

A Global-Microhistorical Study of the 17th-Century Mediterranean World: The Armenian Brothers, Hasan Agha and Anton Çelebi

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This panel aims to contribute to the growing field of global-micro history in the early modern Ottoman context. It focuses on the extraordinary story of two brothers, Hasan Agha and Anton (Bogos) Çelebi, who were born in Bursa into an Orthodox-Armenian family in the early seventeenth century. The brothers followed different paths to reach the high echelons of Ottoman administration: Hasan converted to Islam and became the Istanbul customs officer (gümrük emini), whereas Anton served as the customs officer of Izmir and the customs officer of the silk trade in Bursa until his brother Hasan's execution in the Çınar incident (1656). Anton fled to Livorno, converted to Catholicism, developed close relations with the Medici family, and governed the city for a while as the gonfalonier (standard-bearer). Although they followed different directions, Hasan helped his brother's rise in his offices in Izmir and Bursa and eventually they both became significant economic and political actors and wealthy merchants in the large trade networks from London to Isfahan. Hasan and Anton's multilayered commercial networks, bureaucratic careers, and flexible identities present us with a rare opportunity to connect individual stories to larger phenomena in the pre-modern period. Through their individual cases of social advancement, identity formation, and legal, intellectual, and commercial networks, this panel discusses some local and trans-imperial conjunctures based on a large set of primary sources collected from archives in Turkey and Italy. Individual contributors to this panel investigate the porous borders of the Mediterranean in terms of family structures and cultural identities by focusing on the two brothers; the role Hasan Ağa played as a financier in the largely monetarized structure of the seventeenth-century Ottoman state; Anton Çelebi's relations with the Medici family and his cross-cultural activities that formed commercial and intellectual networks between the Ottoman and Italian worlds; and legal connections between these two worlds established through Anton's intricate inheritance case.