

Directions: Read the text below ALOUD with a partner. Read the document segment by segment. After each segment note, what you thought as you read the text, what the author was trying to convey, and what the segment was about. Underline and note words/phrases you find significant/interesting.

*[Tappan Introduction] ABOUT a century before the capture of Constantinople, when Amurath I was on the throne, his vizier suggested to him that he had a right not only to one-fifth of the spoils of battle, but also to one-fifth of the captives. "Let officers be stationed at Gallipoli," he said, "and as the Christians pass by, let them choose the fairest and strongest of the Christian boys to become your soldiers." Thus was formed the famous corps of the Janizaries. To keep it up, the agents of the sultan went once in four years to all the Christian villages under Turkish control. Every boy between six and nine years of age must be brought before them, and the agents carried away one-fifth of the number, carefully selecting the strongest and most intelligent.*

#### Notes

THE advice of the vizier was followed; the edict was proclaimed; many thousands of the European captives were educated in the Mohammedan religion and arms, and the new militia was consecrated and named by a celebrated dervish. Standing in the front of their ranks, he stretched the sleeve of his gown over the head of the foremost soldier, and his blessing was delivered in the following words "Let them be called Janizaries [*yingi-cheri*—or "new soldiers"]; may their countenances be ever bright; their hand victorious; their swords keen; may their spear always hang over the heads of their enemies; and, wheresoever they go, may they return with a white face." White and black face are common and proverbial expressions of praise and reproach in the Turkish language. Such was the origin of these haughty troops, the terror of the nations.

They are kept up by continual additions from the sultan's share of the captives, and by recruits, raised every five years, from the children of the Christian subjects. Small parties of soldiers, each under a leader, and each provided with a particular firman, go from place to place. Wherever they come, the *protogeros* assembled the inhabitants with their sons. The leader of the soldiers have the right to take away all the youth who are distinguished by beauty or strength, activity or talent, above the age of seven. He carries them to the court of the grand seignior, a tithe, as it is, of the subjects. The captives taken in war by the pashas, and presented by them to the sultan, include Poles, Bohemians, Russians, Italians, and Germans.

These recruits are divided into two classes. Those who compose the one, are sent to Anatolia, where they are trained to agricultural labor, and instructed in the Mussulman faith; or they are retained about the seraglio, where they carry wood and water, and are employed in the gardens, in the boats, or upon the public buildings, always under the direction of an

overseer, who with a stick compels them to work. The others, in whom traces of a higher character are discernible, are placed in one of the four seraglios of Adrianople or Galata, or the old or new one at Constantinople. Here they are lightly clad in linen or in cloth of Saloniki, with caps of Prusa cloth. Teachers come every morning, who remain with them until evening, and teach them to read and write. Those who have performed hard labor are made Janizaries. Those who are educated in the seraglios become *spahis* or higher officers of state.

Both classes are kept under a strict discipline. The former especially are accustomed to privation of food, drink, and comfortable clothing and to hard labor. They are exercised in shooting with the bow and arquebuse by day, and spend the night in a long, lighted hall, with an overseer, who walks up and down, and permits no one to stir. When they are received into the corps of the Janizaries, they are placed in cloister-like barracks, in which the different *odas* or *ortas* live so entirely in common that the military dignitaries are called from their soups and kitchens. Here not only the younger continue to obey the elders in silence and submission, but all are governed with such strictness that no one is permitted to spend the night abroad, and whoever is punished is compelled to kiss the hand of him who inflicts the punishment.

The younger portion, in the seraglios, are kept not less strictly, every ten being committed to the care of an inexorable attendant. They are employed in similar exercises, but likewise in study. The grand seignior permitted them to leave the seraglio every three years. Those who choose to remain, ascend, according to their age in the immediate service of their master, from chamber to chamber, and to constantly greater pay, till they attain, perhaps, to one of the four great posts of the innermost chamber, from which the way to the dignity of a *beglerbeg*, or a *capitan deiri* (that is, an admiral), or even of a vizier, is open. Those, on the contrary, who take advantage of this permission, enters, each one according to his previous rank, into the four first corps of the paid *spahis*, who are in the immediate service of the sultan, and in whom he confides more than in his other bodyguards.

What was the benefit or significance of becoming a janissary?

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#### Source

From: Eva March Tappan, ed., *The World's Story: A History of the World in Story, Song and Art*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), Vol. VI: *Russia, Austria-Hungary, The Balkan States, and Turkey*, pp. 491-494.