

A Privileged Class in Everyday Life: Understanding the Janissaries' Role in Capital Accumulation

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on an obstacle to the capital accumulation possibilities of the pre-capitalist period in the Ottoman economy. From the second half of the 16th century, the janissaries, like all the institutions of the Empire, changed. The main argument of the study is that the new form taken by the janissaries as a result of this transformation had a feature that absorbed the capital produced in the Empire. This study does not address or discuss the Empire's integration process or its peripheral position within the capitalist system.

KEYWORDS

Janissaries, Ottoman Economy, Capital Accumulation, Pre-capitalist Period

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INTRODUCTION

Capital accumulation is considered to be one of the main pillars of capitalism. A variety of studies¹ have focused on how capital accumulation in the Ottoman Empire played a significant role in the Empire's incorporation into a capitalist economy. So far, experts agree on the fundamental characteristics of Ottoman integration into the world economy. Numerous studies have attempted to explain Ottoman modernization. Since the eve of the 19th century, certain regions of the Ottoman Empire, such as Rumelia, Northern Syria, Egypt, and Western Anatolia had all fallen under the domination of the Eurocentric economic system. In particular, in 1750, the sales of raw materials in the Empire surpassed those of manufactured goods in foreign trade. It is for this reason that Pamuk (2011) argues that the year 1750 was a critical point in the Ottoman economic transformation. It is undeniable that the Ottoman Empire occupied a peripheral position within the capitalist world system. However, there remains a lack of agreement among scholars as to the underlying causes of this phenomenon. The question of what led to the peripherization of the empire remains a topic of debate among historians. Some approaches, like those in Kuran (2011), seek the answer in terms of religious characteristics, while some scholars, like Quataert (1999), state that political and economic reasons were at the forefront. This paper examines how the janissary corps influenced capital accumulation in the Ottoman economy. While existing literature has primarily analyzed the janissary corps as a military organization, this research endeavours to examine their impact on capital accumulation in the Empire as a rising social group.

By the end of the 16th century, Ottoman institutions had fallen into rapid decline. A transition period was implemented after the classical period ended and before the modern period began. The characteristics of this transition period are one of the important determinants of the hierarchical role of the empire in the capitalist system. This period has features that make capital accumulation impossible, with the change in the Ottoman army being one of the main reasons for this situation, with the most important actors behind this change being the janissaries. As previously mentioned, this study focuses on how the janissaries affected the Ottoman economy. The martial aspects of this change are beyond the scope of this study.

Firstly, both inflation and wages in the Ottoman economy will be discussed in this paper. In the first part, we survey the economic reasons which made the Ottoman classical structure unsustainable. Due to economic change, the janissaries' social standing subsequently changed, and the prohibitions that had been strictly applied during the classical period were eventually ignored. This is how they began involving themselves in everyday life. As a result of all these changes, the janissaries greatly affected the economy. Finally, in the last part of this paper, we examine the effects that the janissaries had on the Ottoman economy.

¹ This study does not discuss the Ottoman Empire's integration into the capitalist economy. It deals with a structural situation that already existed before integration and which, therefore, affected the integration process. The center-periphery approach developed within the framework of the world-systems theory and, in the light of this approach, it was accepted that the Ottoman Empire had been included in the world-economy as a peripheral member. In this study, the hierarchical position of the Empire in the capitalist system is not discussed; only one of the factors which drove it to a peripheral position is analyzed. For further information on the center-periphery approach and Ottoman integration, see Amin 1976, İnalçık 1969, Wallerstein 1979, Kasaba 1988, İslamoğlu 2004.



1. THE WAGES AND INFLATION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

An empire that has established a stable political and economic system is typically resistant to change. Given the level of communication and transportation available during the pre-modern era, this conservative attitude is certainly logical. However, history shows that at some point, various combinations of numerous factors such as population, climate, wars, and migrations disrupt the balances that empires want to protect with great effort. The classical order built by the Ottoman Empire, which was not free from this rule, changed with the pressure of various elements. Although the change of the janissaries is at the forefront as it is the focal point of this study, in fact, the Ottoman Empire has also changed and transformed with all its institutions since the second half of the 16th century. According to Fodor (2018: 38–55), climate change, population pressure, the spread of firearms among the common people, endless wars and provincial rebellions were among the reasons that forced the classical order to change. While accepting the transformation of all the institutions of the empire, this study focuses on the accumulation of capital and the change of the janissaries. The following sections are therefore restricted to discussing the causes of inflation and the evolution of military institutions.

1.1. External Factors

When it comes to maintaining stability within a given society, volatility in prices is the greatest deterrent and, whilst ‘inflation measurement’ is a relatively new concept, this problem has been known throughout the course of history (O’Neill, Ralph and Smith 2017: 47). The circulation of American gold and ever-rising manufacturing processes caused Europe to experience high inflation during the 16th and 17th centuries. One study found that ‘between 1521 and 1600, about 18,000 tons of silver and 200 tons of gold entered Spain through official channels from America’ (Heaton 1948: 249). Indeed, ever since Bodin, American gold became the cornerstone of the earliest and simplest explanation of the European price revolution: ‘while not everyone would agree as to the relative extent of the influence of the long inflation, it is clear that one important input was the considerable inflow of specie (mostly silver) from the American colonies’ (Fisher 1989: 883).

The escalating cost of inputs prompted manufacturers in Western Europe to seek out more cost-effective alternatives. The Ottoman Empire, with its vast territory and proximity, emerged as a desirable option for this pursuit. Exports, however, were not a desired economic activity for classical Ottoman economic management. Like every medieval empire, the Ottomans were reluctant to change the dynamics of the self-sufficient economic order (Genç 2014: 45). Due to the fear of famine, measures were taken to limit the export of goods, which resulted in the illegal exportation of raw materials from the country. This led to an increase in prices, particularly in West Anatolia and the Balkans, which were known to be key regions for this illegal trade in agricultural products and raw materials. Wheat, leather, wool, silk, and livestock were the most in-demand, and it was such European demand for Ottoman goods that acted as the primary reason for inflation within the Empire (Barkan 1970: 585).



1.2. Internal Factors and Inflation Rates

The internal factors of inflation within the Ottoman Empire were direct results of external factors. There were two main internal factors that worsened the inflation rates in the Empire. First, when the territorial expansion of the Empire stopped, the amount of war booty decreased (Barkan 1970: 596). The second reason was the frequent debasement of its monetary policy (Gerber 1982: 315). The amount of silver in coins was frequently reduced in order to mint more coins than the same amount of silver. For this reason, while the ratio of silver in a coin was 0.66 in the 1520s, it decreased to 0.25 in the 1620s. In sum, both external and internal factors caused the Ottoman Empire to experience high inflation, which adversely affected the Ottoman army as well. Perhaps the most well-known analysis of Ottoman inflation is to be found in the work of Pamuk (2004: 455). Calculations in this study are also based on Pamuk's findings, which can be seen in the appendix.

1.3. Change in the Army

As stated above, the army was one of the Ottoman institutions that was negatively affected by the increase in inflation rates. Before the 17th century, the backbone of the Ottoman army was its cavalries. These had no wages but were given fiefs, or *timars* (İnalçık 1973: 104–118). The number of janissaries was limited mainly for economic reasons. For instance, in 1526, in the battle of Mohács, while the Ottoman army consisted of around 100,000 soldiers, there were only 7886 janissaries (Beydilli 2013: 454). These numbers, however, reversed in favor of the janissaries within 90 years for, in 1616, with a 100,000-strong Ottoman army on its way to the siege of Revan, the number of fiefed cavalries on all imperial borders was estimated to be around 14,867 (İnalçık 2012: 170). The *timar*, therefore, was no longer a military system in the Empire but an economic one (Özkaya 1979: 219).

Since the cavalries received their wages as fiefs, they had no burden on the state treasury. Nevertheless, since the income received by the cavalries from their fiefs was fixed due to strict regulations, it was impossible for any increases to be made on them (Akdağ 1945: 420). Therefore, both perceived and actual inflation was equal for them. In this way, fief ownership, which had once been considered as one of the most desirable positions in the empire, turned into something to be avoided. By contrast, it became more prestigious to be a member of a janissary corps (Shinder 1973: 221–222). The standard of living of the cavalries deteriorated so much that they gave great support to the princely revolts that took place in the last periods of the Kanuni, which were assumed to be the most powerful times of the empire. In a study investigating the Timar System, Akdağ (1945: 422–423) reported that the cavalries which supported the rebellious princes intended to become janissaries after their prince had succeeded to the throne. Besides, the recruitment procedure of the rebel army was similar to that of the janissary.

Although the riots were suppressed, the underlying socio-economic factors that contributed to their occurrence were not addressed. People did not want to have fiefs, and those who already owned them sought to evade their obligations. The cavalries, which were one of the backbones of the Ottoman army, began engaging in crimes throughout Anatolia, including banditry. For



these reasons, the number of janissaries increased dramatically in order to ensure security in the provinces. In addition to this, janissaries were also assigned as garrisons in the city centers of Anatolia (Akdağ 1947: 299).

1.4. Salaried Servants of the Empire and Inflation

In spite of the fact that there were paid military outside of the janissary corps such as castle serving, serving for fief was the primary form in the Ottoman classical period. As the number of janissaries increased, the exception became the rule. Unlike the fiefed cavalries, the perceived and real rates of inflation were not equal for salaried workers seeing as their income was not limited by law. Nevertheless, their real incomes decreased due to high inflation. The loss of this income was measured by means of two variables: first, changes in the wages and, second, inflation rates. As stated earlier, Pamuk's study on inflation rates in the Ottoman Empire will be used in this study. For the wages, three different sources were used: first Barkan's (1953, 1955a, 1955b) findings of Ottoman budgets; second, Uzunçarşılı's (1988) study on janissaries; and third, the Ottoman archive records. In this chapter, in order to understand how the wages were affected vis-à-vis inflation, the wages of three different professions apart from the janissaries will also be examined.

Clerks, architects, and doctors were salaried servants of the Ottoman palace. From 1527 to 1670, the salaries of these servants, excluding doctors, increased nominally. Although the salaries of doctors increased between 1527 to 1660, they decreased nominally in comparison to the salaries of 1660 and 1670. When the 1527-1660 period is examined, salaries increased nominally by 9%, 10%, and 14%. The nominal change in salaries between 1660-1670, though, was 0.26%, 5.75%, and 25.10%. After ten years of decline, the total nominal change between 1527 and 1670 was 9.36%, 4.44%, 14.61%. The low increases or decreases in salaries caused purchasing power to decrease significantly in the face of the high inflation which was experienced in the same period. When examined at the real level, the change in salaries between 1527 and 1670 was 71%, 72%, and 77%.

Table 1. Daily Wages and Real Wages of Various Servants²

	1527–1528 Base Year	1660–1661		1669–1670	
		Nominal Wage	Real Wage	Nominal Wage	Real Wage
Clerks	17.62	19.22	6.18	19.27	5.10
Architects	10.13	11.23	3.61	10.58	2.80
Jewish Doctors	27.17	30.98	9.95	23.20	6.15

² For the source of the data presented in the table, see Akdağ 1947.



Sources can provide different information on janissary salaries. This is probably because the salaries of the janissaries differed according to their experiences. In addition, it is normal for soldiers in different positions to receive different salaries. The records provided by Uzunçarşılı on the salary of the janissaries are controversial and far from systematic. According to his findings, the daily wage, which started with 2 *akçe*, increased to 3 *akçe* from the beginning of the 17th century. It is understood that 3 *akçe* was the starting amount because Uzunçarşılı states that the highest janissary salary was 5 *akçe* in the same period. On the eve of the 17th century, with the new raise made to their salaries by Sultan Ahmed, the highest janissary salary reached 9 coins per day. Contrariwise, during the middle of the century, it reached 12 *akçe*s (Uzunçarşılı 1988: 411–413). Barkan's studies of Ottoman budgets are more likely to display average income levels, as they show both the total number of janissaries and the total expenditure. In addition to these studies, records in the Ottoman archives are also important sources on this subject. With the help of the archive sources, the income of the janissaries who served in various fortresses was determined.³

It seems that the real wages of the janissaries had a trend similar to other servants. The average janissary wage increased from 1527 to 1567 in both nominal and real levels. During the following century, however, it declined in both levels. Average wages must have decreased as the rapid growth in the number of janissaries increased the number of soldiers receiving wages at the starting level. On the other hand, the salaries of the janissaries working in the fortresses were higher than the average. The salary of the soldiers who served in Yanova Fortress in 1675 was twice more than the average. In any case, the real income level of the janissaries – just like that of other servants – declined between 42% and 67%.

In contrast to architects, doctors, and clerks, the janissaries were not like the limited number of unarmed officers who were restricted to palace service. Instead, their numbers were not fixed, and they were deployed throughout the empire. This is what gave rise to their being a privileged class in Ottoman daily life.

Table 2. The Daily Wage of a Janissary
According to the Total Expenditure on the Budget⁴

	Average Daily Wage per Person, Nominal (Akçe)	Real Wage per Person (Akçe)
1527–1528 (Base Year)	5.43	5.43
1567–1568	7.43	7.1903226
1660–1661	7.41	2.2917526
1669–1670	7	1.7847025

³ BOA. AE. SMMD. IV. 5/509 26.01.1081 (22 April 1675); BOA D. YNÇ. d. 33897 29.12.1081 (9 May 1671); BOA D. YNÇ. d. 33899. C 29.12.1081 (9 May 1671).

⁴ The data in Table 1 are adjusted for inflation by Pamuk's (2014) findings on Ottoman inflation.



Table 3. Daily Wage of Janissaries in Various Fortresses⁵

	Average Daily Wage per Person (Akçe)	Real Wage per Person (Akçe)
1527–1528 (Base Year)	6.93	6.93
Damascus Fortress		
1631	8.38	2.85
Erzurum Fortress		
1670	11.67	3.09
Bender Fortress		
1671	12.42	3.29
Erzurum Fortress		
1675	15.12	4
Yanova Fortress		

2. A PRIVILEGED CLASS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Armies consisting of slaved soldiers, or mamluks, date back to the Abbasid period. Although the rulers of Islamic states benefited from their service, the nature of the mamluks remained unknown. A mamluk was not just any slave but an elite soldier. Every ruler dreamt of having an army of soldiers who were recruited at early ages and who underwent rigorous military training. The mamluks, since they were recruited at early ages, had no familial or tribal affiliations which would potentially become a threat to the rule of the sultan. Moreover, they were not only trained to be good soldiers but were also taught to be loyal to the sultan (Pipes 1981: 9). As Blaydes and Chaney (2013: 23) note, ‘There is no consensus in the existing literature as to why mamlukism emerged and spread throughout the Islamic world.’ However, it is obvious that mamlukism was an important element in preventing a feudal distribution of power in the Islamic world. Blaydes and Chaney’s (2013) significant study about political divergence of the Christian West and the Muslim world emphasizes the importance of mamlukism in the distribution of power.

The employment of a mamluk army was a double-edged sword for the sultan. On one hand, it had the capability to lead to victorious campaigns; however, if not properly controlled, it could also rebel and present a significant threat to the sultan’s rule through either imprisonment or death. Therefore, just as there were strict rules in mamlukism, there were strict rules for the janissaries in the Empire as well. The logic behind these rules and prohibitions was to keep those soldiers separate from the local people. For this reason, the janissaries were prohibited from getting married until 40 years old and doing anything other than military service. Furthermore, only the children of Christian families in certain regions of the Empire — mostly Rumeli — were

⁵ For the source of the data presented in the table, sees Uzunçarşılı 1988.



recruited into the army. However, as Akdağ (1945: 293) argues, no classical text explicitly states that only the children of Christian families could be recruited into the army. Akdağ (1945: 294) claims that the janissaries may have created such a rule verbally with the help of a reaction similar to class consciousness. Given that the janissaries were extremely aggressive in their interests and even killed the sultan, this claim is not absurd. Yet, no matter how aggressive the janissaries were, the demographic profile of the empire after the 17th century did not allow for the establishment of an army consisting only of the children of Christian families. As stated above, the numbers of janissaries and fiefed cavalries in the army reversed. In the 17th century and afterwards, people were recruited from different regions to meet Ottoman army demand. Authorities began to ignore janissaries' marriage and trade relations with local people (Kafadar 1991: 273). Hereby, from the 17th century up until the abolishment of the janissary, the Ottomans broke one of the most basic rules about mamlukism and allowed janissaries to be in contact with the people. Janissaries were allowed to be in everyday life, to get married, to trade, to lend, and to communicate with the common folk (Erder and Faroqi 1980: 300). Furthermore, contrary to the rules, the janissaries continued to use their privileges (Akdağ 1964:31). This phenomenon – i.e. the janissaries' holding their privileges despite their being able to interact in everyday life – became one of the most serious issues of Ottoman urban life between the classical and modern periods.

3. JANISSARIES' IMPACT ON OTTOMAN ECONOMY AND CAPITAL ACCUMULATION

It is important to understand janissaries' provincial organizations to understand their impact on the Ottoman economy. Until their abolition, janissaries were the soldiers of the sultan. Therefore, they did not take orders from the local authorities, with the only exception being their commander, who was also a janissary. Of course, as might be expected after a while, this situation led to the famous question of 'who will guard the guards themselves?'

In a study about alimony payments in Istanbul, it is shown that, from 1520 to 1680, the average daily alimony payment increased from 1/1,5 akçe to 7/8 akçe nominally (Akkaya 2018: 301–302). In another study on the wages of construction workers in Istanbul, it was found that there had been an increase in workers' wages at a similar rate. The study examined two groups of workers: the unskilled and the skilled. According to its findings, between 1490 and 1680, the salaries of both skilled and unskilled workers increased by between 4.7 and 5.2, respectively (Pamuk 2000: 69–70).

How could the janissaries live with an increase of 1.5/2 times under economic conditions in which alimony payments increased at approximately 6/8 times? It is assumed that the janissaries, with the encouraging ignorance of political authorities, turned into a metaphorical black hole which absorbed the capital produced in the Empire economy. After the 17th century, they adversely affected both capital accumulation and inflation in a variety of ways.

3.1. Unlawful Acts of Jannisaries

From the end of the 16th century, the janissaries became more visible among artisan guilds. In principle, as long as the occupations were separated, it was not necessarily harmful for soldiers to also work as artisans or traders. The balance the empire had established in urban life over many



centuries, however, had been radically shaken. Like most other medieval empires, the Ottoman Empire established laws to maintain this balance within the cities. Since the population growth rate was extremely low, the number of craftsmen and shops in a city's bazaar was kept under control. One of the most important of these mechanisms comprised the long years spent as firstly an apprentice and then as a journeyman training to obtain a master certificate. If someone tried to open a shop in the city without a certificate of mastership, the relevant guild would complain to the authorities which, in turn, mostly ended up with the closure of the store by the authorities in charge. When the janissaries persisted in opening shops without these certificates without any legal consequences, however, this balance was disturbed (Kaya 2013: 199).

Another characteristic of commercial life in Ottoman cities was that it was far from competitive. Goods produced by craftsmen had to have a pre-determined quality and price. It was against the law for the guilds to produce low-quality goods or set prices above a certain ceiling. The janissaries, however, who were also heavily involved in trade, violated these rules as well (Baş 2014: 334–354).

Another source of unrest was that the janissaries wanted the same privileges they enjoyed in military service to carry out their trade activities. Under normal circumstances, the Muslim judge, or *kadi*, of the city would inspect the bazaar and shops and had penal authority in case any laws were transgressed. Nonetheless, as soldiers of the sultan, the janissaries wanted to be above the law and did not recognize the *kadi*'s authority, both in their military and trade lives (Çiftçi 2010: 33).

Another regulation in the Ottoman bazaars stipulated that retail sellers of fruit and vegetables were prohibited from interacting with wholesale sellers prior to their entry into the city. This measure aimed to ensure that all retail sellers could purchase goods on equal terms. The janissaries, however, violated this rule as well, aiming to meet wholesalers early in order to secure a monopoly. They then sold their monopolized products above the ceiling price (Çiftçi 2010: 39).

The illegal trade of scarce commodities or officially controlled materials and substances has long served as a viable way for individuals to increase their income rapidly. It would be surprising if the janissaries did not leverage these benefits of the black market and the broader underground economy. Evidence suggests that agreements were often made between janissaries and merchant ship captains such that, upon each ship's arrival at an Istanbul port, the goods on board would not enter the local market (İnalçık 2005: 42–46).

Other unlawful acts were also committed under the pretext of military privileges. Chief among these were the practices of pressing tribute and of looting the most direct forms of capital transfer. The janissaries compensated for the decline in living standards with funds pressed from local artisans and indulged in looting when the opportunity arose. The most common were extraordinary situations such as fires or earthquakes. Especially in Istanbul, the task of extinguishing fires fell to the janissaries known as *tulumbacılar*. There are records that the *tulumbacılar* looted during fires. There are other recorded cases of them starting fires just to loot (Baş 2014: 357). Collecting unfair taxes from the peasants was also among the habits of the janissaries (İnalçık 1998: 27). This can be regarded as a tribute-like illegal income.

High-interest money-lending was one of the fundamental sources of income for janissaries as well, particularly in the provinces. At various points in time, there were instances where janissaries were reported to have seized land from indebted peasants who were unable to make their loan repayments. Novel arrangements in Ottoman land property relations were birthed as a result of events such as these (Akdağ 1963: 39).



In terms of recruitment documents, two types of unlawful strategies for gaining income as a janissary have been identified by historians. The first involved an officer recording an individual as a janissary in return for payment, in violation of his duties (Baş 2014: 336). Until the first quarter of the 17th century, janissaries wanted to be artisans and traders. As previously mentioned, this trend started in the second half of the 16th century. The joining of janissaries into urban guilds was a rather painful process. After the initial conflict, however, an equilibrium point was found, and the tradesmen and janissaries stood out as a social force against all kinds of reform and innovation in the Ottoman Empire (Çiftçi 2010: 38). From around the 1620s, the process of janissaries becoming artisans flipped, and many artisans – eager to benefit from military privileges – bribed recruitment officials in order to become janissaries. When they received the official paper which proved that they were janissaries themselves, they enjoyed all the privileges listed above in trade life. Another similar situation was the sale of this type of official paper to a merchant. In the case of this unlawful action, it was not the official in charge of registration but an individual janissary who would sell his own document (Baş 2014: 338).

In addition to the economic activities listed above that they engaged in, janissaries also had an impact on the money market. The ratio of silver in the akçe was gradually devalued by Ottoman authorities since they needed extra money to compensate the loss in the state treasury. When the silver ratio in the akçe devalued, the value of gold coins vs. akçe increased, thereby causing the purchasing power of the janissaries to fall rapidly. Nevertheless, artisans often paid the price of this decline, with the janissaries ignoring the new silver ratio and forcing the artisans to take the akçes over the old silver ratio. The state ignored these actions and sometimes even supported them. In 1651, for example, *Defterdar* agreed with the janissaries and bought gold coins from the artisans of the city by forcing them to accept low-value akçe as being more valuable (Efendi 2003: 662).

3.2. Frequency and Variety of Illegality

It is important to know the frequency of the janissaries’ unlawful actions. Since these were illegal actions, most of them were unregistered. Ottoman archives could give an idea about their frequency. The result of searches made with some keywords is shown in Table 4 below. Since an unknown amount of the empire’s documents must have been lost, and only some of the existing documents have been scanned and added to the database, it is important to keep in mind that these results merely allow a glimpse into the distribution of unlawful, jannisary-led acts by year.

Table 4. Archive Documents with Complaint Content from Janissaries in The Title

Time/Search Term	Complaint (<i>Şikayet</i>)	Unfair (<i>Haksız</i>)	Cruelty (<i>Zulüm</i>)	Total
1500–1600	15	3	22	40
1600–1700	21	17	39	77
1700–1800	75	18	50	143



Three searches with three keywords were made. The first one is ‘janissary, complaint’; the second one is ‘janissary, unfair’; and the last one is ‘janissary, cruelty’. The documents containing these phrases in the title were counted. If any document appeared in different searches repeatedly, it was only counted once. We found 199 documents that contained the first group of words in the archive database. 111 of them were about complaints against the janissaries. As seen in the second column of Table 4, 67% of the documents found belong to the 18th century. 68 search results were found in the second group, in which 38 were about the illegal acts committed by the janissaries. Only 8% of the 38 documents belong to the 16th century. Finally, 153 documents were found in the third category: 111 of them were about the cruelty of the janissaries, of which 80% belonged to the post-17th century period. Even with a simple search through the titles of archived documents, it turns out that the number of complaints from the janissaries increased in parallel with the increase in their number. Considering that the documents recorded in the archives represent only the tip of the iceberg, the assumption that the janissaries committed great extortion after becoming more involved in everyday life seems plausible. The *mühimme defters*⁶ are additional sources that give support to this argument. Sixteen graduate theses on the subject were examined, eight of which date from the 16th century and eight from the 18th century. The analyzed *defters* contain 48 complaints concerning the janissaries. Of the 48 complaints, forty occurred in the eighteenth century.⁷

The unlawful acts of the janissary corps are not limited to those listed above. Surely, those listed are the most well-known, but the numerous types of unlawful actions committed by the janissaries were at such a level that the question requires further scrutiny. Janissaries took a wide range of actions to compensate for losses in income, even influencing the judiciary. As understood from a document dated 1577, they intervened in the courts and protected criminals.⁸ This ‘service’ was not free of charge. Another document, dated 1579, shows that janissaries received illegal money from a merchant, which was equivalent to the amount of tax that the merchant paid for his trade.⁹ Furthermore, in a document dated 1637, it is stated that a janissary seized the properties left by his father to a villager named Recep in the city of Küre in Anatolia.¹⁰ Apart from these, there are numerous records of complaints about the janissaries’ union with bandits, especially in the provinces. Another common theme in archived documents is the looting by janissaries who were on their way to a war zone.¹¹ Some janissaries took advantage of the fact that the soldiers who ensured order in the provinces were at the front during wartime and seized the property of the common people without paying for them.

⁶ The *Mühimme Registration Books* are the result of the political, military, and social decisions that were debated in imperial council (*Divân-ı Hümayun*) and electronic searches are not possible for these resources.

⁷ A total of sixteen postgraduate theses were scanned in order to obtain this data. The related theses can be found in the following sources: Akar 2021; Akarsu 2006; Bulut 2019; Çakır 2006; Genç 2021; Genç 2022; İzgi 2006; Kavak 2014; Kirca 2007; Kurt 2005; Özbay 2008; Öztürk 2010; Paşazade 2006; Topal 2021; Toraman 2005; Yılmaz 2016.

⁸ BOA, A. DVNSMHM.d.31/108 28.04.985 (15 July 1577).

⁹ BOA, A. DVNSMHM. d.36/588 20.02.987 (18 April 1579).

¹⁰ BOA, A. DVNSMHM. d. 88/191 01.07.1047 (19 November 1637).

¹¹ Archive records contain plenty of documents dealing with these issues, see, for example, the following ones: BOA, A. DVNSMHM d. 74/196 12/02/1005 (05 October 1596); BOA, A. DVNSMHM.d. 111/1816 20.10.1112 (30 March 1701); BOA, A. DVNSMHM.d. 117/44 20.03.1122 (19 May 1710); BOA, A. DVNSMHM.d. 117/408 10.08.1123 (23 September 1711); BOA, A. DVNSMHM.d. 126/1055 29.01.1130 (2 January 1718); BOA, A. DVNSMHM.d. 85/103 03.06.1040 (7 January 1631).



Three incidences are pivotal in order to understand the degeneration of the janissaries. According to a document dated 1734, the kadi of a town called Çemişgezek in eastern Anatolia was ordered to capture the janissaries who fled from a riot in Istanbul and had committed abuse against local people.¹² This document communicates the idea that the janissaries, fearing punishment as a result of the power changes in Istanbul, scattered into the provinces. Another document, dated 1792, showed that some janissaries had tried to extort an Ottoman merchant by not allowing him to ship his goods, even though he had all the required documents for exporting his wares on his person.¹³ The merchants engaged in the export of goods were also required to bear the added cost of extortion, in the form of additional payments to soldiers in addition to the taxes they had already paid. The last document discovered provides crucial insight into the level of corruption within the janissary corps. In an edict sent to the governor of Damascus, it is stated that the janissaries were given the task of guarding the pilgrimage road to Mecca by bribing their commanders and stole from the pilgrims during their duties.¹⁴ This document evidences the existence of bribery in the military such that janissaries are assigned to positions with intense illegal income opportunities.

3.3. The Amount of Capital the Janissaries Seized

It is nearly impossible to know the amount of capital that was seized by the janissaries over the years. Even a study that takes years in the archives to reveal the approximate amount is doomed to be inconclusive because most of the soldiers' actions are unrecorded. Under this heading, a question was asked based on the available data to provide a small clue about the confiscated capital: how much capital would the janissaries have had to seize only in order to maintain their real income level in 1527? We have three available data to answer this question: the number of janissaries in the empire, the average daily wage of a janissary, and the inflation rates. Despite the higher salary of the janissaries serving in the fortresses, we focused on the salary level of 1527 as 5.43 for these calculations. It is known that, by 1670, there were 53,849 janissaries in the empire (Agoston 2014: 113). The salaries of the janissaries in 1670 ranged from 7 to 12 akçes. According to the inflation data used in this study, the salary should have been 20 akçe to maintain the real income of 1527 in 1670, which means that a janissary would have had to have seized 8–13 akçes daily in order to reach the 1527 level. Based on this data, it is revealed that 53,849 janissaries would have had to have seized capital worth between 155,085,120 and 255,513,505 akçes in total in 1670.

On the other side of this coin, the total income of the Ottoman budget in 1670 was only 612,528,960 akçes. In this case, in 1670, the janissaries would have had to have acquired a capital amount corresponding to 25% to 40% of the budget income in order to reach the real income level of 1527.

Needless to say, this calculation is built on an assumption. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the janissaries had to compensate for the decline in their real income. In accordance with the

¹² BOA, A. DVNSMHM. d. 139/1491 10.08.1146 (16 January 1734). The Patron Halil Rebellion, dated 1730, is mentioned in this document.

¹³ BOA, C. HR. 158/7874 24.09.1206 (16 May 1792).

¹⁴ BOA, A. DVNSMHM d. 72/252 13.07.1002 (4 April 1594).



argument of this study, the janissaries, encouraged by the fact that the state ignored all of their transgressions, turned into a social group that destroyed the accumulation of capital in the Empire. Moreover, the janissaries were not the only salaried armed units in the empire. For example, when artillery and cavalry units are taken into account, the number of salaried soldiers in 1670 increases from 53,849 to 75,933 (Agoston 2014: 113). Just like the janissaries, the palace cavalry deployed in the provinces were involved in illegal actions. In order to avoid repetition, the palace cavalry is not mentioned separately in the article because of their relatively small number and since their illegal actions were just the same as the janissaries. The result that all the quantitative data and the assumptions based on these data leads one to posit that the salaried soldiers, who were personal servants of the sultan, turned into a structure absorbing the surplus of capital in the Ottoman economy.

3.4. Deterioration or Change? Normativity in Narrative

The janissaries' engagement in mass lootings via intimidation might be considered as one of the markers of extensive corruption in the Empire. Nevertheless, can their marriages, involvement in commercial life, and their close interaction with the local people be interpreted as a sign of corruption? The answer is 'yes' according to both late Ottoman and early Republican historiography. Uzunçarşılı (1988: 477), in his reference book on the janissaries, clearly argues that the janissaries' moral and ethical standards declined as they started breaking rules that were put in place for slave soldiers, such as prohibitions on marriage and trade. However, over time the notion that violations of the regulations established within the slave military system would inevitably result in breaches of broader societal norms, such as theft, extortion, and bribery, was subject to critical examination. This approach led to the understanding that the proscriptions which were purportedly to have been strictly implemented within the janissary corps may have never been enforced in practice. Just as Akdağ (1947: 293) challenged the commonly held proposition that only children of Christian families were recruited into the military, Kafadar (2009: 29–36) brought a new perspective to the relationship of the janissaries with commercial life. According to his findings, there was never any written prohibition against the participation of janissaries in commercial life, even in very early periods. Nonetheless, he admits that, even if the janissaries were engaged in commercial activity in the classical period, this was very limited in number, with the intensity of janissary trade increasing enormously after the classical period (Kafadar 2009: 35). Besides trade, Kafadar (2009: 29–36) provides evidence that some other prohibitions that are commonly accepted as existing in the slave soldier order, such as the prohibition of marriage and inheritance, were not as valid as they are supposed to be.

This study does not contain a normative narrative about the janissary order, nor does it provide a discussion about what rules the slave soldiers must have followed. The real-life equivalents of the rules presumed to be inherent to the notion of the slave soldier are beyond the scope of this study. The existence or absence of a ban on janissaries trading does not affect the fact that the number of janissaries entering trade increased over time. We focused on the economic consequences of the actions driven by the growing number of janissaries and their dramatically falling income level.



CONCLUSION

This study proposes to view the janissaries, one of the most important institutions of the Ottoman Empire, from a different perspective. From an inductive viewpoint, based on the limited quantitative data available, the janissaries certainly constituted an obstacle to the accumulation of capital. It should be noted that this study does not propose that the Ottoman peripherization within the capitalist economy can be attributed solely to a single cause. However, certain factors may be considered more significant among the array of contributing factors to this phenomenon. The transformation of the janissaries into a social group that absorbs capital in urban centers is an essential factor in the Ottoman capitalization process considering that one of the most well-known problems of this process was capital accumulation. Naturally, the Ottoman classical economic management approach, which is consistent within its internal logic, not only did more harm than good in the face of capitalist change, but was also an extremely important factor.

Since the 17th century, the empire, which belonged to the medieval age with all its institutions and mentality, transformed mostly due to external pressures. In this article, we analyzed a small section of this great transformation. Examining the relationships that hindered the accumulation of capital in the new order established following the collapse of the classical structure of the empire, is crucial for comprehending the process of capitalization. After the fief system became militarily dysfunctional in the provinces, the notables (*ayans*), who increased their political power beginning in the second quarter of the 18th century, hired janissary-like soldiers known as *sekbans*. During the 17th century in Anatolia, which witnessed the Celali-Sekban conflict, agricultural production declined, and both rebels and sekbans seized the surplus, mostly produced in rural areas, just as the janissaries did in the cities. In this regard, the structures that absorbed the surplus in Ottoman agricultural production await to be analyzed in terms of their own economic dimensions. The damage of the Celali Rebellions to agricultural production remains to be investigated. Once the relationships and structures that absorbed the surplus product in the empire and prevented the accumulation of capital are more closely scrutinized, the hierarchical position of the Ottoman Empire in the process of integration into the capitalist system will be better understood.

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APPENDIXES

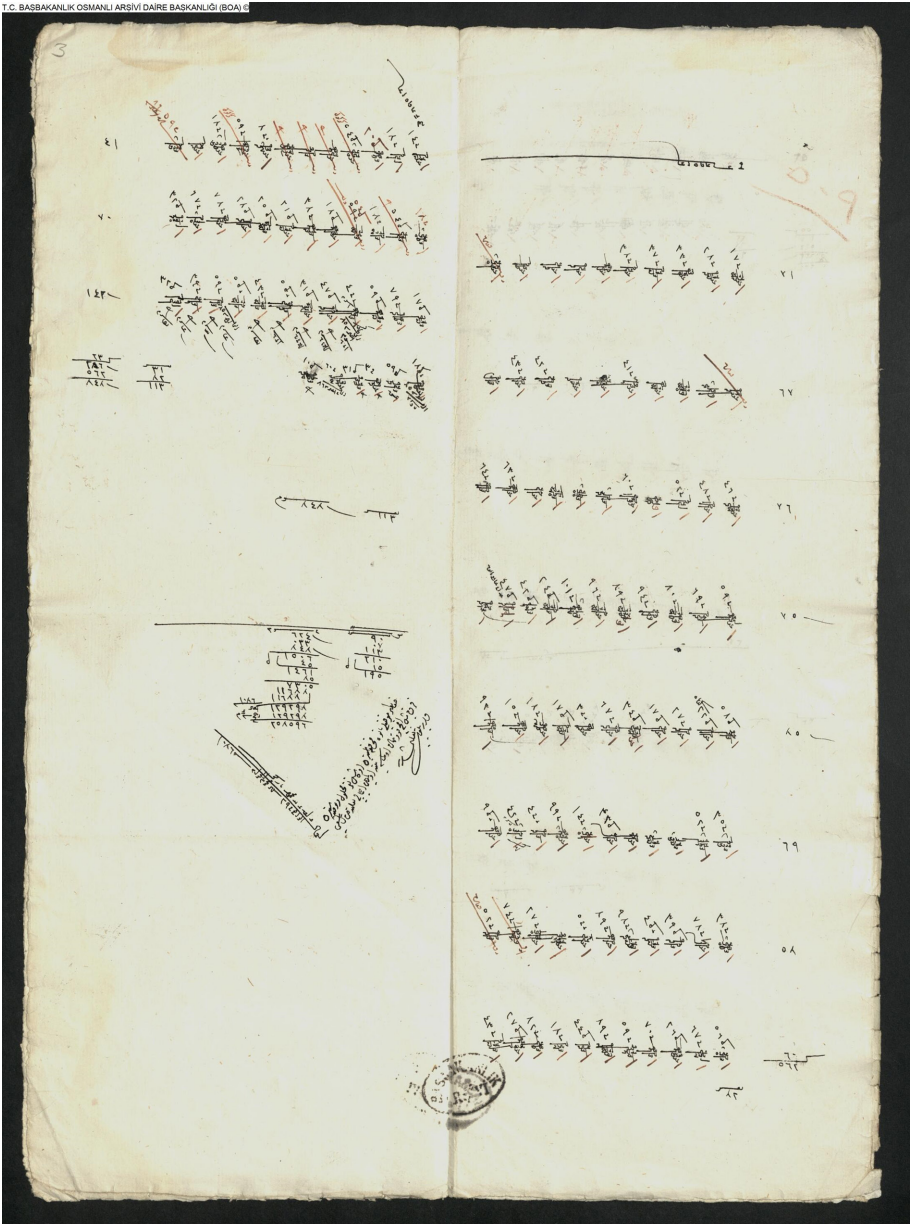
1. Inflation in the Ottoman Empire¹⁵

Years	CPI 1469=1	Silver content of the akçe, in grams	CPI in grams of silver, 1469=1	Years	CPI 1469=1	Silver content of the akçe, in grams	CPI in grams of silver, 1469=1
1469–79	1.2	0.85	1.17	1720–29	6.98	0.13	1.06
1480–89	1.3	0.68	1.02	1730–39	7.62	0.12	1.1
1490–99	1.09	0.68	0.85	1740–49	9.93	0.12	1.39
1520–29	1.87	0.66	1.42	1750–59	10.1	0.11	1.3
1550–59	1.64	0.66	1.25	1760–69	11.1	0.10	1.23
1560–69	1.86	0.61	1.32	1770–79	17.8	0.093	1.93
1570–79	1.99	0.61	1.41	1780–89	17.2	0.080	1.58
1580–89	3.35	0.39	1.47	1790–99	24.5	0.053	1.5
1590–99	4.45	0.3	1.46	1800–09	34.7	0.048	1.91
1600–09	5.43	0.29	1.81	1810–19	49.5	0.032	1.86
1610–19	4.44	0.29	1.47	1820–29	62.8	0.018	1.26
1620–29	5.56	0.25	1.54	1830–39	130.1	0.0073	1.12
1630–39	5.49	0.2	1.24	1840–49	181	0.0081	1.7
1640–49	4.37	0.27	1.34	1850–59	240.5	0.0083	2.32
1650–59	4.92	0.27	1.56	1860–69	285.7	0.0083	2.76
1660–69	5.82	0.23	1.56	1870–79	265.6	0.0083	2.56
1670–79	7.06	0.21	1.69	1880–89	238.1	0.0083	2.3
1680–89	7.46	0.21	1.79	1890–99	235.6	0.0083	2.27
1690–99	7.96	0.13	1.21	1900–09	220.9	0.0083	2.13
1700–09	6.05	0.13	0.92	1910–14	294.2	0.0083	2.84
1710–19	6.87	0.13	1.03				

¹⁵ For the full article, see Pamuk 2004.



2. Document on Janissary Wages in Yanova Fortress (1675)



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