PART II
CHAPTER THREE

MILITARY UNITS:
ELEMENTS OF SOLIDARITY AND DIVISION

The foregoing investigation of residential quarters has tried to show the ways in which taxation and the requisitioning of human and material resources exerted a direct and immediate impact on Aleppan society. More gradual but no less important was the diffusion throughout provincial society of military cadres, including both regular and irregular troops. It is perhaps best to start with the observations of Ogier Guislen de Busbecq, the Habsburg ambassador to Istanbul in the sixteenth century. In a 1560 report to his superiors, he drew a striking contrast between Habsburg and Ottoman soldiers, remarking,

I tremble when I think of what the future must bring when I compare the Turkish system with our own; one army must prevail and the other be destroyed, for certainly both cannot remain unscathed. On their side are the resources of a mighty empire, strength unimpaired, experience and practice in fighting, a veteran soldiery, habituation to victory, endurance of toil, unity, order, discipline, frugality, and watchfulness. On our side is public poverty, private luxury, impaired strength, broken spirit, lack of endurance and training; the soldiers are insubordinate, the officers avaricious; there is contempt for discipline; licence, recklessness, drunkenness, and debauchery are rife; and, worst of all, the enemy is accustomed to victory, and we to defeat. Can we doubt what the result will be?1

Busbecq indeed represents a generation of sixteenth-century European observers who, if they did not admire Ottoman armies for their prowess, at least strove to warn their countrymen of the danger that these armies posed to Europe. At the core of the Ottoman military establishment was the standing infantry corps, the janissaries, who were recruited from among the Christian population of the empire, converted, and trained in warfare.2 They had proven themselves in suc-

---

2 On the janissaries (*yeniçeri*), see Rhoads Murphey, “Yeni Çeri,” *EI*; Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, 76–85; idem, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300–1600,” in Inalcik with Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History*, 88–93; Ismail