernization and failed, but Sultan Mahmud II waited eighteen years for the right time to make important changes in the corps or to eliminate it if not cooperative. The Janissaries no longer had the support of the *Ulama* or a majority of the people in Istanbul and

surrounding areas. Mahmud II had earlier recruited new men to form the *Nizam i-Cedid* "New Order or Army" and had added the loyal Janissary *ortas* (the gunners, marines, and bombardiers) to it and had them trained by his French advisors. But some corps members still refused to be trained in European tactics. They went to the sultan's Topkapi Palace to protest and then, perhaps realizing that the end was near, many Janissaries took refuge in the Istanbul barracks, which they barricaded with heavy stones. Sultan Mahmud II believed that "*Either the Janissaries will all be massacred or cats will walk over the ruins of Istanbul.*" People responded to calls to rally around the sultan and joined in the fight against the Janissaries, because they wanted revenge for their numerous acts of murder and theft. Mahmud II then sent the *Cedid* and other loyal Janissaries to the barracks. These men gave the mutineers a chance to "relent or come to their senses" but they refused. So the Sultan's loyal soldiers attacked the barracks and kill the rebellious Janissaries along with many others found in the city. The corps was officially abolished. While some Janissaries just faded into the population, many loyal Janissaries continued to serve the sultan until 1850.

Notes:

Kul: *Some historians believe that the translation of kul as 'slave' is misleading. The Islamic law normally considered freedom as fundamental, and slavery a transitory condition. It regarded the manumission of slaves as a meritorious act which religion encouraged. Spiritually, the slave has had the same value as the free man, and the same eternity is in store for his soul.*

The Hand of Fatima: *This stylized image of a palm, the hand of Fatima, is a popular decorative motif for jewelry in the Islamic world. The hand depicted in this way is a magical symbol of power, and is thus used as a talisman, for the hand is the capacity to control nature and bring order out of chaos. It is an ancient symbol found in many cultures. Despite its name it has nothing to do with Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.*

Cyril Glasse. The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam.



Pen and ink drawing of a senior Ottoman officer by Dürer around 1495. German artists started producing accurate representations of Turkish military costume and weaponry soon after Ottoman forces started raiding central Europe. This man's flanged mace, as well as the size of his turban, were a mark of rank or command. (Albertina Coll., no. 3196, D.171, Vienna)

*'In my hand I took the axe
As I set out on my journey
Without self-awareness
I became aware of the Beautiful One (God).'*

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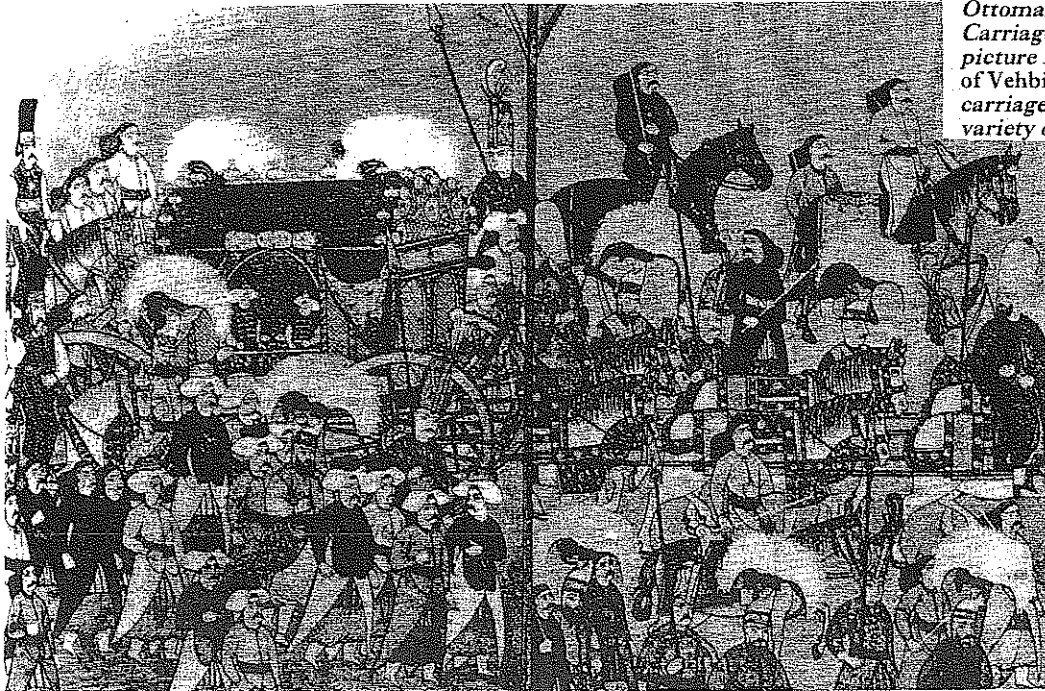
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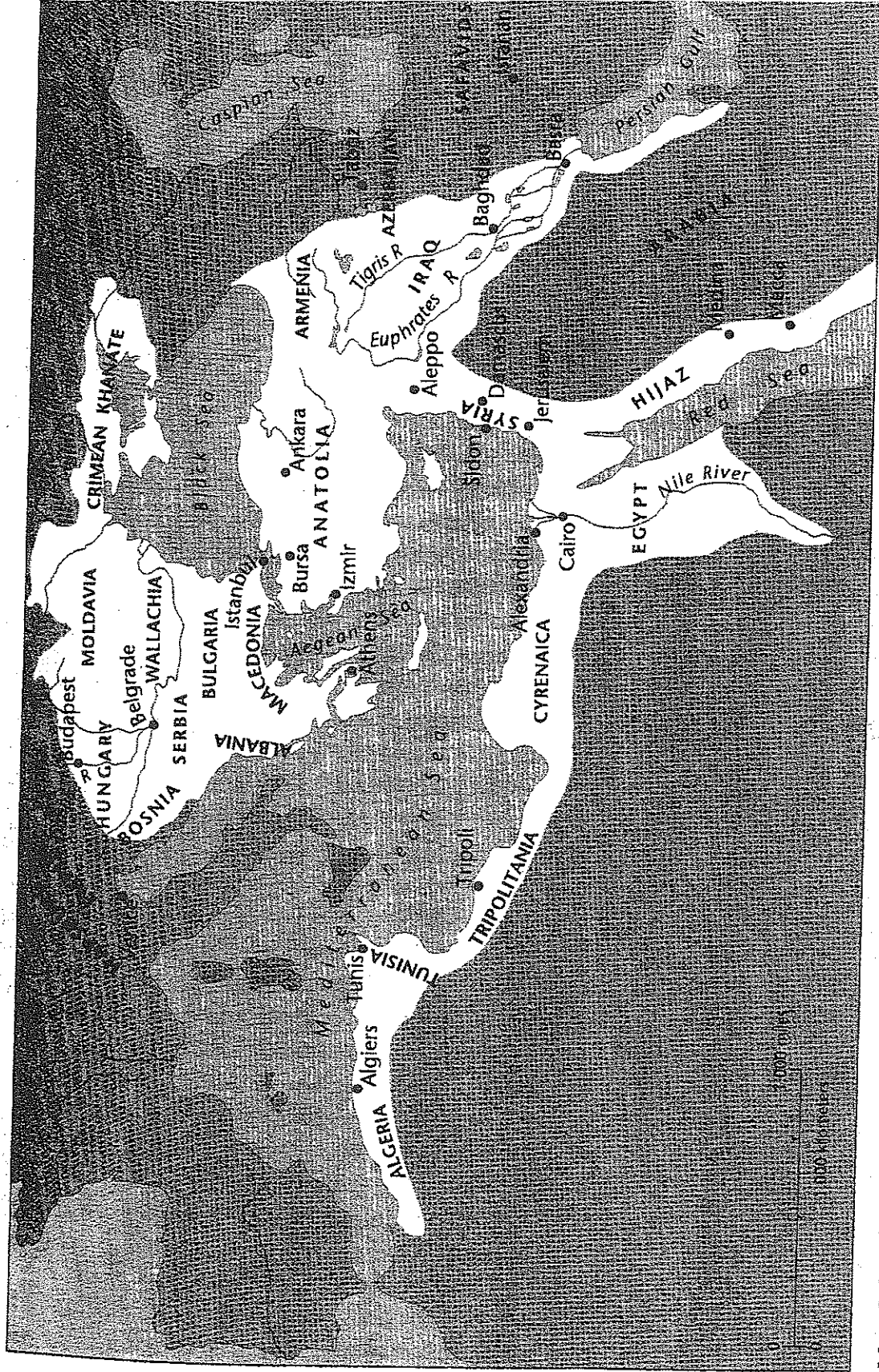
A very good source on Janissary Corps and colored illustrations of costumes.

Lecture:

Kiel, Machiel, "Balkan Mythology and Janissary Recruitment," April 13, 2001, at the Center For Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University.



'Procession of the Ottoman Sultan's sons in a Carriage', a double-page picture from the Surname of Vehbi, 1650-85. The carriage is escorted by a variety of soldiers



Map 3.1 The Ottoman Empire in the Late Seventeenth Century

Student Activities

Discussion Questions

1. Some historians believe that calling the Janissaries *kul* or slave soldiers was misleading because the title *kul* was one of honor and dignity. Do you agree or disagree with this? Can we say that the Janissaries were free? What do you believe are the elements of freedom?
2. The *kul* system (slave system) drafted adolescent males, educated and trained them to be soldiers in the field and in government. Read about the young boys who are captured in parts of today's Africa, and made to be soldiers. How different are their lives from the boys in the *kul* system?
(see activity #2)
3. Many governments in modern times have drafted young men to become soldiers? Discuss the reasons for such drafts. Who do you think should be drafted and why?
4. Why did the Ottoman sultan, Murad I, create the *devshirme* system? Argue either for or against his reasons.
5. What were the mixed reactions among the Janissaries' families to their sons and brothers being taken from them by the Ottoman Empire?
6. What qualities made the Janissaries successful during the late fourteenth to mid-sixteenth centuries? Are these qualities important to succeed in other occupations?
7. Recalling what you know of slavery in the southern United States before the Civil War, how would you compare the lives of these slave to those of the Janissaries?
8. The Janissaries helped the sultan to expand the Ottoman Empire and to govern it. How does the American military help this country?
9. The sultan was an "absolute" ruler of the Ottoman Empire. What is an absolute ruler? Is the president an "absolute ruler? Why or why not?
10. What brought about the disintegration of the Janissary Corps from the powerful and successful soldiers of the late fourteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century, and the rebellious soldiers of the late sixteenth to early nineteenth century?

Research and Projects

1. Using a modern map of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa as a guide, indicate on the Ottoman Empire map the countries now found in former Ottoman ruled areas.
2. Ottomans were not the first to use war prisoners and slaves in their armies. Research one other country or people who followed, or still follow, this practice? Write a report comparing the treatment of these slave soldiers with that of the Janissaries.
3. The sultan, Murad I made rules for the Janissaries to follow to become excellent soldiers. In a report, compare these rules to ones you think are important to be a successful student? Which of the rules might apply and which not? Why?
4. The Janissaries received a pension after they retired and could engage in business. Research articles about either the American veterans of World War II or the Vietnam War. Note the benefits received by each group of veterans, and their **adaptation** to their peacetime life. Prepare an oral report citing any differences and the reasons for them. Ask the class to respond to your report by considering what the responsibilities of a government should be to its war veterans.
5. Make a list of the subjects and skills that the *icoglan*s (pages) and the *acemioglan*s (cadets) learned and compare it with the list of subjects that are taught in your school. Which subjects are the same / different? Which of the Ottoman subjects are still important today? Write a paragraph indicating your favorite subject and why you think the *icoglan*s and *acemioglan*s would also like it.
6. Prepare a glossary defining the following words from the Janissary article. To reinforce the definitions students could devise a crossword puzzle or an anagram puzzle, or, have a "word bee". Choose a student as 'questioner' giving him a list of definitions with the correct answer. Divide the class into 2 teams lined up facing each other. Provide each student with a list of the words. The questioner asks a student from each team, in turn, to name the correct word for a definition. If the student's answer is incorrect, she is eliminated, and a student from the other team is questioned, and so on, till one team is left without any student standing.

Acemi Ocak	Acemioglan	Aga
Askeri	Bey	Bosphorous
Constantinople	Corbasi,	Devshirme
Enderun Kolij	Falaka	Hocas
Icoglan	Icoglanlar	Istanbul
Kapukulu	Kazan	Kul Sultan
Manumission	Orta	Reay
Timar	Topkapi Palace	