



JANET: Janissaries in Ottoman Port Cities: Muslim Financial and Political Networks in the Early Modern Mediterranean-ERC Starting Grant 2019

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ABSTRACT

AIM OF THE PROJECT

The aim of JANET is to study the formation and functions of Janissary economic and political networks in the 18th- and early 19th-century Mediterranean. Through this study, the project examines the commercial role of Muslims in the Ottoman and wider Mediterranean economy. It elaborates on the political and financial interaction between Muslim communities in the area and compares between the development and functions of Ottoman Muslim networks and those of other religious groups in the common early modern Mediterranean space.

INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS

The project challenges the dominant stereotypes about Islam which perpetuate the idea of Muslim economic idleness in the early modern era. It studies, for the first time, the Janissaries not as a military corps, but as a privileged social group forming a complex of financial and political networks, it connects understudied areas – such as North Africa – with a number of other Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Danubian regions and, finally, it utilizes an elaborate network analysis for disclosing system-level patterns and micro-level behaviors in this vast territory.

METHODOLOGY

JANET introduces three different levels of network analysis (local, imperial, and Mediterranean) while focusing on a number of Ottoman port-cities in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and by major rivers with considerable sea-faring activity. Its research is based on archival material in Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Russian, French, and English, employing sources which have hitherto never been systematically combined for writing Mediterranean history. Also the project uses both a quantitative and qualitative analysis for the construction of systematic data series, which are going to be fed into five relational databases, connecting data on events, institutions, individuals, and geographical information.

DISSEMINATION ACTIVITIES

JANET's dissemination activities include: The creation of an open access digital portal containing databases of sources, abstracts of deliverables, multimedia material, bibliography and links to be used by the international academic community; the organization of four workshops (in Rethymno, Istanbul, Izmir, and Salonica) and one international conference (in Rethymno); the participation of its research team members in international conferences, seminars, workshops, popular lectures, and the production of a number of publications in open access (at least two books and ten articles) and two Ph.D. dissertations.

IMPACT

JANET aspires to create an innovative entanglement of military, social, political, and economic history which has the potential to change our current perception of the early modern Mediterranean and the role of Islam in it. Its findings will result in a fruitful revision of the historiography of a series of countries which form a large part of the present-day Mediterranean space, east and west. Last but not least, the project engages in the contemporary public discourse over the issue of religious co-existence in the Mediterranean region and offers a topical, balanced, and unbiased historical approach to the Muslim presence in the area.