

Who is the lawful heir?: Anton Çelebi's trans-imperial inheritance case between Florence and Istanbul

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Recent scholarship has revealed strong commercial, diplomatic, and architectural connections established across the Mediterranean. This study aims at bringing forward the discussion of legal connections established in the Mediterranean world as a result of these links. It focuses on the inheritance case of Anton Çelebi, an Orthodox Armenian merchant who was born in Bursa. Upon his brother Hasan Ağa's execution in the Çınar incident, Anton Çelebi fled to Livorno, converted to Catholicism, and engaged in a significant level of commercial activity. Dying intestate and without children in Livorno, Anton Çelebi left a huge estate, which led to a complicated series of court cases between his "potential" heirs from Istanbul. The connections Anton established between the Italian states and the Ottoman world through his trade activities during his lifetime remained alive after his death through these court cases over his inheritance. Based on these court records, this study demonstrates how complicated trans-imperial legal matters in the pre-modern period could get, both for institutions and people: the court in Florence had to send its officials to Istanbul to collect evidence relating to the heirs, and the potential heirs had to travel all the way to Florence to demand their shares from Anton's estate. This paper also demonstrates the extent to which Ottoman subjects knew about the complicated legal procedures and inheritance laws in Italian cities on the one hand, and how familiar the court in Florence was with family laws and the family dynamics of Ottoman Armenians on the other.