FROM VILLAGE BOY TO JANISSARY

For about 300 years, from the late 1300s, the sultans filled their army and government with boys taken from Christian families. This was the devshirme, the “gathering.” It was forced: families could not refuse, and the boys were made Muslims. Read each step, then put the steps in order.

1



Officials come to the village

Every few years the sultan’s officials rode into Christian villages, mostly in the Balkans. Fathers had to bring all their sons of the right age before them. Families could not refuse.

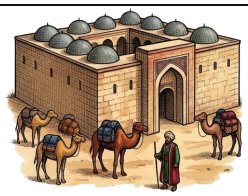
2



Boys are chosen

The officials chose strong, healthy, able boys of about 8 to 18, usually not more than one from a family. Each boy’s name, village and looks were written down so he could not be swapped.

3



The march to Istanbul

Guarded groups of boys walked to Istanbul, sometimes for weeks. There they were counted, examined and made Muslims. From now on they legally belonged to the sultan.

4



Learning Turkish on a farm

Most boys were sent to live with Turkish farm families in Anatolia for several years. They worked the land and learned the Turkish language and the customs of Islam.

5



Sorted for the palace or the army

After the farm years the boys were sorted. A few of the most able went to the palace school in Topkapi to study the Quran, languages, law and mathematics; some later became governors and grand viziers. The rest became cadets.

6



Training as janissaries

The cadets trained for years, then joined the janissaries: paid foot soldiers with guns and uniforms. They lived in barracks and, at first, were not allowed to marry.

7



Servants of the sultan

Cut off from their families, they had only the sultan to serve, which made them loyal to him. The devshirme was used less and less in the 1600s and ended in the early 1700s.