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Ottoman War and Peace

Studies in Honor of Virginia H. Aksan

Edited by

Frank Castiglione
Ethan L. Menchinger
Veysel Şimşek

MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

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Nizam-ı Cedid

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CHAPTER 5

Drill and Discipline as a Civilizing Process: The Genesis of the Modern Soldier in the Ottoman Empire, 1789–1826

Fatih Yeşil

In February 1804, Selim III (1761–1808) decided to enforce his New Order (*Nizâm-ı Cedid*) in the Balkans, unknowingly triggering a tumultuous chain of events for him and his empire.¹ The open conflict between the Janissaries and soldiers of the New Order Army (*Nizâm-ı Cedid Ordusu*) in Edirne in 1806, also known as the second Edirne Incident, was one of such cataclysmic events. Charles Arbuthnot, the British Ambassador to Istanbul, described the difference between these Janissaries and the soldiers of the New Order Army in this incident as follows:

The Janissaries, it is true, were not sufficiently to be depended upon, either in point of obedience or discipline. Individually, however, they are expert in the use of the weapon to which they have been accustomed, and altho' they are very inferior to the disciplined troops of European powers, it is to be doubted whether they do not preserve some advantage over the soldiers of the New Turkish Institution who have not yet been taught to act with confidence in a collective body, and whose mode of training must debar them from the separate feats of personal prowess by which the Janissaries have ever been distinguished.²

It is remarkable that the French Ambassador in Istanbul, General Horace Sébastiani, who never agreed with Arbuthnot on any subject, sent similar reports to Paris on this matter. Concerning the Russo-Ottoman War of 1806–1812, for instance, he wrote “the soldiers of the Sultan would fight bravely and furiously, but their disordered ardor would succumb to a superior enemy by discipline, armament, and tactics.”³ In fact, both ambassadors emphasized

- 1 From Stürmer (Habsburg internuncio to Istanbul) Haus-Hof- und Staats Archive, Türkei II/133, 25 February 1804.
- 2 From Charles Arbuthnot to Fox, 26 July 1806, National Archives, Foreign Office Papers 78/50.
- 3 Similar comments repeat in the dispatches of the French Ambassador. See General Sébastiani to Champagny 12, 15, 26 February and 4, 5 March 1808 Archives Nationales Affaires

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