

Cultures of Military Violence Against Prisoners of War and Slaves

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The year 1683 marked a pivotal juncture within the Ottoman Empire. The defeat incurred during the Second Siege of Vienna precipitated a state of upheaval within the empire, compelling the Ottoman Army to grapple with a coalition of adversarial forces on a scale hitherto unprecedented in its historical trajectory. This exceptional circumstance concomitantly gave rise to a discernible surge in the application of illegitimate military violence.

In the context of the ongoing DFG-funded research project, a collaborative effort between the University of Potsdam and the Ruhr-University Bochum is underway to conduct a comparative analysis of the cultures of illicit military violence in the Ottoman and Habsburg Armies during the Great Turkish Wars. My research, conducted at the University of Bochum, is centered on examining the Ottoman Army, while counterparts at the University of Potsdam are delving into the intricacies of the Habsburg Army. The project aims to delineate the boundaries of legitimacy concerning military violence within the Ottoman Empire, assessing to what extent, under conditions of warfare, soldiers engaged in illegitimate acts of military violence, whether individually, collectively, or within the command hierarchy. This inquiry is pursued through a micro-sociological research approach. A significant aspect of this study involves investigating the impact of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the units within the Ottoman army, which possesses a heterogeneous composition, on the formation of their practices of illegitimate military violence.

Within the scope of the project, violence is examined in three domains: violence towards civilians, enemy soldiers and prisoners of war, and internal military violence. The forthcoming conference will specifically address military violence against enemy soldiers and prisoners of war. In this context, the following questions will be opened for discussion: What constituted the legal framework for violence against soldiers, prisoners, and slaves? What types of illegitimate violence practices have been observed? What are the socio-cultural, ideological, and economic motivations behind the illegitimate violence inflicted on prisoners and slaves? How was illegitimate violence perceived within society? To what extent has the organizational culture of the Ottoman army shaped its actions of violence?