

## **Ottoman Acting Companies in the Long Seventeenth Century**

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Early modern economic change throughout the Ottoman imperial domains have been so far mostly explored through the study of agriculture, trade, prices, and taxation. This paper seeks to complement existing perspectives on the urban economic landscape by bringing to the fore the emergence of acting companies (*esnâf-ı bâzbâzân kolları*) in Istanbul and Edirne. In the seventeenth century the numbers of singers, musicians, dancers and impersonators on the theatrical marketplace of the two imperial capitals grew quite significantly. Consequently, they developed a new quasi corporate mode of organization, which is still excluded from the historiography of the Ottoman market dominated by the research of the artisanal groups organized in the guilds. While looking at the history of theater and performance through the novel socio-economic lenses my research seeks inspiration from the methodologies exhibited by the scholarly works about professional companies of *Commedia dell'Arte* in the south as well as transnational networks of travelling actors in the north of the European continent. What makes one a professional in Istanbul's theater industry? How do these careers reflect the changing demographics of the capitals? The paper pieces together fragmented evidence from several books of festival, accidental archival registers, descriptions by Ottoman intellectuals and Western travelogues to demonstrate how career in performance became an attractive option for a wide range of individuals and to discuss how commercialization of spectacle created new economic agents even if still elusive in economic networks.