

Captivity and Career Transformation on Ottoman-Habsburg Borders in the Seventeenth Century

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This paper aims to explore the career transformations of enslaved individuals along the Ottoman and Habsburg borders in the seventeenth century, with a particular focus on labor dynamics, slavery, and the economic implications of these factors. Through the narratives of three main captives—‘Osmān Ağa of Tımişvar, Janissary Süleymān and Ḥasan Esīrī— it examines the possible effects of economic and diplomatic changes and interactions within the Ottoman Empire during this period on these individuals. Before their capture in the seventeenth century, ‘Osmān Ağa of Tımişvar, Janissary Süleymān, and Ḥasan Esīrī were individuals belonging to the middle and lower classes. However, after their captivity, they experienced significant changes in their career trajectories and economic status. According to their memoirs and notes, the language skills and knowledge acquired in dāru’l-ḥarb (the abode of war) might have contributed to their elevated status upon returning to the lands of Islam. The social environments and individuals they encountered and the events they witnessed in Habsburg lands and France contributed to their later social elevation and contribution to the Ottoman economy and society. Within the unstable dynamics of the seventeenth-century Ottoman-Habsburg borderland, contemplating the survival dynamics of individuals constantly at risk of falling into enemy captivity may lead us to consider the impact of microhistory on macrohistory. A perspective considering the dangers and advantages of living in border regions can help us understand how these individuals achieved stronger economic positions after escaping captivity.