

The Customary Officer of Public Order and Regulation in Istanbul: The Janissary Agha*

*İstanbul'da Asayiş ve Nizamın Örfi Zabiti:
Yeniçeri Ağası*

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Araştırma makalesi/
Research Article

Geliş tarihi/Date of Arrival:
18 Aralık/ December 2024

Kabul tarihi/Date of Acceptance:
27 Mayıs/May 2025

* This article is derived from my
Ph.D. dissertation titled "Osmanlı
Devleti'nde Yeniçeri Ağalığı Kurumu",
which was approved in 2024.

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Atıf/Citation: Ayşenur Erdoğan, "The
Customary Officer of Public Order and
Regulation in Istanbul: The Janissary
Agha", *Zeyrek Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*,
2 (Haziran 2025), s. 29-66.

ABSTRACT

The highest-ranking member of the Janissary Corps, which constituted an important part of the permanent army of the Ottoman Empire for many years, was the Janissary Agha. The primary responsibilities of the Janissary Agha, a senior position within the state apparatus, encompassed the administration of the Janissary Corps. He had another, lesser-known but equally crucial responsibility, the maintenance of order and social cohesion in Istanbul. The Janissary Aghas, who were continuously vigilant for any potential disturbances in Istanbul with the soldiers under their command, dedicated a significant amount of time to the neutralization of the elements that threatened the stability and order of the city. The aghas were responsible

for maintaining public order through routine patrols and also they facilitated the establishment of an atmosphere of trust with the officials they appointed for the ceremonies of non-Muslims. From extinguishing fires to repairing sidewalks and preventing the accumulation of garbage in the city, the aghas made great efforts to prevent famines and to ensure that people could easily access basic consumer goods. Additionally, they served as a regulatory apparatus for the tradesmen, ensuring the quality of production and preventing injustices against those engaged in production or sales.

Keywords: Janissary Agha, Administration of Istanbul, Customary Law, Ottoman State Organization.

ÖZ

Osmanlı Devleti'nin daimi ordusunun yıllarca önemli bir parçasını teşkil eden Yeniçeri Ocağı'nın en rütbelisi yeniçeri ağasıdır. Devlet teşkilatı içerisinde üst düzey bir rütbe olan yeniçeri ağasının öncelikli görevleri Yeniçeri Ocağı'nın idaresidir. Fakat onun az bilinen ancak çok önemli olan bir misyonu daha vardır ki o da İstanbul'da asayiş ve düzeni sağlamaktır. Emrindeki askerler ile İstanbul için sürekli teyakkuz halinde bulunan yeniçeri ağaları, şehrin asayişi ve nizamını bozan unsurları bertaraf etmek adına büyük mesai harcamışlardır. Rutin devriye gezileri ile şehrin asayişini kontrol altında tutan ağalar, gayrimüslimlerin merasimlerine tayin ettikleri görevlilerle de güven ortamının devamını sağlamışlardır. Yangınların söndürülmesinden kaldırımların tamirine ve şehirde çöpün birikmesini önlemeye kadar birçok sahada hizmet eden ağalar, kıtlık vakalarının engellemesi ve halkın temel tüketim maddelerine rahatlıkla ulaşması için dahi büyük gayret göstermişlerdir. Ayrıca üretimde kalitenin korunması, üretici ya da satıcı statüsündekilerin mağdur olmaması için esnaf üzerinde kontrol mekanizması olmuşlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeniçeri Ağası, İstanbul'un Yönetimi, Örfi Kanun, Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatı.

Introduction

The Janissaries, a unit formed during the reign of Sultan Murad I to meet the army's need for troops, gradually acquired significant esteem and influence as their numbers and reputation

grew. By the end of the 14th century, they had become a formidable force, capable of influencing the course of the reign of the Ottoman Sultan. Despite the fact that this military group, which the administration closely monitors, constitutes a subcategory of the *Kapukulu* Corps, it is evaluated a standalone group.

The most senior figure within the Janissary Corps, which was managed by a large administrative staff aligned with the high number of soldiers, was known as the Janissary Agha. Over time, the esteemed position of the Janissary Corps elevated this rank, known as the Agha of the Great Unit of the Janissaries (*Dergâh-ı Mualla Yeniçerileri Ağası*) or the Agha of Supreme Unit of the Janissaries (*Ağa-yı Yeniçeriyân-ı Dergâh-ı Âlî*), to a prominent role within the state apparatus. While each of the *Kapukulu* Corps had an agha, the agha of the Janissary Corps was differentiated from the others. Unlike the other aghas, the Janissary Agha had significant influence over numerous administrative and military matters. Indeed, the *Kanunname-i Ali Osman*, which was prepared during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II, explicitly outlines the unique position of the Janissary Agha, stating that he is “greater than other aghas.”¹

The primary responsibility of the Janissary Agha, who was granted the status of being alone in the presence of the Sultan, was to manage the most prestigious group of the military organization. He was responsible for the recruitment and training of the *devshirme*, the main source of the military’s personnel, enrolling them in the Recruit Corps sending them on various missions and finally promoting them to the Janissary Corps. In addition, as the administrator of the largest group of the military organization, he performed many duties in the Janissary Corps. The most important one was to maintain order in the Janissary Corps in peacetime, to carry out the procedures for the appointment and promotion of officers and soldiers, and to prepare recruits for the campaign. In wartime, they were responsible for recruiting soldiers for the army, maintaining order, and providing for the needs of soldiers during campaigns. In addition, they have

¹ *Atam Dedem Kanunu; Kanunnâme-i Âl-i Osman*, prepared by Abdülkadir Özcan, (Istanbul: Yitik Hazine Yay., 2013), p.6.

participated in many military expeditions as commanders since the establishment of their institution.²

Another significant responsibility of the Janissary Agha, who played a pivotal role in the military and administrative structure of the Ottoman Empire, was his involvement in matters pertaining to Istanbul. One of the primary concerns of the state was the maintenance of public order and security in Istanbul, which served as the capital of the empire for centuries following its conquest by the Ottomans and was a major center of trade due to its strategic location. Accordingly, the state appointed its highest-ranking officials as guardians of the city's law and order. Indeed, Mustafa Âlî of Gelibolu, a historian of the 16th century, divides the administration of Istanbul, the capital city, into two in his work *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*. He asserts that the qadi of Istanbul and the kaziasker of Rumelia are the most empowered individuals in matters of sharia, while the grand vizier and the Janissary Agha are the most authorized in matters of customary law.³

It would be an inaccurate assumption to presume that the Janissary Agha was the primary authority responsible for maintaining order in Istanbul, after the Grand Vizier. The administration of Istanbul and its surrounding areas was delegated to various officials by the central government. The authority and responsibility of the Janissary Agha encompassed the majority of walled city, with the exception of Topkapı Palace and the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as the area surrounding Okmeydanı.

The *Cebecibaşı* was responsible for overseeing a number of significant locations in the city, including Hagia Sophia, Ahırkapı, Hoca-paşa, and the Cebeci barracks. *Bostancıbaşı*, on the other hand, had authority and responsibility from Topkapı Palace to the Golden Horn,

2 Ayşenur Erdoğan, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Yeniçeri Ağalığı Kurumu*, Istanbul University, Unpublished Ph.d., Dissertation, Istanbul 2024, pp.152-166.

3 “Pây-taht-ı ‘aliyye, ya’nî ki Kostantıniyye’nün iki hâkim-i şer‘îsi vardır ki Rûmîlî kâdî‘askeriyle İstanbul kâdîsidür, iki zâbıt-ı ‘orfîsi dağı vardır ki biri şadr-ı a‘zam ve biri yeniçeri ağası nâmındaki müfahhamdur”. Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, ed. Suat Donuk, (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yay., 2024), v.4, p.708.

Bosphorus and Yalova. The artillery chief, *Topçubaşı*, was in charge of Tophane and Pera, while Captain Pasha, *Kaptanpaşa*, was responsible for Kasımpaşa, Galata, and the left side of the Golden Horn.⁴ Mustafa Âlî, regarding the authority of Janissary Aghas, was referring to the walled capital city of Istanbul. The Janissary Agha, within this above-mentioned geographical region, was the subsequent authority to the Grand Vizier in the implementation of regulations, the maintenance of order, and the neutralization of threats to public stability.⁵

This duty of the Janissary Agha, which has received less scholarly attention, is evidenced by a number of sources, including official state records, sharia court registers, and the notes of foreigners who have visited the city. In times of emergency, the procedure of locking all gates of the city and delivering the key to Ağa Kapısı (The place of the Janissary Agha) demonstrates the significance and pivotal function of the Janissary Agha in the administration of Istanbul.⁶ In regard to the maintenance of law and order in Istanbul, the Janissary Agha was subject to joint orders with the Qadi of Istanbul. In the majority of these orders, the qadi of Istanbul, who held a more senior position, was listed first. However, the Janissary Aghas, who were elevated to the rank of vizier and bestowed with the title of “aga pasha,” were listed before the qadi. Since such an important duty could not be neglected when the agha was absent from the city due to the campaign, the *Sekbanbaşı*, whom he left in his place in such cases, was held responsible not only for military matters but also for Istanbul. Although he undertook such an important mission for Istanbul, the duties of the Janissary Agha regarding the city are rarely mentioned in the studies. The aim of this study is to reveal the responsibility of the Janissary Agha for the city in many ways. As

4 Robert Mantran, *17. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında İstanbul: Kurumlar, İktisadi, Toplumsal Tarih Denemesi*, Translation: Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay - Enver Özcan, (Ankara: TTK, 1990), vol.I, pp.139-141; Murat Yıldız, “Osmanlı İstanbul’unun Güvenlik Yönetimi (1453-1839)”, *Antik Çağ’dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, v.2, pp.105-106.

5 Mehmet İpşirli “Payitaht İstanbul’un İdaresi”, *Antik Çağ’dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, v.3, p.67; Yıldız, “Osmanlı İstanbul’unun Güvenlik Yönetimi (1453-1839)”, pp.106-107.

6 Silâhdâr Fındıklılı Mehmed Ağa, *Nusretnâme*, ed. Mehmet Topal, (Ankara: Türkiye Bilimler Akademisi, 2018), p.748.

a matter of fact, as it will be seen in the following lines, the Janissary Aghas, along with their officers and soldiers, and occasionally high-ranking officials, maintained city order for centuries.⁷

Security of Ottoman Istanbul

The Janissary Aghas were always on the alert in a crowded and active city like Istanbul. In particular, it was their habit to patrol the city to prevent any breach of law and order. This patrol, which was carried out by groups composed of the commanders and soldiers of the Janissary Corps, was also called “tebdil” or “kol gezme”. The Kavanin-i Yeniçeriyân (The Janissary Code) states that patrols were carried out routinely, especially on Wednesdays and Fridays.⁸ In addition, the Janissary Agha was also seen patrolling the city with his soldiers to maintain order in the occurrence of unusual situations.⁹

The Janissary Agha, who is on the prowl with his crowded entourage, consisting of the Baş Çavuş (Chief Sergeant), *Kethüdayeri*, the Muhzır Bashı (Head of the Constable), Orta Çavuş (Middle Sergeant), Küçük Çavuş (Small Sergeant), Ases Bashı (Head of the Ases), and Janissaries, those who act in violation of the law are apprehended by the falaka (bastinado).¹⁰ In his memoirs, the German diplomat Hiltebrant, who was in Istanbul in the 17th century, provides a detailed account of the patrols conducted by the Janissary Agha, including the locations and times at which they occurred. In his testimony, during these periodic excursions undertaken by the Janissary Agha, individuals hide themselves due to prior warnings from other

7 Domenico Hierosolimitano, *Bir Yahudi Doktorun Harem, Saray ve İstanbul Hatıraları*, Translation: Esmâ Selçuk Demir, (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yay., 2017), pp.159-160; Christoph Wilhelm Lüdeke, *Türklerde Din ve Devlet Yönetimi, İzmir, İstanbul 1759-1768*, Translation: Türkis Noyan, (Istanbul: Kitap Yay., 2013), p.154.

8 *Kavânîn-i Yeniçeriyân (İnceleme-metin-dizin)*, Translation/Criticism: Özgül Özbek, (Ph.d., Dissertation), Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, 2017, p.72, 74, 133.

9 Na’imâ Mustafa Efendi, *Târih-i Na’imâ (Ravzatü'l-Hüseyn Fî Hulâsati Ahbârî'l-Hâfîkayn)*, ed. Mehmet İpşirli, (Ankara: TTK, 2014), v.I, pp.221-223; Hasan Bey-zâde Ahmed Paşa, *Hasan Bey-zâde Târîhi*, ed. Şevki Nezihi Aykut, (Ankara: TTK, 2004), p.377, 721.

10 Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, v.4, p.708; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devleti Teşkilâtından Kapukulu Ocakları I: Acemi Ocağı ve Yeniçeri Ocağı*, (Ankara: TTK, 1988), pp.187-188; Metin And, 16. Yüzyılda İstanbul: Kent – Saray – Günlük Yaşam, (Istanbul: YKY Yay., 2019), p.85.

people, who were aware of the Agha's approaching. Those who were detained were immediately bastinadoed with a stick hidden on a red bag until the Agha's face indicates that he has become satisfied with the amount of punishment inflicted.¹¹

In addition to their routine patrols of the city, the Janissary Aghas were also compelled to maintain order in response to extraordinary occurrences. Surely, the most significant cause of disruption to public order in the city was the occurrence of military uprisings. In some instances, the Grand Vizier accompanied the Janissary Agha on patrol.¹²



Image I: Janissary Agha and his entourage at night
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, c.8626.

To illustrate, on Thursday, January 4, 1657, the *sipahis* assembled in today's Sultanahmet square to protest their salary issues. They proceeded to stone the residences of their superiors and block the streets. In response, the grand vizier and the Janissary Agha undertook a mission to pacify the city. Inns and other establishments in

¹¹ Gülgün Üçel-Aybet, *Avrupalı Seyyahların Gözünden Osmanlı Dünyası ve İnsanları (1530-1699)*, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003), pp.517-518.

¹² *Hasan Bey-zâde Târîhi*, p.377.

Istanbul and Üsküdar were raided, resulting in numerous deaths.¹³ The Janissary Aghas were dispatched to reopen the shops that had been closed as a result of the unrest in the city. In March 1658, following the uprising of the Janissaries, the shops remained closed for several days. At the Sultan's order, the Janissary Agha was tasked to oversee the reopening of the city's streets and shops.¹⁴

Since the main task was to maintain the public order in the city, Janissary Agha addressed any issues that had the potential to either cause or contribute to a problem. The most important of these issues was theft. In order to prevent such incidents, security personnel were deployed to neighborhoods and commercial areas. The Janissary Agha, on the other hand, was responsible for capturing the perpetrators and expelling them from the city,¹⁵ and maintaining a record of the stolen goods¹⁶ following the occurrence of theft incidents. In the event that the Janissary Agha's investigation revealed evidence of official misconduct on the part of the local watchman in cases of theft, he would submit a report to the relevant authorities recommending the dismissal of the watchman.¹⁷ If they themselves were negligent in preventing theft incidents, they were also dismissed. For example, Janissary Agha Yahya was dismissed on March 15, 1785, as a result of poor administrative performance, an increase in criminal activity in Istanbul, and the robbery of a number of shops and households.¹⁸

Another challenge that the Janissary Agha had to address was the presence of individuals who disrupted or posed a potential threat to the established order in the city. In a city where a guarantor is required in order to reside in a neighborhood or pursue a profession,

¹³ Abdurrahman Abdi Paşa, *Vekâyi-Name [Osmanlı Târîhi (1648-1682)]*, ed. Fahri Derin, (Istanbul: Çamlıca Basım Yay., 2008), p.102; *Târîh-i Na'îmâ*, v.VI, p.1724.

¹⁴ *Târîh-i Na'îmâ*, p. 1658.

¹⁵ Turkish Presidency State Archives of the Republic of Turkey – Department of Ottoman Archive (BOA), Divan-ı Hümâyûn Sicillatı Mühimme Defterleri (A.{DVNS-MHM.d), 53/166, 12.C.992 (12 June 1584); *Târîh-i Selânikî*, v. I, p. 231-232.

¹⁶ BOA, Ali Emiri, Abdülhamid I (AE.SABH.I), 11/1025, 10.B.1203 (6 April 1789).

¹⁷ BOA, Ali Emiri, Selim III (AE.SSLM.III), 422/24216, 19.B.1210 (29 January 1796); HAT, 238/13222, no date.

¹⁸ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Târîh-i Cevdet*, ed. Abdülkadir Özcan, Nezihi Aykut, (Ankara: TTK, 2018), v. III, p. 142.

the presence of an unidentified individual without a guarantor is a matter of concern and is discouraged by the state.¹⁹ Janissary Aghas were among the officials in charge of identifying, capturing, and expelling these individuals, who are likely to be involved in criminal activities and pose a threat to the city's food supply.²⁰

For example, in 1766, when it was discovered that some individuals unknown to the city had arrived to observe the ceremonies celebrating Viladet-i Hümâyûn (the birth ceremony of the sultan's children) and resided in a variety of locations, including inns, bachelor rooms, shops, and cellars, an order was issued to the Janissary Agha, commanding the immediate eviction of these individuals.²¹ The state's perspective on soldiers who had no business in the city was identical. Similarly, as evidenced in a *hatt-ı hümayûn* addressed to Kaimakam Pasha in 1792, for soldiers released from captivity and residing in the barracks, it was imperative to consult with the Janissary Agha and ensure that the sick and all but the needy were ordered to be granted travel allowances and "dismissed" to their hometowns.²²

It is not only those who have the potential to commit crimes, but also those who are actively engaged in criminal behavior, who should be excluded from the city. Therefore, the city's authorities sought to identify and remove individuals engaged in criminal activities. Their efforts extended to those involved in minor offenses like theft²³ and prostitution²⁴ or acts of disobedience against the state,

19 Tahsin Özcan, "Osmanlı Mahallesi Sosyal Kontrol ve Kefalet Sistemi", *Marife: Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 1/1, p.132-133; Betül Başaran, "İstanbul Kefalet ve Teftiş Defterleri", *Antik Çağ'dan XXI. Yüzyıla Büyük İstanbul Tarihi*, v.IV, pp.584-585.

20 The supervision of the surety system and the identification and expulsion of unmarried individuals without guarantors from the city were also among the responsibilities of the *bostancıbaşı*. See: Yıldız, "Osmanlı İstanbul'unun Güvenlik Yönetimi (1453-1839)", p.110.

21 Ahmet Önal, *Osmanlı Bürokrasisi ve İstanbul Tarihine Dair Bir Kaynak; Buyuruldu Mecmuası*, (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yay., 2019), pp.222-223.

22 BOA, Hatt-ı Hümayun (HAT), 238/13265, no date.

23 BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 53/166, 12.C.992 (12 June 1584).

24 It was the responsibility of the *Bostancıbaşı* to take the necessary measures against those involved in this criminal act, particularly women, who were regarded as engaging in activities that were contrary to Sharia law, moral standards, and the traditional family structure. However, it is noteworthy that in certain instances, the Qadi of Istanbul and the Janissary Agha were also involved in addressing this issue, which

such as disturbing the city's stability and security. To illustrate, in 1820-1821, when certain Greeks from Peloponnese and Agrafta residing in the city engaged in actions against Muslims, the Janissary Agha was ordered to detain these individuals and remove them from Istanbul immediately.²⁵

As evidenced by this case and some other examples, the Janissary Aghas frequently collaborated with state officials on matters related to Istanbul, including this particular instance. Especially, as documented in certain records, individuals deemed to be wanderers, lacking any form of guarantee or affiliation, were captured by the Janissary Agha and the qadi of Istanbul and subsequently transported to the customs. The responsibility for organizing their transfer by boat and facilitating their departure from the city was assigned to the Customary Officer.²⁶

In addition to the prevention of the concentration of non-guaranteed and single individuals in the city, which posed a threat to security and sustenance, the inns and bachelor quarters where such individuals resided contributed to the significant workload of the Janissary Aghas. The emergence of the bedsitters and inns serving a similar purpose, as uncovered by researches on this subject, indicates that these establishments were regarded with a certain degree of skepticism by the general public, who viewed them as being situated outside the boundaries of the neighborhood, despite their actual

threatened the established moral order. In early 1581, when complaints were filed regarding the presence of prostitutes and ill-intentioned *levends* in specific neighborhoods and their involvement in inappropriate activities, the Qadi of Istanbul and the Janissary Agha were tasked with addressing the situation (BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 42/1002, 11 January 1581). In 1786, the Jewish community and rabbinical leaders submitted a formal request to the *Bostancıbaşı*, requesting that the matter be resolved. They asserted that despite their best efforts, they were unable to prevent musicians and *dairezen* from entering Jewish households, enter the households "without their husbands present," and engaging in adultery. Subsequently, the case was assigned also to the Janissary Agha, and the voivode of Galata, in addition to the *Bostancıbaşı*, with the objective of preventing unauthorized entry into houses under the pretext of playing music and of addressing and eliminating the violations in question (BOA, Cevdet, Adliye (C.ADL), 26/1533, February 11, 1786).

²⁵ BOA, HAT, 1316/51330, no date; Şânî-zâde Mehmed 'Atâ'ullah Efendi: *Şânî-zâde Târîhî*, (1223-1237 / 1808-1821), ed. Ziya Yılmaz, (Istanbul Çamlıca Yay., 2008), p.1210.

²⁶ BOA, Cevdet, Belediye (C.BLD), 18/872, 15.B1217 (11 November 1802); BOA, Cevdet, Zabtiye (C.ZB), 53/2601, 6.B.1217 (2 November 1802); BOA, HAT, 845/37962, no date.

location within it. While it is not feasible to make generalizations, it is noteworthy that the state prioritized searching for criminals in this area due to the involvement of some individuals in minor criminal activities.²⁷ For instance, a joint decree issued in 1720 to the qadi of Istanbul and the Janissary Agha addressed this issue, ordering the search of all inns and bedsitters in order to find those who disturbed the social order by banditry in and around Istanbul.²⁸

In addition to those involved in petty crimes, these locations also became places where individuals engaged in anti-state activities. Indeed, as evidenced by several judgments issued in accordance with the Janissary Agha Sahin Mehmed Pasha, the Albanian, Laz, and *Çift-bozan* Turks who resided in inns, baths, and bachelor quarters collaborated with the Janissaries in the *Patrona Halil* Revolt that devastated the city during the summer of 1730. These groups participated in the looting of private property and even the attempted murder of civilians²⁹. Shortly after this incident, a joint edict was issued to the Qadi of Istanbul and the Janissary Agha, as well as a number of state officials, with the objective of regulating the issue of bachelor quarters. The edict mandated that, given the influx of individuals from diverse nationalities into Istanbul and the subsequent shortage of meat and supplies, it would no longer be permissible to construct new stone or wooden inns or bachelor's quarters. It was ordered that no new rooms would be constructed within the inns, nor would they be expanded by the addition of land from the exterior. Those who resided in establishments that initially appeared to be blacksmith shops but subsequently transformed into inns, would be expelled, and the doors of these locations would be sealed. Furthermore, while the construction and repair of bachelor's rooms was prohibited, and any individual caught engaging in inappropriate behavior within an existing room would be punished, the innkeepers and chambermaids

²⁷ Onur Gezer, "Çizginin Dışındakiler: Osmanlı İstanbul'unun Aykırı Bekârları ve Bekâr Girer "Melek Girmez" Odaları", *Osmanlı İstanbulu II: II. Uluslararası Osmanlı İstanbulu Sempozyumu*, (2014), p.531.

²⁸ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 129/1353, Evahir.M.1133 (November 1720).

²⁹ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 138/28, Evail Za. 1143 (May 1731); BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 138/29, Evail Za. 1143 (May 1731); BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 138/254, Evail M. 1144 (June 1731).

who permitted such individuals to stay would be subjected to appropriate disciplinary action.³⁰ Nevertheless, it is evident that this policy was persistently violated, with the Janissary Agha, in particular, failing to maintain control. Indeed, directives were frequently issued to government officials, including the Janissary Agha, to prevent the construction of these establishments, which were described as “gathering places for sinful people,” and to punish those who contravened this order.³¹ In this manner, the Ottomans were endeavoring to preserve and maintain social order.

One of the key concerns of the Ottoman Empire was to guarantee social stability by ensuring the safe execution of non-Muslim ceremonies among its *tebaa*. In order to achieve this, as Stephen Gerlach and Reinhold Lubenau also stated, non-Muslims would request the protection of the Janissary Agha during these ceremonies.³² In addition to their religious ceremonies, non-Muslims also resorted to the same method for security purposes during their weddings. At the time of the wedding, upon the request by a non-Muslim, a guardian was assigned by the Janissary Agha for those in Istanbul and by the *Bostancıbaşı* for those in the neighboring regions for a specified daily fee, and these people would be on duty until the ceremony was over. In the event of any misconduct by a “prohibitor” officer, responsibility was attributed to their direct superiors. Therefore, the responsibility of the Janissary Aghas was to ensure that no officers engaged in any illicit activities or caused problems by requesting additional funds.³³

It is a well-documented fact that the Janissaries also served as security personnel for ambassadors, delegations, and their respective

30 BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 138/759, Evasıt L. 1144 (April 1732).

31 *İstanbul Ahkam Defterleri, İstanbul'da Sosyal Hayat II*, (Istanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş., 1998), p.390-391; Mütercim Ahmed Âsım Efendi, *Âsım Efendi Tarihi*, ed. Ziya Yılmaz, (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yay., 2015), v.I, pp.358-360; Ahmed Refik, *Asırlar Boyunca İstanbul Hayatı*, (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2020), p.461.

32 Stephan Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü, 1573-1576*, Translation: Türkis Noyan, Kitap Yayınevi, p.675; Reinhold Lubenau, *Reinhold Lubenau Seyahatnamesi; Osmanlı Ülkesinde 1587-1589*, Translation: Türkis Noyan, (Istanbul: Kitap Yay., 2012), p.244.

33 *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Sosyal Hayat*, v.II, pp.189-190, 198-199.

residences.³⁴ The Janissary Aghas were responsible for ensuring the security of individuals of great importance for such inter-state relations. In his diary, Reinhold Lubenau, who was part of the Austrian embassy delegation sent to the Ottoman Empire in 1587, also mentioned about this procedure. Lubenau noted that if someone requested a janissary for security, it was immediately assigned. Indeed, he himself took a janissary with him during his Anatolian tour, and they were able to travel in relative comfort thanks to this new soldier, who had been assigned by the Janissary Agha.³⁵

Although the state took considerable measures to guarantee the protection of these guests, the janissary leaders were sometimes warned by the administration in response to the misdeeds of their soldiers. As a case in point, the incident that occurred in the neighborhood of Büyükdere, where the Russian Ambassador Baron de Strogonoff was residing in the early 19th century, provides an illustrative exemplar of this problem. A group of approximately fifty *yamak* (castle soldiers) armed with guns in the neighborhood of Büyükdere made aggressive outbursts in the vicinity of Stroganoff's residence, attacked the janissaries who attempted to prevent them, wounded one of them in the head, and even fire the guns. The ambassador, profoundly distressed by these incidents, documented his concerns in a statement conveyed through his interpreter to the relevant administrative authorities. The Grand Vizier, in his report, conveyed the matter to Sultan Mahmud II and stated that the necessary measures had been taken, that the ambassadors were guests of the state, and that the Janissary Agha had been warned on Wednesday when he came to the Sublime Porte to prevent such incidents against them and to prevent it from happening again. Sultan Mahmud, however, was displeased with the contents of both the envoy's complaint and the grand vizier's response. Emphasizing the ineffectiveness of the Janissaries in such incidents and the disgraceful nature of these events in the presence of the envoys, he ordered the Janissary Agha

³⁴ Abdulkasim Gül, *Yeniçeriliğin Tarihi*, (Istanbul: Küre Yay., 2022), v.I, pp.247-248.

³⁵ Reinhold Lubenau *Seyahatnamesi*, pp.362-363.

to be warned once more³⁶. Grand Vizier indicated that the demands had been met³⁷.

Order and Cleanliness in the Capital

The Janissary Aghas dedicated a significant portion of their time to the neutralization of the elements that disrupted the established order, as well as the order of the city. Fires were undoubtedly one of the most significant disruptions to the established order in Istanbul. While the Janissaries played an instrumental role in extinguishing the fires, the Janissary Agha, the most authoritative figure in the Corps, also assumed significant responsibility in this regard. This endeavor also captured the interest of foreigners in the city.

Indeed, Stephan Gerlach and Domenico Hierosolimitano document that when a fire broke out in Istanbul, the Janissary Agha would promptly assemble the soldiers and proceed to extinguish it.³⁸ Additionally, Salomon Schweigger observed in his writings that the Janissaries were responsible for preventing looting during fire oversight.³⁹ Pavel Artemyevich Levashev observed that the Janissary Agha kept a constant watch over fires, monitoring them day and night from the tower situated within the courtyard of his palace.⁴⁰

The precise date when exactly the Janissary Agha first began to oversee the extinguishing of fires is not known. It is, nevertheless, rumored that this practice became a custom after the Janissary Agha Karagöz Agha went to the fire that broke out as a result of a lightning strike at the Baruthane in Galata in 1501 and supervised the extinguishing of the fire.⁴¹ In recognition of their invaluable contributions

³⁶ BOA, HAT, 1164/46058, no date; HAT, 1164/46058A, no date, BOA, HAT, 1164/46058B, no date.

³⁷ BOA, HAT, 1164/46047, no date.

³⁸ Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, p.570; Hierosolimiitano, *Bir Yahudi Doktorun Harem, Saray ve İstanbul Hatıraları*, pp.101-102.

³⁹ Salomon Schweigger, *Sultanlar Kentine Yolculuk: 1578-1581*, Translation: Türkis Noyan, (Istanbul: Kitap Yay., 2004), p.103.

⁴⁰ *Esir Bir Rus Diplomatın Gözünden İstanbul: Pavel Artemyeviç Levaşov'un Hatıraları (1763-1771)*, Translation: İlyas Kemaloğlu (Kamalov) – Eduard Khusainov, (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yay., 2012), p.44.

⁴¹ *Arkeoloji Müzesi Kütüphanesi 376 Numarada Kayıtlı Anonim Tevârih-i Âl-i Osmân (H.616-929 / M. 1219-1519) İnceleme-Metin*, Translation/Criticism: Hüseyin Oğuz, (Master

to the field of firefighting, the administration has bestowed praise upon the representatives of this authority, who have been serving since the earliest times⁴². To illustrate, the Janissary Agha, whose hands were burned during the extinguishing of the fire that broke out in the summer of 1762, which spread over a vast area and lasted for thirty hours, was commended for his actions by being presented with a *hilat* in the presence of the grand vizier.⁴³

As evidenced by the surviving accounts, some of the Janissary Aghas survived the ordeal with minor injuries.⁴⁴ However, there were also instances where Janissary Aghas lost their lives during the incident. To illustrate, on November 6, 1806, a Janissary Agha who was involved in extinguishing a fire that originated in the residence of Şeyh-zade, situated in close proximity to the Molla Aşkî Mosque, and subsequently spread to the surrounding area, perished when the wall of a burning house collapsed upon him.⁴⁵

The fires in Istanbul resulted in the termination of the duties of several Janissary Aghas⁴⁶. The first and arguably most notable instance of this occurred in 1569. The fire originated in the residential

Dissertation) Marmara University Institute of Turkic Studies, 2013, p.131; İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi*, (İstanbul: Türkiye Yay., 1971), v.1, p.410.

42 Vak'ânüvis Subhî Mehmed Efendi, *Subhî Tarihi, Sâmî ve Şâkir Tarihleri ile Birlikte 1730-1744 (İnceleme ve Karşılaştırmalı Metin)*, ed. Mesut Aydınar, (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2007), p.249; Mustafa Cezar, "Tahribat Yapan Yangınlar ve Tabii Âfetler", *Türk Sanatı Tarihi Araştırma ve İncelemeleri I*, 1963, p.356; Ahmet Tekin, *Ottoman Istanbul in Flames: City Conflagrations, Governance and Society in The Early Modern Period*, (İstanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2020), p.66.

43 Mehmed Hâkim Efendi, *Hâkim Efendi Tarihi*, ed. Tahir Güngör, ed. Ziya Yılmaz, (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2019), pp.1075-1076; Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi, Ahmed Vâsîf Efendi ve Mehâsinü'l-Âsâr ve Haka'iku'l-Ahbâr'ı, 1166-1188 /1752-1774, yay. ed. Nevzat Sağlam, (Ankara: TTK, 2020), p.230; *Şemdanizade*, v.II, p.48; Cezar, "Tahribat Yapan Yangınlar ve Tabii Âfetler", p.361.

44 Râşid Mehmed Efendi ve Çelebizade İsmail Âsım Efendi, *Târih-i Râşid ve Zeyli (1071-1141/1660-1729)*, eds. Abdülkadir Özcan et al, İstanbul: Klasik Yay., 2013.p.1185; *Şem'dânizâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi'nin Mür'it-Tevârih Adlı Eserinin (180B-345A) Tahlil ve Tenkidi Metni*, ed. Mustafa Öksüz, (Master Dissertation), Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, 2009, p.342; *Subhî Tarihi*, p.249.

45 Âsım Efendi Tarihi, v.I, p.387.

46 İzzi Süleyman Efendi, *İzzi tarihi (Osmanlı Tarihi 1157-1165/1744-1752)*: (inceleme metin, ed. Ziya Yılmaz), İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2019), p.930; *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Tarihi Mür'it-Tevârih*, p.163; *Târih-i Cevdet*, v.II/I, p.179.

neighborhood designated for the Jewish population. Due to illness, Cafer Agha, the Janissary Agha, was unable to supervise the fire, which was considered the most catastrophic in the 16th century. When the Janissaries, lacking a leader, exploited this opportunity to plunder, Cafer Agha was dismissed and replaced by Mirahur Siyavuş Agha.⁴⁷

In some instances, the dismissal of Janissary Aghas was due to the circulation of rumors alleging their involvement in deliberately starting and failing to extinguish fires. Indeed, during the frequent fires that broke out in 1752, rumors about the Hasan Agha, such as setting fires and failing to intervene in the fires, arose among the people and increased day by day.⁴⁸ Ultimately, Hasan Agha was called to the *Bâb-ı Âsafî* and subsequently dismissed due to these rumors [21 Şaban 1165 (4 June 1752)].⁴⁹ Interestingly, following his dismissal, the fires in Istanbul ceased, and the rumors disappeared.⁵⁰

The duty of the Janissary Agha was not limited to personally going to the scene of the fire and working to prevent damage and losses. The Janissary Agha was also responsible for investigating the causes of fires, implementing measures to prevent their recurrence, and issuing warnings to the relevant authorities.⁵¹ Furthermore, providing information regarding fires to the Sultan and the Grand Vizier also kept the Janissary Aghas occupied. The activities of the Janissary Aghas, who were frequently instructed about fires, were subject to close monitoring, particularly by the Sultan. Failure to fulfil their duties resulted in severe penalties.⁵²

Until the abolition of the Janissary Agha's position, these individuals served as enforcers of order within the city, particularly

47 *Tarih-i Selânikî*, pp.76-77; Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, *Künhü'l-Ahbâr*, p.694; Tekin, *Ottoman Istanbul in Flames*, pp.71-72.

48 *İzzî Tarihi*, p.926, 930; *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Tarihi Mür'it-Tevârih*, p.163.

49 *İzzî Tarihi*, p.930; *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Tarihi Mür'it-Tevârih*, p.163.

50 *İzzî Tarihi*, p.931; *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Tarihi Mür'it-Tevârih*, p.163.

51 BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 132/1020, Evail N. 1137 (May 1725).

52 BOA, Âmedî Kalemî (A.{AMD), 18/9, 1186 (1772-1773); *Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi H.951-952 Tarihli ve E-12321 Numaralı Mühimme Defteri*, ed. Halil Sahillioğlu, (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2002), pp.5-6.

addressing deficiencies in municipal matters. An analysis of existing archival materials indicates that within this structure, they were also tasked with maintaining standards of cleanliness.⁵³ Prior to the establishment of the *Ihtisab Nezareti* (municipal administration) within the state apparatus, the responsibility for municipal duties had been assigned to specific units that were under the authority of qadi office. These units included the *Çöplük Subaşı* and *Çerçöp Subaşı* (litter warden), who were held responsible for ensuring the city's cleanliness.

Since they were also responsible for preventing the accumulation of garbage and the clogging of canals, it was created patrolling personnel within their organization, financed by an annual fee⁵⁴. Furthermore, junior janissaries were employed to clean the streets and their work was supervised by the Janissary Agha, Qadi, the Grand Vizier and even the Sultan⁵⁵. Despite efforts to maintain order, there were times when attention to cleanliness was neglected, resulting in the accumulation of garbage and animal carcasses in the streets or their improper disposal. In such cases, officials, including the qadi of Istanbul and eventually the Janissary Agha, were tasked with solving the problem.⁵⁶

The slaughter of animals in the city was another problem for the cleanliness and order of the city. Excluding the period of Eid al-Adha, the slaughtering of animals was prohibited in all areas of the walled city. However, designated areas in Yedikule and Edirnekapı were allocated for this purpose. When these rules were violated, the Janissary Agha was called upon to intervene and prevent the slaughter of animals within the city and to ensure that the rules were followed.⁵⁷

⁵³ Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, (Istanbul: İBB, 1995), p.905, 907.

⁵⁴ Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, p.906; Ayşe Pul, "Osmanlı Sosyal Hayatı Figüranlarından Arayıcı Esnafı", *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, vol.XXIII, p. 218, 223.

⁵⁵ Pul, "Osmanlı Sosyal Hayatı Figüranlarından Arayıcı Esnafı", p.222.

⁵⁶ BOA, A.DVNSMHH.d., 58/551, 17.Ş.993 (14 August 1585); *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: İstanbul Mahkemesi* 97 Numaralı Sicil (H.1217-1225/M.1802-1810), Translation/Criticism: Mürsel Sarı-Ayhan Işık-Numan Yekeler, (Istanbul: İBB Kültür AŞ., 2019), p.114, 19.R.1218 (8 August 1803); *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Ticaret Tarihi*, v.I, p.350; Önal, *Buyuruldu Mecmuası*, p.213; Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-ı Belediyye*, v.II, p.909.

⁵⁷ BOA, A.İDVNSMHH.d., 58/272, 17.Ca.993 (17 May 1585); BOA, A.İDVNSMHH.d., 58/897, 8.L.993 (3 October 1585).

Another issue concerning the Janissary Agha regarding order was the sidewalks. Until 1826, when the *Ihtisap Nezareti* was established, the construction and repair of sidewalks was carried out by the “sidewalkers”, a complete organization of artisans with their chief *kethudas* and special architects.⁵⁸ The Janissary Aghas also took on the task of repairing Istanbul’s deteriorated sidewalks, as noted in the survey books prepared for the repairs. As noted in many of the survey books, the Janissary Aghas initiated the process by submitting a detailed report to the Porte on the routes of the sidewalks that had deteriorated, caused inconvenience to the public, and needed to be repaired.⁵⁹ In the following process, he was expected to appoint a bailiff or scribe with written orders and to ensure that the repair was properly completed.⁶⁰

The Janissary Aghas, served to eliminate problems that disturbed the order and damaged the structure. They acted together with various officers for this purpose. The most striking case in this regard is the one concerning the correction of damage to the historical walls of Istanbul⁶¹. For example, in 1722, the qadi of Istanbul, the Janissary Agha, the Building Chief, the Municipal Administrator and the Chief Architect of the city were asked to demolish the buildings built on the city walls from Ahırkapı to Yedikule, with the exception of those who had lived there for a long time, and to demolish the gardens and trees that had damaged the walls.⁶²

58 Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Şehircilik ve Ulaşım Üzerine Araştırmalar*, ed: Salih Özbaran, (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yay., 1984), p.32.

59 BOA, AE.SSLM.III, 107/6479, 11.Ra.1217 (12 June 1802); BOA, C.BLD, 77/3826, 3.M.1207 (21 May 1792); BOA, C.BLD, 79/3913, 20.C.1220, (15 September 1805); BOA, C.BLD, 27/1311, 8.N.1208 (9 April 1794); BOA, C.BLD, 77/3826, 3.M.1207 (21 May 1792); BOA, C.BLD, 49/2422, 20.S.1217 (22 June 1802); BOA, C.BLD, 67/3347, 22.Za.1218 (4 March 1804); BOA, C.BLD, 130/6476, 22.R.1211 (25 October 1796); BOA, C.BLD, 84/4168, 11.B.1211 (10 January 1797); BOA, C.BLD, 88/4374, 6.M.1219 (17 April 1804); C.BLD, 27/1313, 24.L.1220 (15 January 1806).

60 BOA, C.BLD, 55/2710, 7.B.1200 (6 May 1786); C.BLD, 36/1763 4.M.1218 (26 April 1803); C.BLD, 68/3382, 13.Z.1218 (25 March 1804); C.BLD, 127/6316, 12.Ca.1235 (26 February 1820); C.BLD, 94/4652, 9.C.1237 (2 March 1822).

61 BOA, A. {DVNSMHM.d., 130/1129, Evasit Ş. 1134 (June 1722); BOA, C.BLD, 94/4655, no date.

62 BOA, A. {DVNSMHM.d 130/1129, Evasit Ş. 1134 (June 1722).

In addition, they have been held responsible by the state for the obligation to supervise the construction of buildings that are undergoing repair or reconstruction in order to prevent illegal interventions.⁶³ In addition, they were responsible for the repair and reconstruction of the town after exceptional events like the earthquake.⁶⁴ For example, the repair of the walls that were severely damaged in the 1509 Istanbul earthquake was completed in 1510 by architect Ali bin Abdullah, architect Bali and Mahmud under the supervision of Janissary Agha Yunus Agha.⁶⁵ Likewise, after the 1766 earthquake in Istanbul, the Janissary Agha was also among those who were assigned to demolish the heavily damaged buildings and prevent any harm to the people.⁶⁶

Enforcement and Inspection of Rules

In Istanbul, where diverse populations coexisted, a set of regulations was put in effect to ensure the maintenance of social order. One of these rules was related to clothing. Actually, while the Ottoman State did not initially intervene in dress codes, the expansion of borders and coexistence of diverse cultures led to the implementation of measures over time. From the perspective of maintaining social cohesion and order, it was sought to ensure that individuals dressed in accordance with cultural norms and religious traditions. These matters were subject to control and responsibility of the *ihtisab* agha.⁶⁷

In instances where this was not the case, the state sought to maintain order within society through the deployment of its officials,

⁶³ BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 149/162, Evâil C.1155 (Ağustos1742); *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 97, 97/83, p.228-232, vr.55b-2, 8.S.1221; *Istanbul Ahkâm Defterleri*, Sosyal Hayat, v.I, p.129; *Asım Tarihi*, v.I, p.358-360.

⁶⁴ *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: İstanbul Mahkemesi 25 Numaralı Sicil (H.1179-1180/M.1765-1767)*, Translation/Criticism: Salih Kahriman-Mümin Yıldıztaş, (Istanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş., 2019), p.153, vr.55-2, 14.Z.1179 (24 Mayıs 1766).

⁶⁵ Wiener Wolfgang Müller, *Istanbul'un Tarihsel Topografyası: 17. Yüzyıl Başlarına Kadar Byzantion-Konstantinopolis-İstanbul*, Translation: Ülker Sayın, (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yay., 2001), pp.294-295.

⁶⁶ *İstanbul Mahkemesi* 25, p.153, 14.Z.1179 (24 May 1766).

⁶⁷ Ziya Kazıcı, *Osmanlı'da İhtisab Müessesesi: (Yerel Yönetim)*, (Istanbul: Bilge Yay., 2006), pp.219-225.

particularly the Janissary Agha and his law enforcement mission.⁶⁸ For instance, on March 21, 1580, the qadi of Istanbul and the Janissary Agha were directed to issue a decree that Jews and Christians should refrain from wearing turbans in accordance with Muslim tradition and instead adopt hats as their headgear.⁶⁹ In the subsequent days, another edict was issued for the Janissary Agha.

This order warned him to enforce the rule of wearing red hats for Jews and black hats for Christians as it had been established during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. Additionally, the order prohibited Jews and Christians from wearing veils and walking around in the mentioned clothing.⁷⁰ As evidenced by these examples, the administration sought to address the issue by involving the Janissary Aghas in the matter.⁷¹ Of course, state's emphasis on maintaining order with regard to modes of dress was also relevant in the case of Muslims. When the available records are analyzed, it is seen that there was a great sensitivity especially regarding the dress of Muslim women. For example, during the earlier part of the eighteenth century, the state prohibited the wearing of the showy abaya, a form of dress traditionally associated with Muslim women. This prohibition was justified on the grounds that the abaya violated religious rules, disturbed the peace within the family unit, and led to instances of marital dissolution. In order to prevent the production and wearing of these garments by women, orders were issued to high-ranking state officials, particularly the Janissary Agha.⁷²

Another factor that must be considered in maintaining social order is the consumption of alcohol by non-Muslims. The non-Muslim

⁶⁸ Rahmi Tekin, *İstanbul'da Gayrimüslimlerin Gündelik Yaşamı (1520-1670)*, (Ankara: Birleşik Yay., 2014), p.62, 66.

⁶⁹ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 39/525, 4.S.988 (21 March 1580).

⁷⁰ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 39/556, 7.S.988 (25 March 1580); Tekin, *İstanbul'da Gayrimüslimlerin Gündelik Yaşamı*, pp.62-63.

⁷¹ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 133/65, Evahir.S.1138 (October-November 1725); BOA, AE. SAMD.III, 222/21414, 18.Ra.1143 (1 October 1730); Ahmed Refik, *Asırlar Boyunca İstanbul Hayatı*, pp.297, 395-396.

⁷² BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 133/812, Evail L. 1138 (June 1726); *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: İstanbul Mahkemesi 24 Numaralı Sicil (H.1138-1151/M.1726-1738)*, (İstanbul: İSAM, 2010), pp.97-99, L.1138; Ahmed Refik, *Asırlar Boyunca İstanbul Hayatı*, pp.299-301.

population was permitted to consume alcohol, provided that they abided by the regulations set by the Sharia and customary laws. This also applied to the transportation of alcoholic beverages and substances used to produce them to their residences. Consequently, while these individuals were transporting the items through the city gates and within the city, they were granted permits by the state in exchange for taxes or services. The Janissary Aghas were instructed to prevent any opposition or interference by the military personnel during the transportation of the related materials.⁷³

The authorization documents permitting the individuals to transport liquor within the city were issued by the finance ministry or the *divan-ı hümâyûn* (imperial council). Upon a modification of the authority responsible for issuing these papers, the individuals in charge of the city's order were accordingly notified.⁷⁴ For instance, in 1734, the Janissary Agha was informed that henceforth, the orders on alcohol would be written from the *divan-ı hümâyûn* and those who had permits from the finance department should not be allowed to transport.⁷⁵

One area in which the Ottoman Empire permitted non-Muslim populations to operate freely within the constraints of sharia and customary law was that of inns and taverns. As all studies on this subject demonstrate, non-Muslims were permitted to establish and operate taverns, provided that they paid taxes and followed the regulations related to production and consumption.⁷⁶ These regulations included the prohibition of opening a tavern in close proximity to

⁷³ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 131/1353, 20.B.1136; BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 138/566, 29.C.1144; BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 140/1237, 10.Za.1147; BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 149/177, 10.C.1155; BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 149/254, 29.Ş.1155; İE.HR, 11/1098, 29.Z.1135; *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: Galata Mahkemesi 259 Numaralı Sicil (H.1137-1138/M.1724-1725)*, Translation/Criticism: Hüseyin Kılıç-Salih Kahrıman, (İstanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş., 2019), p.385, vr.68b-3, Evasıt Za.1137 (June 1725); p.398, vr.71b-1, 5.B.1137 (20 March 1725); p.403, vr.72b-3, 2.Ş.1138 (5 April 1726).

⁷⁴ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 140/1, Evail Ra. 1147 (August 1734); BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 140/2, Evail Ra. 1147 (August 1734); A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 140/3, Evail Ra. 1147 (August 1734).

⁷⁵ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 140/478, Evail Ra. 1147 (August 1734).

⁷⁶ İhsan Erdiñli, *Keyif, Günah ve Suç Arasında Osmanlı'da Meyhaneler ve Müdavimleri*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay., 2021), p.61, 108, 115; pp. 214-215.

Islamic shrines, the provision of services on non-religious days, closure during periods of mobilization, limitation of hours of operation, prohibition of late-night hours, and restriction of sales to Muslims.⁷⁷

A significant source of revenue for the Janissary Agha's office is the fee charged for supervisory services provided in relation to taverns⁷⁸. In addition to their supervisory role, the Janissary Aghas were responsible for implementing decisions regarding taverns and for resolving any disturbances related to them⁷⁹. For example, the emergence of taverns outside Ayakapı led to the proliferation of knife-wielding drunken individuals who harassed women and held excessive, drunken celebrations on prayer mats in mosque courtyards, which resulted in the mosque becoming unusable for prayer. Consequently, the Janissary Agha was ordered to immediately close these taverns in the area⁸⁰.

In addition to his other duties, the Janissary Agha was obliged to investigate complaints regarding taverns and determine whether any laws had been violated. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, when residents of the neighborhoods of Ebubekir Pasha, Davud Pasha, Hekimoğlu Ali Pasha, Katip Müslühiddin, Sormagır, and Hacı Timur complained about the opening of taverns in Yenimahalle, where non-Muslims lived, a significant investigation was initiated,

⁷⁷ Erdinçli, *Keyif, Günah ve Suç Arasında*, p.172-173; Derviş Tuğrul Koyuncu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Alkollü İçeceklerin (Arak ve Şarap) Üretimi, Ticareti ve Tüketimi: 1792-1839 İstanbul Örneği*, (Ph.d., Dissertation), Marmara University Institute of Social Sciences, 2019, pp.43-44.

⁷⁸ The tavern fees occasionally caused difficulties for the Janissary Aghas. This issue was so controversial that in 1654, when the Janissary Agha Kenan Pasha attempted to intervene against some Sipahi who were caught drinking duhan while on patrol, he met with strong opposition from the senior members of this group. They sent a message to Kenan Pasha and told him that he did not intervene in the taverns and boozehouses because of the money he received, and that drunken shout filled the air as a result. What's more, they threatened him, stating that if he interfered with them again, they would resort to further actions that would cause trouble. Despite his anger, Kenan Pasha was forced to accept the situation. For further details, refer to *Târih-i Na'imâ*, p.1552; Koyuncu, *Alkollü İçeceklerin (Arak ve Şarap) Üretimi, Ticareti ve Tüketimi*, p.62.

⁷⁹ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 48/968, 19.S.991 (14 March 1583); BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 58/834, 17.N.993 (12 September 1585); A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 73/765, 6.Z.1003 (12 August 1595); BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 73/767, 4.Z.1003 (10 August 1595).

⁸⁰ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 73/767, 4.Z.1003 (10 August 1595).

and comprehensive information was requested from the Janissary Agha. Ultimately, it was revealed that the tavern known as *Nikolay Koltuğu*, which had been the subject of local complaints, was officially registered in the financial records maintained by the *Hazine-i Amire*. However, it was discovered that seven to eight other taverns were operating without the necessary permits. Eventually, the taverns and *koltuks* (smaller taverns) belonging Mebto and Vasil were closed down, while *Nikolay Koltuğu* was left untouched since it had a license and no harm for Muslim community. The Janissary Agha was ordered to implement this decision⁸¹. As these alcohol establishments, which were predominantly owned by Greeks and Armenians, were subject to taxation by the state, they were all documented in the official ledger, known as the *Başmuhasebe* (Chief Accounting Office). The 1807 application for the renewal of the decree on such places shows that these taverns and sherbet houses were investigated by the Janissary Agha and registered in the Chief Accounting Office with his decree⁸².

Regulation and Control of Basic Consumer Goods in Istanbul

One of the primary responsibilities of the Janissary Aghas in Istanbul was to prevent shortages and ensure the population's access to essential goods and services. In this context, the Janissary Aghas, appointed by the state as law enforcers, were obliged to undertake a significant mission to guarantee that the inhabitants of the city had access to the basic consumer goods that were essential for their daily lives. The initial objective is



Image II: Janissary Agha
Brown University Library Collections

⁸¹ BOA, C.BLD, 57/2819, 18.B.1221 (1 October 1806); Koyuncu, *Alkollü İçeceklerin (Arak ve Şarap) Üretimi, Ticareti ve Tüketimi*, pp.82-83.

⁸² BOA, C.BLD, 15/735, 12.C.1222 (17 August 1807).

determining the *narh*. The term “*narh*” can be defined as a maximum and minimum price set by the state for a given product, with due consideration given to the rights of both the buyer and the seller. In order to determine the *narh*, a council was formed in the presence of the qadi, and negotiations were held with the relevant actors for the product which was to be priced⁸³. The Janissary Agha was also held responsible for the price of meat, and it was customary for the agha to be present at the council when determining the price of lamb to be slaughtered, particularly on the day of *Hidirellez*⁸⁴.

The responsibilities of the Janissary Agha extended beyond the determination of the *narh* for meat. The council, which determined the prices, frequently conducted inspections of the bazaars and markets with the objective of maintaining order. The Janissary Agha was a regular companion of the Grand Vizier during these inspections, accompanied by numerous other officials, including the *subaşı*, *çavuşbaşı*, and the qadi of Istanbul⁸⁵. In accordance with established custom, the grand vizier, who was the sole decision-maker during the inspection, would pose questions to the relevant individuals in the group. When butcher shops were inspected, the Janissary Agha was held accountable for the quantity and quality of the meat in the instance of a negative outcome⁸⁶. In addition to the supervisory role, as evidenced in the following sources, when it was determined that the shopkeepers did not comply with the sales prices, orders were issued to the Janissary Agha, the designated rule enforcer, with the objective of preventing the public from being exploited⁸⁷.

In addition to his other duties, the Janissary Agha was responsible for overseeing the grain situation. While the ready availability of basic foodstuffs to the people of Istanbul was of great consequence, extraordinary circumstances disrupted this process. In the event of

83 Halil Sahillioğlu, “Osmanlılarda Narh Müessesesi ve 1525 Yılı Sonunda İstanbul'da Fiyatlar”, *Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi*, 1967, vol.1, p.38; Ahmet Tabakoğlu, “Osmanlı Ekonomisinde Narh Uygulamaları”, *Toplu Makaleler I: İktisat Tarihi*, 2005, p.158.

84 *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 97, p.455, vr.123a-2, 9.R.1224 (24 May 1809).

85 *Abdurrahmân Abdî Paşa Kanunnâmesi*, p.27; Uzunçarşılı, *Merkez Teşkilatı*, pp.141-321.

86 *Abdurrahmân Abdî Paşa Kanunnâmesi*, p.27; Uzunçarşılı, *Merkez Teşkilatı*, p.141.

87 *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 97, pp.237-238, vr.58a-1, 19.S.1221 (8 May 1806).

famine resulting from for example military campaigns, the administration was faced with the significant challenge of ensuring the population's access to foodstuffs, particularly grain. According to archival documents, the Janissary Aghas, as customary officers of Istanbul, were responsible for finding solutions to overcome this difficult situation, especially in times of food shortage. They undertook a great deal of work in providing these basic food sources for the city⁸⁸.

Not only the transportation of grain to the city but also its preservation in the city was one of the primary concerns of the Janissary Aghas. They were held responsible at a time when grain was transported from the Mediterranean and Black Sea to Istanbul via the city walls in boats or on horseback. The edict was issued with the objective of preventing the smuggling of flour to the bakeries situated outside the city walls in quantities exceeding their permitted rations, as well as to halt the illicit trafficking of agricultural products, whether overtly or covertly. They were also ordered to arrest and imprison whoever was involved in this smuggling, to strongly warn the police officers, i.e., officers, at the castle gates, and to be vigilant in this regard himself⁸⁹.

In one instance, a Janissary Agha was even dismissed due to his inability to enforce the official order regarding grain. Indeed, in 1758 Ramadan, a measure was taken to prevent rice shortages in Sha'ban, it was decided that everyone could only have two *vukiyya* (a type of Ottoman weight measure) each. However, at the beginning of Sha'ban, some women gathered at a non-Muslim rice shop, threatened the owner with knives, kidnapped him, and began looting. Upon hearing the news, the Janissary Aga Nalband Mehmed Pasha went to the shop to prevent the situation from escalating. However, when the women attacked the Aga Pasha with curses and kidnapped him, the disgraced Aga Pasha was dismissed from his post⁹⁰.

⁸⁸ BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 23/407, 8.Ş.981 (3 December 1573); BOA, A.{DVNSMHHM.d., 23/408, 8.Ş.981 (3 December 1573).

⁸⁹ Önal, *Buyuruldu Mecmuası*, p.141.

⁹⁰ *Şem'dânî-zâde Fındıklılı Süleyman Efendi Târîhi Mür'it-Tevârih*, v.II.A, p.16.

Another concern for the Janissary Aghas was the maintenance of order with regard to the supply and price of meat in Istanbul. In particular, when the process of bringing animals to the city for slaughter was disrupted or there were any irregularities in the butchers, the Janissary Agha was held responsible for resolving the issue⁹¹. In addition, the Janissary Agha was, on occasion, tasked with the responsibility of formulating solutions to address periods of meat shortages. For instance, in 1736, the severe winter conditions resulted in the inability to transport sheep from Rumelia to the city, leading to a notable decline in the meat supply. In response, the Janissary Agha Abdullah Agha initiated action by issuing an order to all officials in Çorlu, Saray, Bergos, Baba-yı atik, and Hayrabolu, directing them to address the needs of the Albanian drovers who spent the winter near Istanbul⁹².

The available evidence suggests that, as was the case with grain, the Janissary Aghas were expected to provide a solution in instances where the firewood problem occurred. For example, in June 1583, following the illicit unloading of wood material from vessels that had sailed through the Black Sea, a shortage of timber occurred in the city. The Janissary Agha was consequently charged with ensuring the delivery of the wood to the pier in full amount, by placing men in specific locations along the route⁹³.

Tradesman Control

As can be seen in many of the above-mentioned issues and related examples, the Janissary Aghas were dedicated to serving the order of Istanbul and promoting the well-being of its people. In addition to these responsibilities, perhaps the most striking one is their role in monitoring the activities of tradesmen. Artisan groups, which were formed by people who practiced the same profession and art, constituted an integral part of the social structure of the Ottoman Empire.

91 BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 66/253; BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 138/793, Evahir.L.1144 (April 1732).

92 BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 142/323, Evahir.L.1148 (March 1736).

93 BOA, A.{DVNSMHM.d., 49/282, 13.Ca.991 (4 June 1583).

Over time, these groups evolved into a distinct social entity, characterized by their own organizational structure, rules, and principles. Within their respective organizations, numerous administrators were appointed, including the sheikh, assistant *yiğitbaşı* (foreman), viceroy, chamberlain who were entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing their respective orders. Some tradesmen groups even had administrators who were specifically designated for their particular line of work. In addition to these administrators, Muslims and non-Muslims established a system of self-regulation to ensure that the professions they practiced together were not prejudiced, that the quality of production was not disrupted, that competition was fair, and that unqualified individuals were not allowed to enter the professions⁹⁴.

From the eighteenth century, the Janissary Aghas also acquired authority over the guilds, which practiced their professions under the supervision of the Qadis and Grand Viziers and under the control of their subordinate officials⁹⁵. The Agha's office was even present at meetings where guild rules were established by mutual guarantees between guild members,⁹⁶ and copies of the guarantee registers created at these meetings were kept in the Agha's office for reference when needed⁹⁷. Imperial decrees issued to guilds, renewals of contracts upon membership, and permits granted for the opening of new shops were also notified to the Janissary Aghas⁹⁸. The Janissary Aghas were engaged in matters of interest to the guilds, such as appeals to higher authorities to address issues that harmed their trade or to resolve disputes within the framework of the law. They were

94 *İstanbul Esnaf Tarihi Tahlilleri İstanbul Esnaf Birlikleri ve Nizamları*, ed: Ahmet Kal'a, (İstanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş., 1988), v.1, p.114, 118.

95 İpşirli, "Payitaht İstanbul'un İdaresi", pp.72-73.

96 *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: İstanbul Mahkemesi 78 Numaralı Sicil (H.1216-1217/M.1801-1803)*, Translation/Criticism: Ayhan Işık-Esra Yıldız, (İstanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş., 2019), pp.367-368, vr.61a-2, G.Ca.1217 (30 August 1802).

97 For the registers of butchers, tanners, and candle makers inside and around *suriçi*, a copy of which was delivered to the janissary agha in the first half of the 18th century, see. *İstanbul Mahkemesi* 24, pp.347-351, 5.N.1140 (15 April 1728); pp.354-362, 7.N.1140 (17 April 1728).

98 *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Esnaf Tarihi*, v.II, pp.162-163, 299-300.

involved in matters such as investigating complaints,⁹⁹ summoning defendants when cases were brought before the assemblies¹⁰⁰.

The primary duty of the Janissary Aghas over the guilds was to ensure the enforcement of the law. They worked to resolve issues when unqualified or unsponsored individuals infiltrated guilds,¹⁰¹ disputes arose between members,¹⁰² or unjust actions were taken against guilds¹⁰³. In order to maintain public order, the state sought to control the guilds through regulations and frequent inspections. One of the officials assigned to deal with disturbances was the Janissary Agha¹⁰⁴. When the state banned the production of certain items, it was the job of the Agha to notify the guild involved and secure their agreement to cease production¹⁰⁵. The Janissary Agha was also called in when it came to dealing with street vendors who violated public order¹⁰⁶.

A specific guild among tradesmen that was of particular concern to the Janissary Agha was the butchers. The Janissary Agha was undoubtedly responsible for ensuring the smooth management of processes such as the supply of meat for the city, its fair distribution, slaughter at designated locations, and sale in compliance with price controls to prevent public dissatisfaction. Therefore, one of the most significant challenges requiring continual attention from the Janissary Agha was the issue of tradesmen engaged in the sale of meat

⁹⁹ *İstanbul Mahkemesi* 25, pp.426-427, G.Za.1179 (11 April 1766).

¹⁰⁰ *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Esnaf Tarihi*, v.II, pp.152-153, 239.

¹⁰¹ *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: İstanbul Mahkemesi 94 Numaralı Sicil (H.1222-1223/M.1807-1809)*, Translation/Criticism: Salih Kahriman-Yılmaz Karaca, İstanbul 2019, p.283-284, 3.Ra.1223 (29 April 1808); *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Esnaf Tarihi*, v.II, pp.265-266.

¹⁰² *İstanbul Mahkemesi* 25, pp.215-216, Selh.M.1180 (8 June 1766); p.321, 9.R.1180 (14 September 1766); Nejdert Ertuğ, *Osmanlı Döneminde İstanbul Deniz Ulaşımı ve Kayıkçılar*, (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 2001), p.39; Önal, *Buyuruldu Mecmuası*, pp.189-190.

¹⁰³ *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Esnaf Tarihi II*, p.37-38; *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Ticaret Tarihi*, v.I, pp.309-312.

¹⁰⁴ *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: Kartal Mahkemesi 94 Numaralı Sicil (H.1128-1133/M.1716-1721)*, Translation/Criticism: Rasim Erol-Sabri Atay, (İstanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş., 2019), pp.234-235, vr.64b.

¹⁰⁵ *İstanbul Mahkemesi* 24, p.190, 24, 27.Za.1138 (27 July 1726).

¹⁰⁶ BOA, A.İDVNSMHM.d., 140/473, 10.Ra.1147 (10 August 1734); BOA, C.ZB, 31/1544, 9.Za.1147 (2 April 1735).

and meat products. As evidenced by numerous decrees addressed to the agha, there were frequent violations of regulations pertaining to the transportation of livestock to Istanbul, their slaughter at state-designated facilities (salhâne), and their distribution to designated locations¹⁰⁷. The Janissary Agha was also responsible for monitoring butchers to ensure fair trade standards¹⁰⁸ and adherence to price controls¹⁰⁹.

Slaughtering animals in Istanbul was also critical subject for maintaining order and ensuring cleanliness in the city. Slaughterhouses built for this purpose were recorded in registers with their locations and subjected to the same regulations as tradesmen's shops. Nevertheless, despite the absolute prohibition of animal slaughter outside these facilities, some tradesmen violated the rules by establishing new slaughter sites or relocating existing ones. Such practices had a disruptive effect on urban order and had a negative impact on tanners who processed the skins of slaughtered animals, candle makers who used the fats, and foundations that levied taxes on related activities. Consequently, the state intervened to maintain the slaughterhouse system, issuing joint orders to the Janissary Agha, Voyvodas and judges¹¹⁰.

As illustrated by the provided examples, from the 18th century onwards, the Janissary Agha assumed the role of an authority charged with the supervision of regulations for tradesmen, the maintenance of order, the implementation of penalties, and even the administration of taxation¹¹¹. This authority even became so significant that, in

¹⁰⁷ *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 25, pp.365-366, 15.Ca.1180 (19 October 1766); *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri: Bab Mahkemesi* 197 Numaralı Sicil (H.1222-1223/M.1807-1809), Translation/Criticism: Nedim Pakırdağ-Abdullah Sivridağ, (Istanbul: İBB Kültür A.Ş., 2019), pp.330-331, 14.L.1162 (27 September 1749); *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Esnaf Tarihi*, v.II, pp.191-196.

¹⁰⁸ *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Esnaf Tarihi*, v.II, p.62. For the same intervention to be made on the tradesmen who mix dried pears and fig leaves with tobacco, see. BOA, İE.DH., 30/2710.

¹⁰⁹ *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 97, pp.237-238, 19.S.1221 (8 May 1806).

¹¹⁰ *Galata Mahkemesi* 25, pp.382-383, G.Z.1137 (11 August 1725); *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 24, pp.328-329, 29.L.1138 (30 June 1726); *İstanbul Ahkâm Defterleri, Esnaf Tarihi* II, p.161.

¹¹¹ BOA, AE.SMHD.I, 11/724, 10.C.1151 (25 September 1738); *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 24, pp.136-137, G.Za.1138 (1 June 1726); *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 94, pp.427-428, 3.C.1223 (27 June 1808); *Istanbul Mahkemesi* 97, pp.434-435, 6.M.1224 (21 June 1809).

discussions establishing the rules for the Guild of Stonecutters, the guild itself submitted a request that no individual other than the Janissary Agha should interfere in their affairs¹¹².

Conclusion

The primary responsibility of the Janissary Agha, the most senior among all Aghas in the Ottoman Empire, was undoubtedly the governance of the most esteemed military unit. However, the responsibilities of the Janissary Agha extended beyond the administration of the Janissary Corps. Indeed, his responsibilities included a role of the customary officer in Istanbul, too. Considering the density of the population in Istanbul, the Janissary Aghas, always on the alert, made significant efforts to neutralize potential threats by conducting patrols with the soldiers under their command.

In addition to their routine patrols for the maintenance of public order in the city, they were also responsible for addressing issues that posed a potential threat to the stability of the city. As a law enforcement agency, their objective was to identify and remove from the city any individuals who had committed theft, were involved in minor criminal activities, or were engaged in activities that were in opposition to the state. Their mission, in short, was to maintain peace and order within the city.

It was not only those who had been convicted of criminal offenses but also those who had the potential to commit crimes were to be expelled from the city. In this context, the Janissary Aghas were responsible for addressing a number of challenges, including the prevention of the accumulation of non-sponsored and single populations in the city, which posed a threat to security and city resources. Additionally, they were obliged to maintain control over the locations where these individuals lived and to prevent the establishment of new settlements.

The demographic and cultural diversity of Istanbul imposed an additional responsibility on the Aghas. They were assigned the task

¹¹² Yüksel Çelik – Murat Uluskan, “İstanbul Ahkâm Defterlerine Göre Osmanlı Başkentinde İnşaat Esnafı (XVIII. Yüzyıl)”, XVI. *Türk Tarih Kongresi*, VI (2010), p.241.

of appointing officials to ensure the security of non-Muslim ceremonies and to prevent any misconduct. Furthermore, they were also held accountable by the administration for any wrongdoing by their soldiers, who were responsible for the security of ambassadors. The Janissary Aghas dedicated a significant amount of time and effort to the elimination of disruptive elements within the city, as well as to the maintenance of order.

In order to maintain order in Istanbul, the Janissary Agha was also responsible for certain municipal duties. Such responsibilities included the removal of elements that could potentially damage the city walls, the repair of deteriorated structures, and the construction of new buildings in a way that would be harmonious with the existing urban fabric. The Janissary Aghas were also required to prevent the accumulation of garbage and animal carcasses in the city, ensure their proper disposal in designated locations, and oversee the repairment of deteriorated sidewalks.

The Janissary Aghas, who were also responsible for establishing and enforcing price controls, made significant efforts to prevent any potential famine in the city and to guarantee the availability of essential consumer goods. The responsibilities of the Janissary Aghas extended beyond the consumer aspect. They also held significant authority over the tradesmen who produced or sold the commodities. To maintain quality standards and prevent exploitation, they participated in the assemblies where regulations were formulated and served as the enforcers of these laws.

Surely, among the Janissary Aghas who held this position for more than four hundred years, there were some who failed to fulfill their obligations or abused their authority. Some of them were even proven to have committed criminal acts. Nevertheless, the administration repeatedly warned the officers in charge of maintaining order in Istanbul to address the challenges that threatened the city's stability and public safety. Those who were convicted or found to have engaged in misconduct were promptly removed from their posts.

Nevertheless, it is also noteworthy that over the course of their service, the Janissary Aghas, in accordance with the authority they had been granted, endeavored tirelessly to prevent or resolve the

challenges that emerged in the city. They fulfilled a crucial role with the soldiers under their command, operating within the framework of the city's order. While doing their job, they were dedicated to serving Istanbul and its inhabitants, acting as the city's customary officers.

GENİŞ ÖZET

Yeniçeri ağası, Sultan I. Murad döneminde ordunun nefer ihtiyacının karşılanması için kurulan Yeniçeri Ocağı'nın lideridir. Yeniçeri Ocağı'nın zamanla artan prestiji liderlerinin rütbesine de yansımış ve yeniçeri ağalığı Osmanlı devlet teşkilatı içerisinde oldukça önemli bir konuma gelmiştir. Nitekim Kapıkulu Ocakları içerisindeki her ocağın bir ağası bulunmasına rağmen, Yeniçeri Ocağı'nınki hepsinden ayrı tutulmuştur. Diğerlerinin aksine idarî ve askerî birçok meselede söz ve yetki sahibi olmuşlardır. Hatta Fatih Sultan Mehmed devrinde hazırlandığı ifade edilen *Kanunname-i Ali Osman*'da "sair ağalardan büyüktür" cümlesi ile makamın mahiyeti ortaya konmuştur.

Osmanlı Devleti'nin askerî ve idarî teşkilatında hayli sorumluluk üstlenmiş olan yeniçeri ağasının bir başka önemli misyonu da İstanbul'a dairdir. Osmanlı tarafından fethedildikten sonra yüzyıllarca imparatorluğa başkentlik yapan ve konumundan dolayı ticaretin merkezi olan İstanbul gibi aktif ve yoğun bir şehrin asayiş ve düzeninin daim korunması devletin üzerinde ihtimamla durduğu meselelerdendir. Bunun için de devlet üst düzey memurlarını şehrin asayiş ve düzenine hizmetkâr kılmış, İstanbul'un idaresini ikiye ayırarak şer'i meselelerde İstanbul kadısı ve Rumeli kazaskerini örfî konularda da sadrazam ve yeniçeri ağasını en yetkili kişiler olarak tayin etmiştir.

Osmanlı Devleti'nin başkentinin asayiş ve düzeni konusunda önemli bir göreve sahip yeniçeri ağaları, İstanbul gibi kalabalık ve aktif bir şehir için daima teyakkuz halinde olmuşlardır. Bilhassa şehirde asayiş ve düzene aykırı herhangi bir durum yaşanmaması veya var olan olumsuzluğun bertarafı için devriye gezmeleri ya da başka bir deyişle kola çıkmaları, bir kaide şeklinde yer etmiştir. Ayrıca söz konusu şehrin asayışı olduğundan bunun için sorun teşkil eden ya da etme ihtimali olan meselelerle ayrıca ilgilenmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda suça karışan ya da karışma ihtimali bulunan, güvenliği ve nizamı tehdit eden bu kişilerin tespiti, yakalanmaları ve şehirden çıkarılmalarında görev icra etmişlerdir. Yine asayiş bağlamında bakıldığında Gayrimüslimlerin merasimlerinde güvenliğin sağlanması için yasakçı tayin edilmesi ve bunların

suiistimalde bulunmasının önlenmesinde misyon üstlenmişlerdir. Ayrıca elçilerin güvenliklerinden sorumlu olan ve bunun için askerlerini görevlendiren yeniçeri ağaları, neferlerinin hataları karşısında yönetimin uyarılarına maruz kalmışlardır.

Şehrin asayiş ve nizamına dair yeniçeri ağalarını meşgul eden bir başka mesele ise yangınlar olmuştur. Nitekim buradaki görevi sadece yangın mahalline bizatihi giderek zararın ve kayıpların önüne geçilmesi için çalışmalarda bulunmak değildir. Yangınların sebeplerini araştırmak, tekrarının yaşanmaması için önlemler almak ve bu konuda gerekli rütbelileri uyarmak da yeniçeri ağasının mesuliyetinden olmuştur. İstanbul'da nizamı sağlama adına bazı beledi vazifeler de yeniçeri ağasının uhdesine bırakılmıştır. Bunların başında İstanbul'un surlarına zarar verecek unsurların bertarafı, harabe yapıların tamiri ve yeni binaların şehrin dokusuna uyacak şekilde yapılmasını sağlama sayılabilir. Çöplerin ve hayvan ölümlerinin şehir içerisinde birikmesini önleme, bunların belirlenmiş yerlere dökülmesini sağlama, bozulan kaldırımları tamir etme de yeniçeri ağalarının görevlerinden olmuştur. Yine narhın belirlenmesi ve uygulanmasında misyon üstlenen yeniçeri ağaları herhangi bir sebepten şehirde oluşabilecek kıtlık vakalarının engellenmesi ve halkın temel tüketim maddelerine ulaşması için büyük gayret göstermişlerdir. Yeniçeri ağalarının vazifesi tüketici cihetiyle sınırlı kalmamış metai üreten ya da satan esnaf üzerinde büyük yetki sahibi olmuşlardır. Üretimde kalitenin korunması, üretici veya satıcı statüsündekilerin mağdur olmaması adına nizamnamelerin düzenlendiği meclislerde hazır bulunup, bu kanunların uygulayıcısı olarak hizmet etmişlerdir.

İstanbul'da nizam bağlamında yeniçeri ağalarının üstlendiği sorumluluk bahsi geçen konularla sınırlı kalmamış, şehrin çok uluslu yapısı da ona bazı görevler getirmiştir. Zira birbirinden farklı unsurların bir arada yaşadığı İstanbul'da toplumsal düzeni koruma adına devlet tarafından belli başlı kaideler oluşturulmuştur. Bu kaidelerden bir tanesi de kıyafetlere dairdir. Gayrimüslimin Müslüman gibi giyinmesi ya da Müslüman'ın kaidelere uymayan kıyafet tercih etmesi devlet nezdinde hoş görülmediğinden, böyle durumların bertarafı için yeniçeri ağası da dahil üst düzey memurlar kullanılmıştır. Yönetimin toplumsal düzen adına yeniçeri ağasından ihtimamla görev icra etmesini beklediği bir başka husus ise Gayrimüslimlerin alkol tüketimine dairdir. Özellikle vergi ya da hizmet karşılığında evine alkol ya da alkol yapıcı madde götürme hakkı elde eden Gayrimüslime, muhalefet ve müdahalede bulunulmasını önlemek yeniçeri ağalarını hayli meşgul etmiştir. Yine meyhanelere nezaret etme ile birlikte böyle mekanlara dair alınan kararların uygulanması ve bu konuda düzeni bozan hadiselerin ortadan

kaldırılmasından yeniçeri ağaları mesul tutulmuştur.

Elbette dört yüz yıldan fazla ayakta kalmış bir makama gelen yüzlerce yeniçeri ağası içinden görevini icrada başarılı olamayan ya da vazifesini suiistimal edenlerin varlığı söz konusudur. Hatta içlerinden bazılarının suçun ta kendisi olduğu dahi tespit edilmiştir. Ancak yönetim İstanbul'un düzenini ve asayişini tehdit eden meselelerin bertarafı için makamın sahibine seri uyarılarda bulunmuştur. Suiistimali görülen ya da suçu sabit olan ise görevinden uzaklaştırılmıştır. Fakat şu da söylenmelidir ki makam var oldukça yeniçeri ağaları, aldıkları yetki doğrultusunda şehirde birçok meselede ortaya çıkan ya da çıkma ihtimali olan olumsuzlukları bertaraf etme adına büyük çaba göstermişlerdir. Emrindeki neferler ile şehrin asayişi ve düzeninde büyük bir misyon üstlenmişlerdir. Makam var olduğu müddetçe örfi zabiti oldukları İstanbul'a ve şehir halkına hizmet etmişlerdir.

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