

Document 1: Character of the Janissaries

Pre-Reading Task: As you read annotate using the text coding directions below:

- + *positive descriptions of the janissaries*
- *negative descriptions of the janissaries*
- ? *questions you have about the description of the janissaries*

At Buda I made my first acquaintance with the Janissaries; this is the name by which the Turks call the infantry [foot soldiers] of the royal guard. The Turkish state has 12,000 of these troops when the corps is at its full strength. They are scattered through every part of the empire [...] to protect the Christians and Jews from the violence of the mob. There is no district with any considerable amount of population, no borough or city, which has not a detachment of Janissaries to protect the Christians, Jews, and other helpless people from outrage and wrong. These Janissaries generally came to me in pairs. When they were admitted to my dining room they first made a bow, and then came quickly up to me, all but running, and touched my dress or hand, as if they intended to kiss it. After this they would thrust into my hand a hyacinth or narcissus then they would run back to the door almost as quickly as they came, taking care not to turn their backs, for this, according to their code, would be a serious breach of etiquette [good manners]. After reaching the door, they would stand respectfully with their arms crossed, and their eyes bent on the ground, looking more like monks than warriors. On receiving a few small coins (which was what they wanted) they bowed again, thanked me in loud tones, and went off blessing me for my kindness. To tell you the truth, if I had not been told beforehand that they were Janissaries, I should, without hesitation, have taken them for members of some order of Turkish monks, or brethren of some Muslim college. Yet these are the famous Janissaries, whose approach inspires terror everywhere.

Source: C. T. Forster and F. H. B. Daniel, eds., *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, vol. I (London: Kegan Paul, 1881)

Document 2: Comparing the Militaries of the Ottomans and Europe

As you read annotate using the text coding directions below:

- * *descriptions of Ottoman military forces, including the janissaries*
- ___ *underline descriptions of European Christian military forces*
- ? *questions you have about the description of the janissaries and military*

The Turkish monarch going to war takes with him over 400 camels and nearly as many baggage mules, of which a great part are loaded with rice and other kinds of grain. These mules and camels also serve to carry tents and armour, and likewise tools and munitions for the campaign. . . . The invading army carefully abstains from encroaching on its magazines [store of food] at the outset; as they are well aware that when the season for campaigning draws to a close, they will have to retreat over districts wasted by the enemy, or scraped bare by countless hordes of men and droves of hungry animals, as if they had been devastated by locusts; accordingly they reserve their stores as much as possible for this emergency. Then the Sultan's magazines are opened, and a ration just sufficient to sustain life is daily weighed out to the

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Janissaries and other troops of the royal household. The rest of the army is badly off, unless they have provided some supplies at their own expense. . . . On such occasions they take out a few spoonfuls of flour and put them into water, adding some butter, and seasoning the mess with salt and spices; these ingredients are boiled, and a large bowl of gruel is thus obtained. Of this they eat once or twice a day, according to the quantity they have, without any bread, unless they have brought some biscuit with them.... Sometimes they have recourse to horseflesh; dead horses are of course plentiful in their great hosts, and such beasts as are in good condition when they die furnish a meal not to be despised by famished soldiers.

From this you will see that it is the patience, self-denial and thrift of the Turkish soldier that enable him to face the most trying circumstances and come safely out of the dangers that surround him. What a contrast to our men! Christian soldiers on a campaign refuse to put up with their ordinary food, and call for thrushes becaficos [small birds], and suchlike dainty dishes! ... It makes me shudder to think of what the result of a struggle between such different systems must be; one of us must prevail and the other be destroyed, at any rate we cannot both exist] in safety. On their side is the vast wealth of their empire, unimpaired resources, experience and practice in arms, a veteran soldiery, an uninterrupted series of victories, readiness to endure hardships, union, order, discipline, thrift and watchfulness. On ours [European Christian] are found an empty exchequer [treasury, collection of national wealth], luxurious habits, exhausted resources, broken spirits, a raw and insubordinate soldiery, and greedy quarrels ; there is no regard for discipline, license runs riot, the men indulge in drunkenness and debauchery , and worst of all, the enemy are accustomed to victory, we to defeat. [...]

Source: C. T. Forster and F. H. B. Daniel, eds., *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, vol. I (London: Kegan Paul, 1881)

Document 3: Comparing the Social Hierarchies of the Ottomans and Europe

As you read annotate using the text coding directions below:

O examples of the social hierarchy in the Ottoman Empire

C examples of the social hierarchy in the Christian Europe

? questions you have about the descriptions of hierarchies

No distinction is attached to birth among the Turks; the deference to be paid to a man is measured by the position he holds in the public service. There is no fighting for precedence; a man's place is marked out by the duties he discharges. In making his appointments the Sultan pays no regard to any pretensions on the score of wealth or rank, nor does he take into consideration recommendations or popularity, he considers each case on its own merits, and examines carefully into the character, ability, and disposition of the man whose promotion is in question. It is by merit that men rise in the service, a system which ensures that posts should only be assigned to the competent . [...] Those who receive the highest offices from the Sultan are for the most part the sons of shepherds or herdsmen, and so far from being ashamed of their parentage, they actually glory in it, and consider it a matter of boasting that they owe nothing to the accident of birth; for they do not believe that high qualities are either natural or hereditary, nor do they think that they can be handed down from father to son, but that they are partly the gift of God, and partly the result of good training, great industry, and unwearied zeal ;

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arguing that high qualities do not descend from a father to his son or heir, any more than a talent for music, mathematics, or the like; and that the mind does not derive its origin from the father, so that the son should necessarily be like the father in character, our emanates from heaven, and is thence infused into the human body. Among the Turks, therefore, honours, high posts, and judgships are the rewards of great ability and good service. If a man be dishonest, or lazy, or careless, he remains at the bottom of the ladder, an object of contempt; for such qualities there are no honours in Turkey!

This is the reason that they are successful in their undertakings, that they lord it over others, and are daily extending the bounds of their empire. These are not our ideas, with us there is no opening left for merit; birth is the standard for everything; the prestige of birth is the sole key to advancement in the public service.

Source: C. T. Forster and F. H. B. Daniel, eds., *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, vol. I (London: Kegan Paul, 1881), pp, 86-88, 153-155, 219-222, 287-290, 293. (<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1555busbecq.asp>)