

# History j4

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Letters of Ogier de Busbecq Who were the Janissaries? The Janissaries are the infantry of the royal guard. According to the letter, the Janissaries were normally spread throughout the empire. Their work was to protect the empire against invasion and also to protect the Jews and Christians from mob violence. The Janissaries were deployed all over the empire to protect it and its citizens.

What role did they play in the Ottoman Empire?

The Ottoman Empire is the present day Turkey. In the ancient times, it was a very powerful empire especially in the 16th and 17th century when it was under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent. Under Suleiman the Magnificent the empire had 32 provinces and controlled Western Asia, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Caucasus and Southeast Europe. During the period that Ogier wrote his letters, the Ottoman Empire was trying to expand its territory. The Janissaries were dressed in robes that went down to their ankles and cowls which they used to cover their heads. Their main role in the Ottoman Empire was to secure the empires borders and protect it against any invasion. Ogier also states in his letter that they were used to protect the Jews and the Christians from mob violence. They also helped maintain law and order in the empire as Ogier states that they protected people from outrage and wrong. The empire had 12, 000 Janissaries. People in and without the empire are terrified of the Janissaries (Foster and Daniel, 1881).

Why would the Turks seek out these Special Forces from the ranks of Christian subjects?

The Janissary was made up of Christian boys who were subjected to strict rules and discipline. In their empire expansion activities, the Ottoman Empire took slaves. These slaves were either sold or recruited into the elite army

known as Janissaries. They were mostly chosen from Balkan and Anatolian Christians. Jews and boys of Turkish origin were not recruited into the Janissary. Janissaries were recruited from the children of Christians who had been enslaved by the Ottoman Empire. Since the empire was Islamic, the Sultan was not allowed to enslave Muslims hence their exclusion from recruitment into the Janissary. The Janissaries were recruited under strict conditions; they were not allowed to keep a beard, to marry and only be soldiers and nothing else. They were recruited every 5 years and were taken in by Turkish families and taught Turkish, its customs and the rules of the Islam faith. They were mainly sought because the Sultan could not enslave Muslims, so the Ottoman Empire sourced them from their Christian subjects. Due to their strict training, the Janissaries were disciplined. Ogier writes in his letter that patience, self-denial and thrift enabled the soldiers to face the most terrifying situations and emerge victorious. He adds that the Turkish Janissaries were ready to endure hardships, were united orderly and disciplined. Janissaries rose through the ranks depending on their hard work. The letter states that those who got accolades from the Sultan were mostly the sons of herdsmen and shepherds. The lowly of the empire got accolades because they had served the state well.

#### References

Forster C. T and Daniel, F. H. B., 1881. *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, vol. I pp, 86-88, 153-155, 219-222, 287-290, 293. London: Kegan Paul. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1555busbecq.asp>