

## **The Only Free People in The Empire**

A comparative analysis of the depictions and descriptions of Turkish and European women in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*

Freya Westerback

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Handledare: Holger Weiss

Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi

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Abstract for Master's thesis

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Author: Freya Westerback	
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Supervisor: Holger Weiss	
<p>Abstract: On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 1716, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu departed from England with her husband on the start of the two-year journey to and from the Ottoman Empire; a journey recorded in the letter collection titled <i>The Turkish Embassy Letters</i>. This letter collection has become well-known due to Lady Mary's challenging of English Orientalist stereotypes and her descriptions of the women she met. As a woman, Lady Mary was permitted entry into the harems and the lives of women within the Ottoman Empire, which had been inaccessible to previous male travel writers.</p> <p>This thesis uses this letter collection to answer the question of how and what Lady Mary wrote about the Turkish women she met, contextualising these opinions by comparing them to her descriptions of the European women she wrote about and the Orientalist depictions of Turkish women that were common in England at the time. Beyond this, this thesis also discusses whether an evolution in opinion is visible in the letters and if Lady Mary's thoughts of the Ottoman Empire and its women changed at all during her time spent there. The thesis uses microhistory and gender history as the theoretical approaches in order to achieve a focused analysis of Lady Mary's experiences as a woman, as opposed to a generalised analysis of female travel writers or depictions of Turkish women. The letters cover a variety of themes, including the upper classes, the customs and laws that dictated women's lives, and the freedoms women held that had previously been ignored by male travel writers. This variation in themes and Lady Mary's comparative approach to the letters contribute to a thorough and multifaceted analysis of her experiences within the Turkish harems.</p> <p>The conclusion of this thesis is that, while Lady Mary's self-aware nature and overtly positive descriptions of the women in the Ottoman Empire suggest an authentic and favourable view on the position of Turkish women, closer analysis of the language used and the topics discussed suggest an underlying cultural bias rooted in Orientalism. While there was little change in the tone used in <i>The Turkish Embassy Letters</i>, Lady Mary's thoughts on customs regarding pregnancy show a notable shift in tone and opinion that can be linked to a shift from observer to participant. Lady Mary frequently chose when to play the English observer standing on the sidelines and when to don the Turkish dress and attempt to experience the Ottoman Empire with the anonymity of the veil. When Lady Mary was forced to adhere to Turkish customs she did not agree with and forced into the role of a participant in Turkish culture, her opinion shifted from positive, to neutral, to noticeably negative.</p>	
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## 1. Introduction

Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire. The very Divan<sup>1</sup> pays respect to them and the Grand Signior<sup>2</sup> himself, when a pasha<sup>3</sup> is executed, never violates the privileges of the harem (or womens apartment) which remains unsearched entire to the widow. They are queens of their slaves, which the husband has no permission so much as to look upon, except it be an old woman or two that his lady chooses. 'Tis true, their law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it.<sup>4</sup>

In 1716, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu travelled to the Ottoman Empire with her husband Sir Edward Wortley Montagu, who had been appointed as the English ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the journey there and for the duration of her time in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary documented what she witnessed and experienced in letters to her friends and acquaintances. Lady Mary wrote about the cities she visited and the people she met and associated with.<sup>5</sup> A notable focus of her letters was the women she met while travelling. Lady Mary's descriptions of the women she encountered are the focus for this thesis. As a woman, Lady Mary was able to experience the Ottoman Empire and the women living there in a way that was largely unprecedented and offers a woman's perspective on the lives women lead.

This thesis takes Lady Mary's unprecedented perspective on the Ottoman Empire and contextualises it within her own letters in order to understand whether Lady Mary's thoughts regarding Turkish women were unusual or merely reflected the same common patterns she used when describing women in any context. When it comes to a woman's perspective on history, especially in regard to a gendered side of history, there is a tendency to force modern ideals on these letters as either context for the analysis or a mental framework used to evaluate the implications of what was written. *The Turkish Embassy Letters* are often judged from a feminist perspective, pitting her views against the views expressed by men in order to determine whether she could be considered a feminist writer or if she simply reflected previous

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<sup>1</sup> Divan: A council or imperial council.

<sup>2</sup> Grand Signior: The sultan.

<sup>3</sup> Pasha: Highest dignitaries and governors.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Wortley Montagu, "Letter XXX," in Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 72.

<sup>5</sup> Anita Desai, "Introduction," in Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, xv.

patriarchal patterns.<sup>6</sup> Contextualising her thoughts in this way enables a study of whether her views on Turkish women were formed differently, allowing for insight into the way Lady Mary's context shaped her views of the new world she encountered in 1717.

### **1.1 Purpose and Research Question**

The primary purpose of this thesis is to study the mentions of women in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, which she wrote during her travels to and from the Ottoman Empire in 1716–1718.<sup>7</sup> Moreso, the purpose is to contextualise the opinions Lady Mary expressed about the women in the Ottoman Empire by comparing and contrasting said opinions with those expressed about women in England and in Europe. This subsequently contextualises her comments, not only in a broader historical perspective, but also within the scope of her own individual perspective and ideals. The main research question this thesis aims to answer is what and how Lady Mary wrote about the women she encountered during this trip, with a focus on the portrayal of Turkish women. The thesis discusses how she wrote about the women she met in addition to what she wrote in order to curate a comprehensive summation of her written thoughts and opinions.

In order to further understand Lady Mary's opinions and views on the women she met in the Ottoman Empire, this thesis focuses on comparing the descriptions of Turkish women with those of the European women she encountered in Vienna, for example, in addition to the potential changes in her opinions over the course of the visit. Her journey through Europe meant that Lady Mary met women whose habits and ways of life also differed from those she was used to, though not perhaps to the same degree as in the Ottoman Empire. This thesis also compares what Lady Mary wrote about the women in the Ottoman Empire with the women in Europe in order to see if an evolution occurred in conjunction with her time in the Ottoman Empire. By doing this, I aim to ascertain how Lady Mary's views on Turkish women are reflected in the contents of her letter collection and how her thoughts regarding women developed and changed during her travels and her interactions with women along the way.

Despite a reasonably large amount of previous research conducted on the contents of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, there is a lack of research asking the questions posed in this thesis.

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<sup>6</sup> Teresa Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's 'Turkish Embassy Letters,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000), 210.

<sup>7</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xv.

The gender perspective is a prevalent starting point for many research articles regarding the letters but there are few articles that use a comparative approach when analysing the contents of the letter. A majority of the articles that do use a comparative approach compare the contents of Lady Mary's letters with that which earlier male travel writers wrote about women in the Ottoman Empire. As such, the comparisons are made between *The Turkish Embassy Letters* and other sources, instead of being limited to letters within the collection. Instead of comparing that which Lady Mary has written about women with that which other women or, more frequently, men have written, I compare Lady Mary's letters in various stages of the journey with each other to establish if there is an evolution in her perspective and way of thinking. This contextualises her thoughts within her own unique perspective. My purpose in this thesis is not to figure out whether her opinions were abnormal for this time, as there exists little source material one could compare her with, but instead to come to a conclusion as to whether her views on the Ottoman Empire and Turkish women were different from her opinions on European women.

## 1.2 Source Material

The primary source material for this thesis is a letter collection titled *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. The collection is comprised of 58 letters written in 1716–1718. Of the 58 letters, 27 of the letters were written while Lady Mary was in the Ottoman Empire, while the remaining 31 letters were written during the journeys to and from the Ottoman Empire. The versions of letters used for this thesis have been transcribed and edited from the collection *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* which was published in 1965 by Robert Halsband.<sup>8</sup> Certain changes have been made in this collection to modernise the spelling of outdated words and places.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, some small grammatical changes have been made to aid the modern reader when reading the collection. The changes made are, however, small and do not alter the content of the letters or that which Lady Mary aimed to convey to her readers. These changes subsequently do not impact the analysis of the contents because the spelling and grammar have only been modernised while the content has been left unaltered.

The letters were written to several different people, predominantly friends and other acquaintances of Lady Mary. The letters were private which means that the language used is

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<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Jack, "Notes," in Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xxxviii.

less formal than an official letter.<sup>10</sup> This implies that the content is less censored than if they had been written with the intention of being published. However, it is important to note that the letters have an interesting history regarding publication. Lady Mary edited the collection and created copies of them despite refusing to have them published in her lifetime. Instead, she gave them to the Reverend Snowdon to later be published. Despite attempts made by Lady Mary's daughter to prevent publication by purchasing the collection, it was later published without her permission in 1763.<sup>11</sup> As such, it is difficult to determine a clear intended audience for the letters as they were initially meant to be private but were later edited with a broader audience and publication in mind. In addition to this, Lady Mary wrote her letters with the intention of challenging stereotypes regarding women in the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman Empire in general that had previously been established by male writers and travellers, intending instead to create a more authentic and correct representation.<sup>12</sup> In this thesis, I interpret the intended audience as being the original addressees of the letters, so I interpret the letters as being private, despite the later edits made.

The source presents a clear limitation in its contents which naturally informs the scope of this thesis. The letter collection covers the time period 1716–1718 and, subsequently, this will be the time period this thesis covers. As such, the source material is limited to *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, excluding other letters written by Lady Mary at other points in her life. Additionally, this thesis discusses Lady Mary's opinions and thoughts regarding women, not women and their position in general. This entails that, while popular stereotypes and ideas regarding women both in Europe and the Ottoman Empire from this time period are not analysed, they are included for the purpose of providing context and background for Lady Mary's thoughts.

### 1.3 Prior Research

Robert Halsband appears frequently when researching Lady Mary and *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. This is largely due to Halsband being the biographer who transcribed and edited the

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<sup>10</sup> Ambereen Dadabhoy, ““Going Native”: Geography, Gender, and Identity in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters,” in *Gender and Space in British Literature, 1660–1820*, eds. Mona Narain and Karen Gevirtz (London: Routledge, 2014), 50.

<sup>11</sup> Desai, “Introduction,” XXV.

<sup>12</sup> Precious MacKenzie, “A Protestant in Foreign Catholic and Muslim Spaces: The Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu” in *Travel, Discovery, Transformation: Culture & Civilization*, ed. Gabriel R. Ricci. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 85–86.

version of the collection that many later works, including the version of *The Turkish Embassy Letters* used for this essay, are based on. Halsband also wrote a biography of Lady Mary, titled *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*.<sup>13</sup> In the biography, Halsband provides a detailed account of Lady Mary's life which provides important context for the content of the letter collection and the following analysis. It also provides background for Lady Mary's upbringing and her life prior to her trip to the Ottoman Empire

There is a reasonable amount of research that has been done regarding *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. This is largely due to the collection being regarded as one of the earlier examples of female travel writing. Additionally, a large amount of said research discusses what was written regarding women. The article "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy Letters: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism" is an adequate introduction and overview of the various angles and perspectives other researchers have used when researching and analysing *The Turkish Embassy Letters*.<sup>14</sup> The article discusses how previous research has been conducted and continues on to introduce new ways to research the letter collection. Hall discusses the main angles used to analyse the collection, those being religion, politics, science, and gender.<sup>15</sup> Despite there being several angles from which one can analyse the collection, the gender perspective is often a prominent factor that is brought up even when not the focus. For example, when research focuses on the religious aspect, it often focuses on what Lady Mary wrote about how the women in the Ottoman Empire practiced their religion, i.e. Islam.<sup>16</sup> The article also discusses how the different perspectives on the broader themes often have the same narrow starting point. For example, a lot of the discussions regarding how Lady Mary wrote about women focus mainly on descriptions of a Turkish Bathhouse she visited.<sup>17</sup>

Much of the previous research has been centred on what Lady Mary meant when she criticised that which men had written about women in the Ottoman Empire. The article "A Protestant in Foreign Catholic and Muslim Spaces: The Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu" discusses the context behind the letters extensively with a focus on the

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Halsband, *The Life of Mary Wortley Montagu* (London : Clarendon Press, 1956).

<sup>14</sup> Jordan Hall, Anna K. Sagal and Elizabeth Zold, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy Letters: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism," *Literature Compass* 4, no. 10 (2017), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Hall, Sagal, and Zold, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy Letters: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism," 1.

<sup>16</sup> Hall, Sagal, and Zold, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy Letters: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism," 2.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, Sagal, and Zold, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy Letters: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism," 4.



religious aspects that influenced her perspective.<sup>18</sup> Beyond this, the article discusses how the letters in the collection create a chronological entirety which impacts the reader's interpretation of the cultures and, in turn, the people she described. MacKenzie explains how Lady Mary criticised the descriptions and the perceptions of the women in the Ottoman Empire that had previously been presented and promoted by male travel writers. An example of this is how Lady Mary challenged the existing stereotype that women in the Ottoman Empire were only slaves and concubines.<sup>19</sup>

In the book *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient in Eighteenth Century English Literature: Ottoman Society and Culture in Pseudo-Oriental Letters, Oriental Tales and Travel Literature*, Baktir compares that which Lady Mary wrote with that which others have written regarding the representation of the Ottoman Empire in travel writings during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> The article touches on how Lady Mary's descriptions of the Ottoman Empire were received and offers contextual background for her life and education.<sup>21</sup> The book is relevant to this thesis due to its contextualisation of Lady Mary's critiques and corrections regarding prior depictions of women in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup> The book also discusses the existing stereotypes regarding everyday life in the Ottoman Empire that Lady Mary responded to and, in several cases, corrected. This in turn provides context for how Lady Mary perceived the everyday life from her perspective as a foreigner in addition to the generalised idea of everyday life in the Ottoman Empire that the English held at the time.<sup>23</sup> Baktir also discusses whether Lady Mary's perspective as a woman contributed to a significantly different or, as Lady Mary occasionally claimed, improved description of the Ottoman Empire. In order to achieve this, Baktir analyses her letters with a focus on the female perspective.<sup>24</sup> Baktir also provides context for how the Ottoman Empire was viewed in England and how Orientalism was visible in the English everyday life, for example in Turkish influences on fashion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> MacKenzie, "A Protestant in Foreign Catholic and Muslim Spaces: The Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu."

<sup>19</sup> MacKenzie "A Protestant in Foreign Catholic and Muslim Spaces: The Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu," 85–86.

<sup>20</sup> Hasan Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient in Eighteenth Century English Literature: Ottoman Society and Culture in Pseudo-Oriental Letters, Oriental Tales and Travel Literature* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2014,) 156–173.

<sup>21</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 157.

<sup>22</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 158–159.

<sup>23</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 161.

<sup>24</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 161–162.

<sup>25</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 164.

The article “English Women in Oriental Dress: Playing the Turk in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana*” discusses how clothing impacted the English views on women in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>26</sup> Scholz analyses and discusses Lady Mary’s depictions and descriptions of how women dressed and how her background impacted these descriptions. For example, Scholz discusses how Lady Mary’s clothing opinions were built on a societal construct in which clothing was a way to affect how one was perceived by others. Clothing was intended to create a certain outward projection of propriety, position and or power. Scholz goes on to add how clothing contributes to the perception of “self” and “other” which in its turn contributes to an establishing of “oriental others.”<sup>27</sup>

Scholz’s article also provides insight into how others viewed Lady Mary. While the article builds many of its arguments on the letters written by Lady Mary, it also builds on that which Joseph Spencer wrote about Lady Mary and her letters from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>28</sup> Scholz uses clothing as a starting point from which to analyse women and their depictions. Despite this, the article provides an interesting angle and analytical perspective for this thesis in addition to context regarding what and how Lady Mary wrote about women and their clothing. Scholz also compares Lady Mary’s letters with the novel *Roxana* by Daniel Defoe. While this article compares two different sources, one of which is fictional, it still provides an insight into how one can approach a comparative analysis of Lady Mary’s *Turkish Embassy Letters*.<sup>29</sup>

In the article “Feminism Against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary’s *Turkish Embassy Letters*,” Teresa Heffernan discusses questions regarding whether Lady Mary’s letters can be considered feministic or not.<sup>30</sup> Heffernan’s main argument revolves around the connection between modernity and religion or tradition which is frequently brought up when discussing the religious practice of veiling; a subject Lady Mary also described in her letters. The articles main argument claims that Lady Mary’s accounts of women who wear the veils free them from a role in which they exemplify the difference between modernity and religion or tradition.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Susanne Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress: Playing the Turk in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana*,” in *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East : Performing Cultures*, eds. Sabine Schülting, Sabine Lucia Müller, and Ralf Hertel (London: Ashgate, 2012), 85–98.

<sup>27</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 86.

<sup>28</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 85.

<sup>29</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 98.

<sup>30</sup> Heffernan, “Feminism against the East/West Divide,” 202.

<sup>31</sup> Heffernan, “Feminism against the East/West Divide,” 203.

Heffernan discusses the connections between feminism and Orientalism in conjunction with how it appears and is reflected in Lady Mary's letter collection.<sup>32</sup> The article discusses how women in the orient, for example the Ottoman Empire, were used as a symbol or tool with which early English feminists could express their frustrations with their own treatment and position in society.<sup>33</sup>

The article is thought-provoking in that it discusses the difference between feminism within different religions and establishes a method with which one can discuss feminism in a time period within which it is complicated to use the term feminism.<sup>34</sup> Heffernan discusses how Lady Mary's questioning of the ways Turkish women had previously been depicted had already begun to bridge the divide between modernity and religion by questioning the sexualised idea of the Turkish woman that already existed in England at the time.<sup>35</sup> The article is relevant for this thesis due to its discussions of women from a feminist perspective and the questioning of the extent to which one can call Lady Mary and her views feministic.<sup>36</sup> Heffernan claims that Lady Mary created an unprecedented opening for feminism and complicated the idea of a strict schism between modernity and religion while also highlighting the limitations that exist when using the term "feminism" in a historical context. For example, Heffernan describes how Lady Mary was classist in her views of people and that she bears an unwillingness to associate with certain groups of women who were seen as lesser, such as women from North Africa.<sup>37</sup>

In the book *Gender and space in British literature, 1660–1820*, the chapter "'Going Native': Geography, Gender, and Identity in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*" by Ambereen Dadabhoy provides interesting insight into the ways in which one can study Lady Mary's sense of identity and femininity while in the Ottoman Empire through *The Turkish Embassy Letters*.<sup>38</sup> While this chapter does discuss the topic of Lady Mary's attitudes and the ways in which she both integrated herself into and distanced herself from Turkish culture and society, it does not discuss her letters from Europe, meaning that the chapter lacks the comparative angle used in this thesis. Dadabhoy also discusses both how Lady Mary engaged in Orientalist norms and how modern researchers have interpreted orientalism in the

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<sup>32</sup> Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 205.

<sup>33</sup> Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 206.

<sup>34</sup> Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 206–207.

<sup>35</sup> Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 207.

<sup>36</sup> Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 210.

<sup>37</sup> Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 213.

<sup>38</sup> Dadabhoy, "'Going Native,'" 49–66.

Turkish Embassy Letters. The goal of focusing on Lady Mary's "going native" leads to a perspective that highlights not only how Lady Mary acted while in the Ottoman Empire but also why she may have made the choices she did make.

While this thesis focuses primarily on the contents of *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, it also focuses on women in the Ottoman Empire. Within this area of research, there are several researchers who have established themselves in this area of historical research and come up frequently in articles on the topic. Madeleine Zilfi has written several works on the positions of women in the Ottoman Empire, two of which have been used in this thesis. The first of the two is *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*.<sup>39</sup> This particular work is an essay collection that focuses on creating a comprehensive overview of how women in the Ottoman Empire lived and how their lives would have appeared. As Zilfi mentions in her introduction, this focus on women in the Ottoman Empire is a relatively new area of study.<sup>40</sup> The essays touch on different topics ranging from the legal standing of women to the ways in which women's movement was limited by religiously informed laws. As such, this work helps to contextualise Lady Mary's observations and highlight areas in which her limited experience may have led to inaccurate conclusions.

The second of Zilfi's works used in this thesis is the book *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire* which discusses the positions of female slaves in Ottoman society in addition to connections between slavery and gender in a broader context.<sup>41</sup> While this book discusses the concept of slavery in a broader sense, the focus is on how slaves existed in the harems and how Islamic laws complicated concepts of hierarchy both within and outside the harems also aid the interpretations of Lady Mary's observations regarding the female slaves she often referred to and mentioned in passing. Beyond that, this book also discusses the ways in which Islamic laws limited the mobility and freedom of women which provides relevant context to Lady Mary's claims about freedom within the Ottoman Empire.

The book *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* by Leslie P. Peirce discusses the political power of the imperial harem, focusing on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Zilfi, *Women in the Ottoman Empire*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

centuries.<sup>42</sup> This book highlights the upper echelons of Turkish society, focusing on the mothers, wives, and daughters of sultans and how the imperial harem as a structure was created and established. The book also discusses the ways in which hierarchy was constructed within the harems in addition to discussing the roles and positions of the wives, concubines, and slaves, in relation to each other. While the book focuses mainly on the topic from a Turkish perspective, it nonetheless provides both interesting and relevant context for the discussion of the harem in this thesis and serves to counter the Orientalist English stereotypes that also feature prominently in Lady Mary's letters in both a cognisant and subconscious manner.

This thesis also uses the works *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women: Establishing Status, Establishing Control* and *The Cambridge History of Turkey*. Vol. 3. by Suraiya Faroqhi to further contextualise the lives of women in the Ottoman Empire. *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women: Establishing Status, Establishing Control* provides interesting context regarding the ways in which status was conveyed and what, exactly, that looked like for Turkish women.<sup>43</sup> This book helps to contextualise, not only the ways in which status was shown and perceived, but also the legal freedoms and rights women had. *The Cambridge History of Turkey*. Vol. 3 is an edited volume containing contributions by several researchers and Faroqhi herself that aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the Ottoman Empire during the time period 1603–1839. This volume covers topics ranging from the political and geological changes of the time to the religious complexities within the region to the position of women in the Ottoman Empire. While the work does not have an explicit focus on women alone, it nonetheless provides a relevant contribution to the topic.<sup>44</sup>

#### **1.4 Theoretical Perspective**

As I am only focusing on that which Lady Mary wrote about women, excluding other women's and other travel writers texts from the same time period, I am using a microhistorical perspective on the subject at hand. This entails that I am studying the subject from a limited perspective by focusing on the experiences and opinions of only one person. For the purposes

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<sup>42</sup> Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi, *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women: Establishing Status, Establishing Control* (Istanbul: Eren, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Suraiya N. Faroqhi, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey*. Vol. 3. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

of this thesis, I am using the definition of microhistory found in the book *What Is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice: Theory and Practice*. This book describes microhistory as being “the intensive historical investigation of a relatively well defined smaller object, most often a single event, or ‘a village community, a group of families, even an individual person.’”<sup>45</sup> The book continues this description, highlighting that the use of microhistory leads to an intensive study of a small area of focus, which in turn leads to a different perspective than if a larger perspective was used.<sup>46</sup>

In this thesis, I focus entirely on Lady Mary’s experience and opinions, providing a more in-depth view than if I had taken accounts from more sources. Microhistory also entails that the narrower perspective is often used to shed light on a larger issue or theme.<sup>47</sup> Again, in this thesis, I use the limited perspective to gain perspective surrounding a broader subject, such as how women wrote about other women during the time period or the English woman’s perspective on women in the Ottoman Empire. As such, my research provides as detailed account of one person’s perspective, which in turn exemplifies a broader topic. Finally, the book defines microhistory as placing a lot of weight on the agency of the individual. In microhistory, the individual person was an active actor who contributed to how historical events played out.<sup>48</sup> This especially holds true as I focus on Lady Mary as an active contributor to her own story and as someone who chose to act as a “truth-teller” of sorts, using her own unique position to challenge the ideas surrounding the Ottoman Empire of the time.

I am also using a female or gender history perspective to study the subject. This is in part due to analysing both what Lady Mary wrote from her perspective as a woman and what she wrote about women. While there are several different methods for studying women’s history, there are also several common threads that lead to a basic uniformity in the reasons why one studies this side of history. While women’s history revolves around a gendered approach to historical study there is also an element of reading beyond the page in order to find out information about those neglected in historical records. An example presented in the chapter “Politics, identification and the writing of women’s history,” is that, by reading about what was

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<sup>45</sup> Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon, et al., *What Is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013).4.

<sup>46</sup> Magnússon, et al., *What Is Microhistory?*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Magnússon, et al., *What Is Microhistory?*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Magnússon, et al., *What Is Microhistory?*, 5.

expected of men, one would extrapolate the expectations placed on women.<sup>49</sup> In this thesis, I make use of both the more blatant approach of studying what Lady Mary explicitly wrote about herself and women as an example of women's history, but also the approach of studying that which she mentions in passing or neglects to mention at all, as it exposes information on what or who was considered worth writing about. It also appears logical to use this theoretical approach as Lady Mary is often considered to be one of the first female travel writers and has frequently been used when studying the early development of popular travel writing.

By using these two theoretical approaches, I am able to create a focussed and narrow analysis of what Lady Mary wrote and how women in the Ottoman Empire were written about in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. By doing this, I highlight, not only the difference between the descriptions of Turkish women and European women, but also how this can be connected to the broader topic of Orientalism and othering, while maintaining Lady Mary's unique perspective throughout.

### **1.5 Methodological Approach**

To first touch upon the methodological approaches used for this thesis, I use a variation of a comparative analytic approach when analysing the source material. In the book *Comparative-Historical Methods*, various comparative approaches are highlighted in regard to comparing statistics, though mainly in the context of using a comparison of several different sources in order to achieve this. However, the book also highlights that comparative methods often entail a combination of several methods in the approach.<sup>50</sup> For the purposes of this essay, I compare what I consider to be the two separate groupings of letters in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, that being the Europe Letters and The Ottoman Empire Letters. In this sense, I have two groups of source material that I directly compare in order to determine the similarities and differences, while also contextualising any changes that may occur in the Ottoman Empire Letter grouping. While this is perhaps not the traditional method of a comparative analysis, it does work for this thesis and the intended analytic goal. I also combine my comparative approach with discourse analysis in order to better analyse what Lady Mary wrote and how that reflected her thoughts. Discourse analysis stems from the understanding that human stories and recollections

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<sup>49</sup> Selma Leydesdorff, "Politics, identification and the writing of women's history," in *Current Issues in Women's History*, eds. Arina Angerman, et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 18.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, 2012), 150.

frequently struggle to maintain objectivity.<sup>51</sup> The area of discourse analysis within historical research emphasises a need for source criticism and the understanding that people's biases and backgrounds influence the manner with which they write.<sup>52</sup> In summary, discourse analysis aims to dismantle the ways the values of the writer, the context in which a source was written, and even the researcher's biases that can influence the reading of a source.<sup>53</sup> Within this thesis, this analytic approach entails reading *The Turkish Embassy Letters* with Lady Mary's background in mind, especially the prevalent Orientalism of the time, while also studying how the way she wrote her letters, such as strongly worded sentences and the use of loaded words, reflects her opinions and values.

The method used for the analysis of the source material is relatively straightforward. I initially read the letter collection in its entirety in order to determine the extent to which Lady Mary wrote about women, and also to ascertain whether it would be possible to answer the research questions based on this source material alone. Following this, I roughly categorised letters and excerpts from letters according to whether they discussed Turkish women or European women, in addition to whether they discussed upper class women or women in general. By doing this, I was able to discern emerging patterns and recurring themes, in addition to topics that would yield a direct comparison. I then proceeded to write this thesis, in which the content of the letters was analysed and compared and the language scrutinised, in order to discuss both what and how Lady Mary wrote about women in different contexts. Additionally, by comparing Lady Mary's thoughts about the Turkish women with her thoughts regarding the European women and that which is known about English women at the time, I am able to contextualise her thoughts, not only within a broader historical perspective but also within her experiences and expectations.

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<sup>51</sup> Caroline Coffin, *Historical Discourse: The Language of Time, Cause and Evaluation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Coffin, *Historical Discourse*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Coffin, *Historical Discourse*, 10.



## 2. Background

In order to understand Lady Mary's ideals and perspectives regarding her descriptions in the *Turkish Embassy Letters*, it is necessary to contextualise them by explaining her history prior to the journey and how her life in England would have shaped her views on the world and the things she found noteworthy while abroad. While there is a common narrative that Lady Mary's opinions were exceptional or abnormal in some way, it is difficult to determine if her friends and acquaintances held similar beliefs due to a lack of sources and information on said ladies. However, the relevance of Lady Mary's background and the context in which she grew up and lived cannot be overlooked and are extremely relevant to this thesis

### 2.1 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was born on the 26th of May in 1689 as Mary Pierrepont. When her father became the Earl of Kingston in 1690, she became entitled to the title Lady Mary Pierrepont.<sup>54</sup> Records indicate that Lady Mary was a well-read lady with a great interest in both language and literature.<sup>55</sup> By age 15, she was proficient in English and French, while also having taught herself Latin. Later on in her teens, she was taught Italian.<sup>56</sup> This proficiency with languages continued into adulthood, as seen in the Ottoman Empire, where Lady Mary studied Turkish and Turkish poetry, as mentioned in her letters.<sup>57</sup>

Following a long and complicated courtship and marriage negotiation, Lady Mary was promised to the Honourable Clotworthy Skeffington.<sup>58</sup> Lady Mary objected to this match as she claimed she did not love him, though this bore little weight as love was not considered a necessity for marriage among the upper classes.<sup>59</sup> Lady Mary eloped in 1712 and married Edward Wortley Montagu in Salisbury on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, four years prior to her visit to the Ottoman Empire, becoming Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.<sup>60</sup> Letters written by her following the marriage indicate feelings of neglect and a distance between Lady Mary and her

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<sup>54</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Desai, "Introduction," ix.

<sup>56</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 6–7.

<sup>57</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 82.

<sup>58</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 24.

<sup>60</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xiii.

husband.<sup>61</sup> Wortley was eleven years older than her, though again, this was not considered abnormal for the time or a cause for the feelings she expressed.<sup>62</sup>

Following encouragement from Lady Mary, Wortley stood for election to parliament following the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and he subsequently won the seat for the City of Westminster.<sup>63</sup> This permitted Lady Mary a place in the court of King George I and allowed her to associate with the upper echelons of English society. While Lady Mary was not impressed with the king, she nonetheless managed to ingratiate herself to him, learning German in the process and befriending the King's mistresses.<sup>64</sup> While at Court, she befriended several men and women who would become known friends of hers and would have letters in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* addressed to them, such as Alexander Pope, an English poet, and the Abbé Conti, an Italian savant, philosopher, and poet.<sup>65</sup>

Lady Mary became ill with Smallpox in 1715 and, though she recovered, was scarred by the disease, reportedly losing her eyelashes and having her skin permanently pitted.<sup>66</sup> Her friends' reactions to this disfigurement exemplified attitudes of the time and the fixation on beauty. While certain friends claimed that other features, such as her eyes, would draw attention away from the scars, others were crueller.<sup>67</sup> This did not, however, damage her position at Court and instead changed her reputation from her being a beauty to being witty.<sup>68</sup>

Wortley was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary to the Ottoman Empire in 1716.<sup>69</sup> In addition to his duties as ambassador, he was also supposed to represent the interests of the Levant Company which was the main holder of the charter for trade in the "Near East." This type of appointment would usually have been intended to last for five years and could extend to 10–15 years in some cases; however, Lady Mary expressed enthusiasm at the prospect. She left England accompanied by her husband on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August in 1716 heading first for Holland.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xiii–xiv.

<sup>62</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xiv.

<sup>64</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 46.

<sup>65</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 51.

<sup>67</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 52.

<sup>68</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 53.

<sup>69</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 55.

<sup>70</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xv.

Wortley was sent with the purpose of accomplishing the diplomatic task of offering England's service as a mediator to help achieve a truce between the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire, who were at war at the time. This diplomatic situation was further complicated by a treaty held between Austria and Venice in which Austria committed to aid Venice. England's interest in this dispute was due to its need for Austrian support in countering Spanish power in the Mediterranean. This is in large part responsible for the route they took on their journey to the Ottoman Empire, as Wortley had other tasks aside from a simple appointment as ambassador.<sup>71</sup> In her letters, Lady Mary made little mention about her husband's roles, indicating either her exclusion from his official activities or a diplomatic discretion on political matters.<sup>72</sup>

As their journey was of a diplomatic nature and due to the letters written, it is easy to trace the route Lady Mary's journey took. They first travelled to Holland, before continuing on to Cologne. Following this, Lady Mary travelled to Vienna, visiting Nuremberg and Ratisbon on the way there.<sup>73</sup> They stayed in Vienna for two months while Wortley attempted to bring about a peace treaty between Vienna and the Ottoman Empire, who were also at war.<sup>74</sup> They then visited Prague, Saxony, and Leipzig before arriving in Hanover.<sup>75</sup> Following this, they travelled to Peterwardein, which was the last Imperial outpost prior to entry into Turkish territory. Subsequently, they were given an imperial escort of 100 musketeers, 50 grenadier and 50 hussars as an escort to Betsko following which they were escorted to Belgrade by a Turkish guard of 130 horsemen as an escort.<sup>76</sup> After approximately three weeks in Belgrade, they continued on to Adrianople via Sophia.<sup>77</sup>

Wortley managed to negotiate terms in which the Turks would stop fighting if the city of Temeswar was returned to them, which he sent to Vienna and England.<sup>78</sup> Following this, they travelled to Constantinople.<sup>79</sup> Vienna rejected these terms strongly. The public view in Europe was that his role was to convince the Ottoman Empire to sign a truce, not advocate on their behalf. Following a campaign by the English ambassador to Vienna, Wortley was recalled in

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<sup>71</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xvi.

<sup>72</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xvi.

<sup>73</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 59–60.

<sup>74</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 61.

<sup>75</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 64–65.

<sup>76</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xvi–xvii.

<sup>77</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 68.

<sup>78</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 72.

<sup>79</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 73.

September of 1717.<sup>80</sup> Lady Mary expressed a reluctance to leave the Ottoman Empire in her letters but they were required to leave regardless.<sup>81</sup> On the way home, they travelled by boat through the Aegean sea. They arrived in Genoa before travelling through the Alpine passes to Paris, Calais, and finally across the English channel.<sup>82</sup>

## 2.2 Orientalist Stereotypes and the Reality of the Harem

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Orient was used to refer to the Ottoman Empire and the Levant.<sup>83</sup> English travels to the Ottoman Empire started around the 16<sup>th</sup> century and continued until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>84</sup> The main lasting contact between England and the Ottoman Empire occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a military cooperation to counter Catholic Spain and the Spanish armada.<sup>85</sup> Orientalism, as both a patriarchal tool and a narrative framework, shaped the English population's understanding of the Ottoman Empire and the women who lived there. A majority of English knowledge of the Orient and, specifically, the Ottoman Empire came from secondary sources and revolved around a habit of citing other writer's works as factual, despite them having had no way to perceive that which they wrote about or having based their works in Orientalist stereotypes themselves.<sup>86</sup> Research done regarding the Orientalist depictions of the Ottoman Empire is inherently forced into the area of discourse analysis as many of the stories and stereotypes told were embellished and even made up in order to present a certain depiction to the English public.<sup>87</sup> The English perception of the Orient hinged on the difference between the civilised, modern, rational, and free image of England and the backward, religious, sexualised, and despotic image of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>88</sup> The Ottoman Empire quickly became an example of what English should strive to avoid.<sup>89</sup> Research often roots these perceptions of the Ottoman Empire in the increasing imperialism of England coupled with the pre-existing

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<sup>80</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xvii.

<sup>81</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 87.

<sup>82</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xvii–xviii.

<sup>83</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 4–5.

<sup>86</sup> Dadabhoy, "“Going Native,”" 50.

<sup>87</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 3.

<sup>88</sup> Teresa, Heffernan, *Veiled Figures: Women, Modernity, and the Spectres of Orientalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 8.

<sup>89</sup> Anna Secor, "Orientalism, gender and class in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish Embassy Letters: To persons of distinction, men of letters etc.," *Ecumene* 6, no. 4 (1999), 383.

power of the Ottoman Empire. Following a shift in global power dynamics following the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, these images, particularly that of the veiled woman started to emerge<sup>90</sup>

Though the English public did not view the Ottoman Empire as an unknown realm, that which they did know was often faulty or biased.<sup>91</sup> One of the most prominent features of Orientalist imagery was the sex-segregated harem, which was highly sexualised in England as a concept, despite lacking knowledge surrounding the subject.<sup>92</sup> The main aspect of the harems that caught the interest of Orientalist imagery was the seclusion from the male gaze. This imagery served to show the English how the women in the Ottoman Empire were imprisoned by the men while simultaneously creating a space inherently inferior to the English and their customs and laws.<sup>93</sup> The harem became synonymous with the Turkish women and was extremely feminised and sexualised, with strong allusions to a homoerotic nature of the space.<sup>94</sup> Many of the Orientalist stereotypes also hinged on the male fantasies of the Orient, specifically the supposed overt sexuality attributed to the seclusion of the harem.<sup>95</sup>

Beyond the sexualised view of the harem from male writers, female views tended to lean more towards the lack of education provided for women.<sup>96</sup> Moreso, the existing stereotypes of the highly-sexualised Turkish women allowed Englishwomen to move the stereotype of women as sexual creatures onto Muslim women, leaning on the Englishmen's perceived superiority in order to push towards an improvement in their own positions in society as a result.<sup>97</sup> By doing this, women were able to shift their criticisms of their own treatment onto Islam.<sup>98</sup> These stereotypes and misconceptions have led to the belief that it is impossible to close the distance between Orientalist imaginings and the Turkish women's reality.<sup>99</sup> Even modern portrayals of the veiled woman have hinged on the simultaneous image of a hidden yet sexual figure, kept locked away from public life.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 8–9.

<sup>91</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,” 50.

<sup>93</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,” 53.

<sup>94</sup> Secor, “Orientalism, gender and class,” 390.

<sup>95</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 19.

<sup>96</sup> Samara Anne Cahill, *Intelligent Souls?: Feminist Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2019), 199.

<sup>97</sup> Cahill, *Intelligent Souls?*, 199.

<sup>98</sup> Cahill, *Intelligent Souls?*, 54.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>100</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 1.

The Turkish reality of the harem stemmed from a perceived necessity to protect women's bodies and limit their mobility which was transformed into various institutions and physical buildings designed to fulfil this purpose.<sup>101</sup> The harems were also an avenue for status signalling as the possession of a large household with numerous wives or concubines was considered a sign of sultanic favour.<sup>102</sup> The position of women in Turkish society was inexorably determined by what the men who ruled this society allowed them to do.<sup>103</sup> Women were considered dependent and lesser than men, which was used as justification for the limitations placed on them.<sup>104</sup> Female subordination was an institutionalised concept that relied on gendered segregation, the hiding of women's bodies, and the exclusion of women from public life, which mainly effected young women of a marriageable age.<sup>105</sup>

Women within the harem were arranged in a hierarchy.<sup>106</sup> One's position within the harem would depend largely on one's relation to a man, with legal wives and favourite concubines holding a higher position within the harem than even sisters and aunts housed in the harem.<sup>107</sup> Beyond the upper class women within the harem, there were also the servants and slaves who were given the role of caring for the women.<sup>108</sup> Hierarchy was influenced by social class, one's position within the extended family, and general rank or role within the harem. Other influencing factors were age, time spent within the harem, and title.<sup>109</sup> This hierarchy of the harem commonly benefitted women who had either born several children or had come into advanced age, with the marriage of their children lending them an even greater patriarchal advantage in terms of their societal position and prestige.<sup>110</sup> The senior women of the harem were able to benefit off of the system, with their seniority allowing them to dictate the lives of younger women and servants and slaves. However, while seniority did lend a degree of authority, the majority of their authority stemmed from the power held by the men they were connected to an associated with.<sup>111</sup> Beyond being a home for the members of the family, the harem would also often function as a training ground for concubines, slaves, and other women

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<sup>101</sup> Dadabhoy, "“Going Native,” 53.

<sup>102</sup> Faroqhi, *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women*, 17.

<sup>103</sup> Faroqhi, *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women*, 24.

<sup>104</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 16.

<sup>105</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 17.

<sup>106</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 125.

<sup>107</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 127.

<sup>108</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 132.

<sup>109</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 170.

<sup>110</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 18.

<sup>111</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 18.

expected to become suitable wives for high-ranking men.<sup>112</sup> Women were taught to sew and embroider and to play instruments and sing. Beyond this, they were also trained how to follow the ceremonies and customs that ruled the lives of the Turkish nobility.<sup>113</sup> Slaves of the harem were considered to reflect on their mistresses and were invested in in order to present as good an image as possible. Slaves were expected to move beyond their origins and potentially be wed to other elites.<sup>114</sup>

Women, despite their positions as nobility, were frequently confined to the harem, permitted only to leave under supervision and guard.<sup>115</sup> When they were allowed to leave, there was a fear that they would be behaving immorally. Women's physical mobility was heavily associated with possible affairs and lovers and the further a woman was from guards, for example during picnics and similar excursions, the less control and surveillance was in place to prevent this.<sup>116</sup> Adultery, though punishable by death was usually settled privately or with court-ordered fines due to difficulties in providing evidence of crime committed.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 139.

<sup>113</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 141.

<sup>114</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 168.

<sup>115</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 143.

<sup>116</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 55.

<sup>117</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 71.

### **3. Highborn Women**

As an English Lady and the wife of an English ambassador, Lady Mary was in a position to associate with the nobility and upper classes of the countries and cities she visited. While this does contribute to a lack of mentions of the lower classes, it also leads to a strong focus on only the upper echelons of society. Additionally, as a woman, Lady Mary was excluded from Turkish Court life while facing no such restrictions in the European courts.<sup>118</sup> Due to this, the comparisons between European and Turkish women involve comparisons between the women of the European courts and the women of the Turkish harems. While this does not impact the analysis any more than the different contexts already do, it is nonetheless important to remember the differences between being European and Turkish nobility. This chapter focuses on discussions of women within the context of the upper classes and nobility. The sections within this chapter discuss a variety of themes, ranging from a more generalised discussion on the ways Lady Mary described the women at court to a more focused analysis on how Lady Mary described the highest-ranking women she was permitted to meet and what similarities and differences existed between the Turkish nobility and European nobility. Beyond this, there are also sections discussing other aspects of court life for women, such as the clothes and other adornments worn and the spaces women were confined to or carved out for themselves in society. Finally, this section discusses how Orientalism and the implicit sexualisation of the Turkish ladies is visible in the letters, especially when comparisons are drawn with descriptions of the European ladies.

#### **3.1 The Women of the Court**

As an English “ambadress,” Lady Mary was able to visit and observe many spaces and events reserved for the ladies of society. While in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary made frequent comparisons to the ladies of the English court or, in some cases, women of any European court. A notable example of this occurs when Lady Mary visited a bagnio<sup>119</sup> in Sophia, a town in the Ottoman Empire. Describing her arrival at the bagnio, Lady Mary wrote “I know no European court where the ladies would have behaved themselves in so polite a manner to a stranger.”<sup>120</sup> In the same letter, Lady Mary explained the differences she referred

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<sup>118</sup> Desai, “Introduction,” xxvii.

<sup>119</sup> Bagnio: Bath house.

<sup>120</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 58.



to, discussing an absence of “d disdainful smiles and satirical whispers” that she claimed were a permanent fixture of English court life. Lady Mary discussed these features in reference to her travelling habit being an unfamiliar way of dressing to the women in the bagnio.<sup>121</sup>

Lady Mary often took the position of challenging the idea that the Turkish people were terrible and chose instead to focus on their positive traits, which is reflected in how she wrote of them.<sup>122</sup> She used the European courts, which would have been more familiar to her addressee, in order to attempt to create an accurate depiction of the manners and behaviour of the Turkish women she encountered in the bagnio. This is reflected in a letter from Ratisbon in which Lady Mary briefly discussed the behaviour among the nobility at court. In this letter Lady Mary appeared to have been well aware of what her addressee would already know and what would be familiar to her. For example, Lady Mary wrote “You know that all the nobility of this place are envoys from different states.” assuming that the addressee would already possess this knowledge.<sup>123</sup> While this could have been a meaningless comment, it could also highlight how Lady Mary used intentional comparisons throughout her her letters and observations by comparing the new with the familiar. Additionally, this, and other comments, also indicate a subconscious or conscious perception of the English courts as the standard against which everything would subsequently be compared. While Lady Mary did not exclusively focus on the ladies at court in this excerpt, the ladies were included in her observations. She commented that they instead quarrelled frequently as opposed to being cordial with each other. Lady Mary also discussed that these quarrels are often left to the person succeeding the envoy.<sup>124</sup>

The negative connotations of this description are apparent. Instead of using a diplomatic tone in her description, Lady Mary instead chose to criticise and essentially insult the manners and habits of the envoys found in the court in Ratisbon by highlighting the frequent quarrels found there and the ceremony that would have steered their lives. When comparing that to the description of the bagnio in Sophia, Lady Mary’s description of the bagnio is surprisingly and overwhelmingly positive, especially as the manners of the ladies were compared to those of the ladies of European courts. While Lady Mary did not explicitly state a preference for one over the other, the implicit meaning and connotations in her letters show a favouring of the

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<sup>121</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 58.

<sup>122</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 166.

<sup>123</sup> Montagu, “Letter VI,” 10.

<sup>124</sup> Montagu, “Letter VI,” 10.

Turkish ladies, despite the amount of time spent in European courts and among European nobility.

In these two letters, Lady Mary placed a focus on the behaviour exhibited by the members of the upper class. In the Turkish example, Lady Mary's focus was exclusively on the behaviour of the women; however, this is largely due to her observations taking place in an area reserved for women and women alone, contrary to the Ratisbon letter in which she visited a space where both men and women gathered. In both of these letters, Lady Mary discussed gathering places in which information and gossip was exchanged; however, the locations do differ in their purposes. While the Ratisbon letter described a court location, the bagnio letter discussed a place of leisure. These differences would naturally influence how the people in these places could have acted, though it is worth noting that Lady Mary did compare the bagnio to court when discussing the manners of the ladies there, suggesting similarities, at least to her. Beyond this, there is a large focus on gossip in both letters and in both contexts, and Lady Mary often connected this gossip to the manners of the people. Despite comparisons to court in both contexts, in one Lady Mary focused on diplomacy and politics and in the other, being the bagnio, she discussed how the manners of the ladies surprised her. While Lady Mary herself drew indirect comparisons, it is evident that she did not consider them to be equal.

Lady Mary also discussed in her letters other interactions with the ladies of the European courts with a more explicit focus on the ladies and their behaviour. In Prague, Lady Mary described how the ladies imitated the fashions of Vienna in the same way that people at Exeter imitated the fashions in London. She clarified this as meaning that they adopted the fashions and made them more excessive than the original. The manner with which she wrote the observation would suggest a degree of disapproval, such as by using the word "excessive" instead of a more positive word like "extravagant." Her descriptions of the ladies further support the interpretation of disapproval. She wrote;

'Tis not easy to describe what extraordinary figures they make. The person is so much lost between headdress and petticoat, they have as much occasion to write upon their backs 'This is a Woman' for the information of travellers, as ever signpost painter had to write 'This is a Bear'.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Montagu, "Letter XIV," 31.

Lady Mary described the manner with which the ladies presented themselves as excessive to the point of them being lost among the clothing they wore and the tone of the letter further supports the interpretation of a disapproving view of the ladies and their fashions.

The language Lady Mary used also bears relevance to this study. Lady Mary used terms such as “obliging civility” and “majestic grace” to describe the ladies in the bagnio and their mannerisms and behaviour. This is contrasted strongly with the use of terms such as “impertinent curiosity,” “disdainful smiles,” and “satirical whispers” to describe the mannerisms and tendencies of the ladies of European courts. This not only alludes to certain frustrations and irritations with aspects of her familiar court life, but this also contributes to an inferred superiority of the Turkish ladies’ manners. While this may be contributed to this letter being sent early in Lady Mary’s stay in the Ottoman Empire, it is interesting to see the extent to which she favoured the manners of the Turkish ladies in this context. Beyond this, the exaggeratedly positive language used to describe Turkish ladies could also be contributed to the potential expectation subversion experienced by Lady Mary when her preconceived notions of what the Turkish ladies would be like were dismantled by the actual behaviour experienced.

As mentioned, English Orientalism used the Ottoman Empire as an example for what England should aspire not to be.<sup>126</sup> The Orient was depicted as a backwards and irrational world that was inferior to the European, in this case English, culture.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, Lady Mary referred to the “vulgar Turk” while disputing the views that the court was more backwards in the Ottoman Empire than in England, indicating the attitudes of the time.<sup>128</sup> This longstanding idea of Turkish inferiority could be seen as a cause for the extremely positive language used which would in turn change the interpretation of her opinions. This dissonance between stereotype and reality could have contributed to the exaggerated language used as she felt the need to emphasise that which was merely up to the standards of the English nobility. While this would still imply that she viewed the Turkish women’s behaviour as being positive, there is a chance that it was not vastly better than that of the European women. Lady Mary’s expectations were instead likely much lower.

Beyond the comparisons of ladies in the Ottoman Empire with ladies in the European courts, there is a separate aspect to consider, which is the European ambassadors in the

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<sup>126</sup> Secor, “Orientalism, gender and class,” 383.

<sup>127</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 8.

<sup>128</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXI,” 75.

Ottoman Empire. In addition to the Turkish ladies, there was also a small group of European ladies who, like Lady Mary, had accompanied their husbands on their appointments to the Ottoman Empire. Early on in her stay, Lady Mary discussed “the French ambassadress” who she associated with on numerous occasions throughout her stay.<sup>129</sup> These interactions provide insight into how different European ladies acted within the Ottoman Empire and how they complied with or rebelled against customs.

Lady Mary expressed frustration with the French ambassadress despite their friendship. She commented in one letter on how the ambassadress’ compliance with forms and ceremonies were a hinderance to conversations, adding that those ceremonies made life “formal and tiresome.”<sup>130</sup> The French ambassadress is described as being “so delighted with her guards, her twenty four footmen, gentlemen ushers, etc., that she would rather die than make me a visit without them, not to reckon a coachful of attending damsels y’cleped<sup>131</sup> maids of honour.”<sup>132</sup> Both the content of the quote and the language used suggest a frustration with both the forms and ceremonies applied to women of their station, and the French ambassadress’ insistence on complying with them. This inference is further supported by Lady Mary’s following statement in which she complained that this forced her to then follow the same forms and ceremonies in her visits to the the French Ambassadress. This particular letter is noteworthy as it shows two different attitudes towards the forms and ceremonies of the Ottoman Empire. While one European lady, this being the French Ambassadress, was favourable towards the customs, Lady Mary apparently found them excessive or, in her own words, “troublesome.”<sup>133</sup>

Though Lady Mary did not overtly discuss ceremonies and customs in the same way while still in Europe, she did briefly discuss them while in Vienna. Lady Mary commented that the envoys to Vienna might find their time more agreeable if they were less obsessed with following ceremony.<sup>134</sup> While Lady Mary did not exclusively focus on the ladies at court in this excerpt, the ladies were included in her observations. This would suggest that Lady Mary’s criticisms of customs and ceremony were not exclusive to those found within the Ottoman Empire but extend to customs and ceremony in general. It is worth noting that neither form of

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<sup>129</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIX,” 67.

<sup>130</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIX,” 67.

<sup>131</sup> Y’cleped: called.

<sup>132</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIX,” 67.

<sup>133</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIX,” 67.

<sup>134</sup> Montagu, “Letter VI,” 10.

ceremony was placed above the other. Lady Mary's dislike appears unanimous and encompassed forms and ceremonies in general, regardless of the context.

This view on ceremony could reflect the English views on manners from the time, in which English manners were considered superior to that of the European courts. This led to the perception that the various ceremonies taking place in the European courts were necessary for them if they wished to maintain the manners that were considered so easy for the English.<sup>135</sup> While this is now considered mainly as an expression of nationalism, it exemplifies an English sense of superiority and shows how this influenced interpretations of the idea of manners as a whole.<sup>136</sup> With this in mind, Lady Mary's irritation with ceremony and her descriptions of the French ambassadress' manners can be interpreted from a new perspective, in which Lady Mary felt herself above ceremony, as she felt she did not require help to uphold her manners, while the French ambassadress was described as not only enthusiastic but almost unable to abstain from following the customs.

Beyond the aforementioned differences and similarities in how Lady Mary discussed the manners of the ladies at court or in the upper classes, Lady Mary's descriptions of court life in the European courts and the courts of the Ottoman Empire differ in the topics Lady Mary chose to highlight in her letters. In the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary described the fundamental customs and habits women followed. While Lady Mary did occasionally adopt a comparative tone, her focus was heavily on how the Turkish women live. For example, in an excerpt focusing on how the ladies in the Ottoman Empire were treated and the freedoms they possessed, Lady Mary mentioned their financial situations, claiming that the Turkish women had "all their money in their own hands," hinting at a perceived degree of financial independence which was greater than that of the European ladies. However, this could also be due to the Orientalist stereotypes at the time that portrayed Turkish women as completely under the control of the husbands.<sup>137</sup>

When Lady Mary discussed the European courts she visited, particularly the Viennese court, she focused on the events that took place, rather than on the basic fundamentals of day-to-day life. For example, writing from Vienna, Lady Mary took time to describe an event to

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<sup>135</sup> Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 24.

<sup>136</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 27.

<sup>137</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 9.

which she was unaccustomed. In this event, Empress Amelia's ladies competed in firing pistols at small pictures for prizes.<sup>138</sup> While Lady Mary wrote positively about the event, she also wrote with a degree of surprise at the event and how it played out. Lady Mary focused not only on the event itself, but highlighted the ways in which women were included while men were relegated to the side-lines. She also mentioned the skill with which the ladies could shoot, pointing out that they could easily defend themselves if necessary. The surprise at this proficiency is an undercurrent in the letter and can easily be traced back to the English standards of modesty and femininity that relegated a woman's role to the home and to her husband, leaving little room for more masculine activities like shooting.<sup>139</sup> Lady Mary also discussed the customs of Viennese women in a later letter. She commented that assemblies were common whenever ladies wanted to show off their homes or wanted to honour a friend. They called those days "days of Gala" and dressed up in their best finery for the occasion. She also commented that the mistress of the house was not obliged to notice anyone or return any visits and anyone who liked was allowed to attend without being presented; however, it is safe to assume that this was intended to refer only to the nobility.<sup>140</sup> Lady Mary expressed again how the customs surrounding events and the nature of the events differed from those taking place among the English nobility, though they were less elaborately discussed than the events of the Ottoman Empire.

While it is not feasible to directly compare how Lady Mary discussed life in the European or Turkish courts, due to the stark differences in the aspects of court life discussed, there are comparisons that can be made in regard to what Lady Mary chose to discuss and highlight in her letters to England. When discussing the lives of the women in the European courts at Vienna and Hanover, Lady Mary focused on the various events she was able to attend and how they differed from the events in England. The few mentions she made about the fundamental aspects of everyday lives of the ladies alluded to strong similarities between the ladies in the European Courts and the English. However, in the letters from the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary focused on the fundamentals. Instead of describing different events that took place, Lady Mary discussed the English preconceptions of the lives of the Turkish ladies and how they were accurate or inaccurate. This is arguably a continuation of the common theme and goal of

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<sup>138</sup> Montagu, "Letter IX," 19–20.

<sup>139</sup> Ingrid H. Tague, *Women of Quality: Accepting and Contesting Ideals of Femininity in England, 1690-1760* (Woodbridge, Suffolk & Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2002), 24.

<sup>140</sup> Montagu, "Letter XII," 26–27.

challenging inaccurate stereotypes of the Ottoman Empire that Lady Mary aimed to accomplish within *The Turkish Embassy Letters*.

### 3.2. Comparing Monarchs

As a visiting ambassadress, Lady Mary was permitted to wait on some of the most high-ranking women in both the European courts she visited and the Ottoman Empire. She subsequently documented each interaction in detail in her letters. This section discusses these excerpts and descriptions of the various interactions and highlights the similarities and differences between them. Lady Mary described various aspects of her interactions with these women for example, the women's appearances and their manners or behaviour in general.

The notably primary focus of many of Lady Mary's descriptions was the fixation on the appearances and overall aesthetic appeal of the ladies she encountered and this is perhaps most evident in her descriptions of the highest-ranking ladies in their respective societies. In a letter from Adrianople addressed to her sister, Lady Mar, Lady Mary told of her first such visit in the Ottoman Empire, in which she was invited to dine with the Grand Vizier's lady. This example is relevant in that Lady Mary did not elaborate on her appearance except to say that there was "nothing about her that appeared expensive."<sup>141</sup> This would suggest that she did not find her particularly beautiful or ugly; however, the comment is also of interest as Lady Mary did not feel the need to highlight the traits that would have been associated with Turkish women in general. Following this visit, Lady Mary was invited to call upon the Kabya's lady, Fatima. Lady Mary's description of Fatima's appearance was much more expansive than that of the Grand Vizier's wife. Lady Mary referred to her as "the fair Fatima" and went into great detail about her beauty, commenting on how it surpassed anyone she had considered beautiful in England and Germany.<sup>142</sup> When describing Fatima's appearance Lady Mary wrote;

I confess, though, the Greek lady had before given me a great opinion of her beauty I was so struck with admiration that I could not for some time, speak to her, being wholly taken up in gazing. That surprising harmony of features! That charming result of the whole! That exact proportion of body! That lovely bloom of complexion, unsullied by art! The

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<sup>141</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 86.

<sup>142</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 89.

unutterable enchantment of her smile! But her eyes! Large and black, with all the soft languishment of the blue! Every turn of her face discovering some new charm!<sup>143</sup>

Compared to her description of the Grand Vizier's wife, Lady Mary's description of Fatima is more descriptive and expresses her opinions of Fatima's appearance extensively. Her language was incredibly poetic, using words like "harmony" and "charming" to describe the overall appearance and highlighting that no matter where she turned her face, she was still beautiful. The comment on her being "unsullied by art" is also worth highlighting as it indicates a lack of makeup while also revealing Lady Mary's poor opinion on the use of makeup. This description is the most extensive of any in the other letters.

The third woman of high-ranking position Lady Mary met during her time in the Ottoman Empire was the Sultana Hafise who was "a favourite" of the former sultan. Lady Mary once again adopted a somewhat comparative point of view when discussing her appearance. However, rather than comparing her to the ladies of Europe, as had been the case with Fatima, Lady Mary instead compared her looks to those of Fatima, whom she had met months prior to her move from Adrianople to Constantinople.<sup>144</sup> While Lady Mary discussed the Sultana Hafise's clothes extensively, she made little mention of her looks, commenting only that "she did not seem to me to have ever been half so beautiful as the fair Fatima I saw at Adrianople, though she had the remains of a fine face more decayed by sorrow than time."<sup>145</sup> It is worth noting that the Grand Vizier's lady was nearly 50 years old at the time of the aforementioned encounter. Though Fatima's age was not disclosed, Lady Mary expressed that she looked too young to have had children, indicating that Fatima was much younger than the Grand Vizier's wife.<sup>146</sup> The Sultana Hafise was mentioned to be 36 years old, though her looks had apparently "decayed."<sup>147</sup>

While it may not be explicitly mentioned, there does appear to be a connection made between appearance and youth which may have influenced Lady Mary's opinions on the women's beauty. At the time, there was a strong connection between youth and beauty in England, with elderly women being viewed as having lost their beauty and paintings of the time almost demonising women of an older age. Women in their fifties were considered to be

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<sup>143</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 89.

<sup>144</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 114.

<sup>145</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 114–115.

<sup>146</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 90.

<sup>147</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 115.



very old, particularly to young women and were often disparaged for this.<sup>148</sup> This then shows up in Lady Mary's letters in which she comments that the two women over the age of thirty were older and their looks had decayed while Fatima, who at the very least looked young, was still considered extremely beautiful. It is difficult to determine if Lady Mary's opinions reflect reality or if they were due to this subconscious bias or cultural norm.

Lady Mary was also able to meet royalty among the European courts. In a letter from Vienna, Lady Mary expressed anticipation when discussing her impending meeting with the empress, Elizabeth Christine. She focused on her eagerness to "see a beauty that has been the admiration of so many different nations."<sup>149</sup> When she discussed the empress' appearance, she described eyes that were not large "but have a lively look full of sweetness," before commenting on her fine complexion and well-made nose and forehead. She also mentioned her smile and her "vast quantity of fine fair hair."<sup>150</sup> Following this, Lady Mary discussed how she carried herself. She commented that, in order to do the empress justice, "one must speak of it poetically." She made use of frequent comparisons to Juno, Venus and the Graces when discussing her body and how she moved. Lady Mary fixated on her hands, commenting that they were perfect and lamenting the fact that her rank meant she was not allowed to kiss them.<sup>151</sup> This comment shows not only the way Lady Mary prioritised the appearance of the nobility, but also the rapture and worship she assigned beauty, particularly that of someone of higher rank than her.

She also discussed an audience she had with Empress Amelia, who was the dowager of the former emperor. She mentioned how the empress was seated on a little throne; however, she did not elaborate on neither Empress Amelia's appearance nor her behaviour, as she instead described the events of the visit.<sup>152</sup> Lady Mary also mentioned the empress of Hanover in a letter from Hanover, who she described as being "the most beautiful queen upon earth" but did not elaborate beyond that, displaying a similar vagueness to Empress Amelia.<sup>153</sup> Lady Mary did not meet much royalty on her travels home from the Ottoman Empire, with the exception of a letter sent from Turin in which she discussed an audience with the Queen of Sicily. She

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<sup>148</sup> Susannah R. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life : Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42.

<sup>149</sup> Montagu, "Letter VII," 14.

<sup>150</sup> Montagu, "Letter IX," 18.

<sup>151</sup> Montagu, "Letter IX," 18.

<sup>152</sup> Montagu, "Letter IX," 20.

<sup>153</sup> Montagu, "Letter XVIII," 37.

again did not focus on the Queen's appearance, instead choosing to discuss how the audience transpired.<sup>154</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis, the examples of highborn ladies Lady Mary met mirror each other surprisingly well. There are both Turkish and European examples in which Lady Mary's descriptions were vague and both a Turkish and a European example of a more extensive description of the lady she met. The first aspect worth highlighting is that the Turkish women were subject to more comparisons, both with each other and with the European examples than the European women were. Fatima was compared to European women Lady Mary had met and the Sultana Hafise was compared to Fatima. The only comparisons exhibited in the European examples are seen when Lady Mary hyperbolically described someone as the most beautiful person she had seen, such as the empress of Hanover.<sup>155</sup> After Lady Mary met Fatima and described her as being the most beautiful person she had ever met and, again hyperbolically, the most beautiful person ever to have been called beautiful, she did not make that statement about any woman she met after Fatima. This could be due to Lady Mary's statement persisting or it could simply be due to Lady Mary not finding any of the highborn ladies she met afterwards beautiful and as such, be only a coincidence.

While Lady Mary's descriptions of the Grand Vizier's lady's appearance were lacking, she did devote more time to describing her behaviour. She described her in a positive manner, using positive words and phrases in said description. She referred to her as "good lady" in her letter and described how the Grand Vizier's lady "entertained me with all kind of civility."<sup>156</sup> She also recounted that she was treated with respect and that the Grand Vizier's lady was "very earnest in serving me of everything."<sup>157</sup> Referring to her prior surprise at the lack of expense in her appearance, Lady Mary wrote that the Grand Vizier's wife said she was "no longer of an age to spend either her time or money in superfluities" and instead spent her money on charity and devoted her time to prayer.<sup>158</sup> The societal expectations placed on English women often linked good character to being good Christians.<sup>159</sup> With this contextual background, Lady Mary's observation would again show how the good character of a Turkish woman was determined by judging her against the English standards. Additionally, Lady Mary made little

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<sup>154</sup> Montagu, "Letter LII," 156.

<sup>155</sup> Montagu, "Letter XVIII," 37.

<sup>156</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 87.

<sup>157</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 88.

<sup>158</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 87.

<sup>159</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 28.

mention of Islam, instead simply highlighting the religious justification and reasoning behind her observations. By not mentioning Islam as the religion, it creates an impression of her contextualising this comment within Christian values and norms, either using something familiar to the addressee or continuing a tradition of using England customs as the standard and norm against which other cultures were judged.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly to the extensive description of Fatima's appearance, Lady Mary continued her description of Fatima's character and manners in a comparable manner, writing;

And to that a behaviour so full of grace and sweetness, such easy motions, with an air so majestic, yet free from stiffness or affectation that I am persuaded, should she be suddenly transported upon the most polite throne of Europe nobody would think her other than born and bred to be a queen, though educated in a country we call barbarous. To say all in a word, our most celebrated English beauties would vanish near her.<sup>161</sup>

Lady Mary added that Fatima also possessed a "Sweetness full of majesty that no court breeding could ever give." Lady Mary's description of Fatima was poetic and made use of frequent comparisons to the European courts in order to fully express to the letter's addressee what she thought of Fatima. She directly referred to stereotypes and misconceptions about the Ottoman Empire being barbarous and highlighted how good her behaviour was by inferring that she would be accepted as royalty despite her country of origin and the stereotypes regarding the Ottoman Empire.<sup>162</sup> Beyond her descriptions of Fatima's manners, Lady Mary also wrote positively about her treatment as a guest. While her visit to the Grand Vizier's wife was described positively, her description of how Fatima treated her was much more expressive and positive. She commented on how she was sat in the corner which was considered a place of honour and she recalled how Fatima entertained her, using words such as "most polite," "agreeable," and commenting that Fatima asked for her friendship "with the best grace in the world."<sup>163</sup>

Though Lady Mary visited several wives of rulers, Fatima was the only one she described as a friend and visited again after the initial meeting.<sup>164</sup> Again, during the second visit, she used

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<sup>160</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 24.

<sup>161</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 89.

<sup>162</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 89.

<sup>163</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 91.

<sup>164</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 118.

words with positive connotations in her descriptions of the meeting, such as commenting on how Fatima greeted her “with the best grace in the world” and describing her as “my lovely friend.”<sup>165</sup> While this mention of Fatima does not differ much from the first encounter in terms of how Fatima was described and the opinion Lady Mary had of her, there is a noteworthy passage pertaining to how the Turkish women were compared to European women. Lady Mary’s companion, a Greek woman, commented that Fatima should be Christian due to her manners and behaviour. This comment in itself is noteworthy as it alludes to how Christianity was linked to character, virtue and good breeding; however, Fatima’s response adds another layer to this example.<sup>166</sup> When told what the Greek woman had said, Fatima was apparently not insulted as Lady Mary expected, but commented that she had received the same comment before and seemed to receive it as a compliment, adding that her father had told her “I had not the air of a Turkish girl.”<sup>167</sup> It is worth noting that there is no way to know whether Fatima interpreted the comment in the way it was meant or if her understanding of the comment carried different connotations and resulted in a more positive reaction than otherwise.

Lady Mary concluded the passage by recounting how she told Fatima “that if all the Turkish ladies were like her, it was absolute necessary to confine them from public view for the repose of mankind, and proceeded to tell her what a noise such a face as hers would make in London or Paris.” which was received positively by Fatima.<sup>168</sup> While it is perhaps more evident in the description of the women in the bagnio, Lady Mary placed European, particularly English, beauty standards on Fatima and compared how her looks suited these standards. An example of this is how Lady Mary compared the effect of Fatima’s “large and black” eyes to blue, commenting that they held the same effect.<sup>169</sup> This again shows how the English beauty was considered by Lady Mary to be the standard against which other beauties could be measured and could be interpreted as an example of how Turkish women were considered beautiful in spite of the differences in their appearances when compared to the European and English women.

When discussing the Sultana Hafise’s manners and behaviour, Lady Mary used a similar manner and affectation to her description of the Grand Vizier’s wife. She noted that she was

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<sup>165</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 118–119.

<sup>166</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 28.

<sup>167</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 119.

<sup>168</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 119.

<sup>169</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIV,” 89.

invited to sit prior to the sultana's entrance, so that the sultana would not be required to stand when Lady Mary entered the room. Lady Mary did note that the sultana inclined her head when she saw Lady Mary. However, this does allude to customs and ways in which women asserted their position and manipulated situations to suit them. Worth mentioning is that, while Lady Mary appeared well aware of the intention behind this act, she did not describe it negatively. At the time, English society held the opinion that their manners and society were superior, in part due to the supposed ease of their manners. This led to a belief that the courts of Europe, who were less civilised, required a greater degree of ceremony than the English in order to uphold manners and civility.<sup>170</sup> Judging from this comment, this expectation and interpretation of ceremony appears to have been extended to the Ottoman Empire.

Similarly to Lady Mary's descriptions of the Grand Vizier's wife, her tone was more neutral and subdued discussing the Sultana Hafise than when she met Fatima. Lady Mary described how she was treated with "the utmost civility" but did not elaborate on what exactly that entailed and again perhaps indicated the English opinion of the Turkish manners.<sup>171</sup> Much of the discourse revolved around the sultan's death, to which the sultana appeared "melancholy," and Lady Mary's queries about the tales she had heard. In her description, Lady Mary revealed some context for the stereotypes she occasionally alluded to. She wrote "The Sultana Hafise is what one would naturally expect to find a Turkish lady; willing to oblige, but not knowing how to go about it, and 'tis easy to see in her manner that she has lived excluded from the world."<sup>172</sup>

In this excerpt it is straightforward to discern that the existing perception in England was that the Turkish ladies would be polite and eager to help but would be hindered by an unfamiliarity with the outside world. This is an example of a preconceived idea Lady Mary had about Turkish women due to Orientalist ideas and allows for insight into why certain women surprised her. She directly compared the Sultana Hafise to Fatima again when she wrote;

But Fatima has all the politeness and good breeding of a court, with an air that inspires at once respect and tenderness; and now I understand her language I find her wit as

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<sup>170</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 24.

<sup>171</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 116.

<sup>172</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 119.

engaging as her beauty. She is very curious after the manners of other countries and has not the partiality for her own so common in little minds.<sup>173</sup>

While there is a possible negative connotation in the “little minds” comment, Lady Mary’s assessment of Fatima’s behaviour was again positive. However, the assessment again related her manners to the standards held in European courts, measuring her manners against European and English expectations. However, with the idea about European manners expressed earlier, specifically how the lack of manners necessitated ceremony and reserve, the fact the Lady Mary compared the Turkish manners with the European manners, not the English could indicate again how the manners of the English were held in higher regard in England.<sup>174</sup>

Lady Mary discussed how her audience with Empress Elizabet Christine played out. Following custom, she had a private audience of half an hour before the other ladies were allowed to enter the court and join them. Lady Mary focused on the looks of the empress, at least initially. Although she mentioned how she was “perfectly charmed” by the empress, she made no initial observations about the empress’ manners. When Lady Mary discussed their interactions, she discussed how the empress “had the goodness to talk to her very much” and had Lady Mary sit at her right hand.<sup>175</sup> Lady Mary, in the same letter, talked about a later audience with the empress mother, who she described as being “of great virtue and goodness” but added that she “picques herself too much on a violent devotion.” She criticised the empress mother for her performative acts of penance.<sup>176</sup> When Lady Mary wrote about her audience with the Queen of Sicily, she used words such as “sweetness and affability” and described her as having “a great share of good sense.” However, beyond that, Lady Mary did not elaborate on her manners.<sup>177</sup>

Lady Mary’s discussions regarding manners differ in their content depending on if the woman described is European or Turkish. While the European women were described as being “agreeable” or “charming” like the Turkish women, Lady Mary did not generally elaborate on this. When Lady Mary described the manners and behaviour of the Turkish ladies she met, she clarified what she meant when she reacted positively towards their manners. While this could be due to a greater interest in the Turkish women or a lack of familiarity with their standards

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<sup>173</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 119.

<sup>174</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 24.

<sup>175</sup> Montagu, “Letter IX,” 18.

<sup>176</sup> Montagu, “Letter IX,” 19.

<sup>177</sup> Montagu, “Letter LII,” 156.

of manners and propriety, the in-depth descriptions of their manners could also be interpreted as confirming that their manners were indeed good or that they measured up to the expectations Lady Mary as an Englishwoman would have had. However, as mentioned, the fact that European manners were held in lower regard adds an additional layer of complexity to the issue as it would have likely influenced Lady Mary's expectations, at least on a subconscious level, and would subsequently change the standard against which manners were being measured.

Additionally, in the English standards for women at the time, beauty was connected to morality, with the idea that poor behaviour could ruin a woman's appearance.<sup>178</sup> While there was great value placed on women's beauty in both contexts, this idea that morality and beauty were inherently connected provides further insight into why Lady Mary emphasised the appearances of the women. Beyond a simple comment on how they lived up to rumour and reputation or how they compared to each other, Lady Mary's discussions of their beauty can also be interpreted as a commentary on their morality and good nature. If a woman who was beautiful was also considered morally good, this description of their beauty only serves to highlight and support that which Lady Mary said about their manners and behaviour.

### **3.3. Finery and Status Signalling**

When discussing the ladies of the court, a popular topic of discussion was their clothing. A woman's clothing was more than something to be worn. Clothing was a way of status signalling, of showing of wealth, and reflected the expectations placed on women by men, society, and other women within their social circle.<sup>179</sup> As such, when discussing how women were described, particularly the women of the upper classes, clothing and how it was described is an intrinsic part of that discussion. Clothes were a way of showing respectability but have also been interpreted within the framework of gender hierarchy. The idea of the time was that "hard bodies" were superior to "soft bodies" which in turn entailed that male bodies were considered superior to female bodies. The stays of this time period "hardened" the woman's body and this containment gave, in part, the woman her respectability.<sup>180</sup> In general, the idea was that clothes would both hide and show off the body at the same time, which provides alternate angles for discussion when interpreting how Lady Mary wrote about clothes in the

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<sup>178</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 134.

<sup>179</sup> Scholz, "English Women in Oriental Dress," 88–89.

<sup>180</sup> Scholz, "English Women in Oriental Dress," 89.

Ottoman Empire.<sup>181</sup> Popular Oriental imagery from the time would have meant that Lady Mary and the addressees of her letters would have had a preconceived notion of what Turkish clothes would look like. While Turkish dress at the time was popular mainly within the scope of masquerade balls, these events were nonetheless popular and this type of dress was imitated among the upper classes of English society.<sup>182</sup>

In a letter to her sister, Lady Mary discussed the “novelties” of Adrianople, starting with the clothing.<sup>183</sup> There are many things that can be said about how Lady Mary discussed Turkish clothing. For the purposes of this thesis, it is worth noting that Lady Mary adopted a comparative approach towards describing the clothes worn by both her and other women. While there was a general perception of Turkish clothing in England at the time, not to mention the Turkish influences on English fashion, the view was largely romanticised and often changed to fit European standards and tastes.<sup>184</sup> As such, Lady Mary used the familiar English fashions as the contrast for the Turkish clothes she wore while in the Ottoman Empire. For example, when writing about the undergarments, Lady Mary wrote “The first piece of my dress is a pair of drawers, very full, that reach to my shoes, and conceal the legs more modestly than your petticoats.”<sup>185</sup> Lady Mary used a comparison to the English petticoats, not to highlight differences in appearances, but to illustrate the differences in how they performed their purpose, pointing out how the Turkish drawers were, in her opinion, more modest than petticoats. There is an interesting use of language, in which Lady Mary referred to “your petticoats.”<sup>186</sup> While this may be nothing more than an innocent language choice, one can also interpret an act of distancing from European fashion by Lady Mary.

However, this is also a conflict with the Orientalist interpretation of Turkish women’s clothes at the time. The absence of stays in Turkish clothing is one of the most notable differences as, for the Englishwomen, stays marked the difference between the modest woman and a “loose” woman. In Orientalist imagery, the lack of stays in a Turkish woman’s clothing marked her as morally inferior as their bodies were less disciplined by their clothing, indicating a certain sexuality among the Turkish women.<sup>187</sup> Beyond this, wearing the Turkish clothes,

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<sup>181</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 88.

<sup>182</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 95–96.

<sup>183</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 69.

<sup>184</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 96.

<sup>185</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 69.

<sup>186</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 69.

<sup>187</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 87.



when she chose to, allowed her to step into Turkish culture while still retaining the right to revert to her former manner of clothing when she chose.<sup>188</sup> This exemplifies a larger pattern in which Lady Mary chose when to observe and when to participate, such as in the bagnio, in which she refused to remove her stays, remaining as a European observer.<sup>189</sup>

When describing the way the ladies dressed in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary described the clothes in great detail, paying particular attention to the richness of the fabric or the various jewels used to adorn clothing.<sup>190</sup> Again, this can be connected to status signalling, as richer adornments indicated a higher standing lady. This was not as visible in descriptions of European fashions. When discussing her visit to court in Vienna, Lady Mary did discuss her clothing but was less descriptive than in her letters from the Ottoman Empire. She emphasised how the dress had quite a revealing neckline and went on to describe the fashions women wore in Vienna. She referred to them as being “more monstrous and contrary to all common sense and reason than 'tis possible for you to imagine.”<sup>191</sup> She focused on the tall headdresses, using words such as “fortified” to describe how they were decorated with ribbon and describing the foundation headdress, called a “bourle,” as a “machine” that the women then covered with their own hair, emphasising how much of the hair used is false. Lady Mary discussed how the weight of the jewels used to adorn their hair required experience to carry upright. Lady Mary compared the whalebone petticoats they wore in England with the ones worn there, noting that the petticoats of Vienna were much wider in circumference and “cover some acres of ground.” She summarised that this manner of clothing “sets off and improves the natural ugliness, with which God Almighty has been pleased to endow them all generally.”<sup>192</sup> Similarly, in a letter from Prague, Lady Mary wrote that the ladies clothing imitated that of Vienna and ridiculed the excess in the clothing. She commented that the ladies were lost in the clothing to the point where she remarked it would be difficult to determine they were women.<sup>193</sup> While in Vienna, Lady Mary expressed confusion in some of the clothing customs, commenting that the fashions in Vienna were “peculiar,” focusing on how only green and rose were considered unsuitable for a widow to wear; however, she was allowed to wear any other clothes she chose.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 92.

<sup>189</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59–60.

<sup>190</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 69–70.

<sup>191</sup> Montagu, “Letter IX,” 17.

<sup>192</sup> Montagu, “Letter IX,” 17.

<sup>193</sup> Montagu, “Letter XIV,” 31.

<sup>194</sup> Montagu, “Letter XII,” 26.

While Lady Mary wrote negatively or with criticism about the clothes in Vienna and Prague, she did, however, comment positively on the Hungarian ladies and their clothing. She used “becoming” to describe the gowns worn and described them carefully. However, in comparison to the descriptions of the Turkish dress which used extensive descriptions of the fabrics used and the structure of the clothes, in addition to the occasional mention of the effect of the clothes, her descriptions of the Hungarian clothes were more restrained and much less poetic.<sup>195</sup> There could be several reasons for the differences in descriptions and tone when discussing fashions in Europe and the Ottoman Empire, varying from the fashions in Europe being too near to what was worn in England, to a previously established appreciation for Turkish dress stemming from the Turkish influences on English fashion and the popular Orientalism of the time.<sup>196</sup>

While Lady Mary’s descriptions of European women and their fashions were generally not positive, as they were compared to the English fashions she favoured, her most derisive descriptions were of the French women she met on the journey home from the Ottoman Empire. Lady Mary described the French ladies as “nauseous creatures” writing how she found their dress “absurd” and their makeup or “paints” to be “monstrously unnatural.” She went on to describe how their manner of styling their hair with curls and powder reminded her of wool and that their faces no longer resembled human faces. She followed this with a pleasant description of her preference for her “pretty country women,” clearly favouring English looks in this context.<sup>197</sup> This strong dislike for the French fashion is the most strongly worded one in the letter collection. Even Lady Mary makes note of the language used, describing the words as “course.” Lady Mary attacked the extensive use of makeup and excessive dresses, highlighting aspects of the fashion that distanced them from their natural appearances. This follows the trend of the time where modest and respectable women were strongly cautioned against doing anything to enhance their beauty, as that was considered dishonest.<sup>198</sup> While this is something hinted at, such as with her distaste for the impracticality of the Viennese whalebone petticoats, it becomes apparent in her descriptions of the French ladies that Lady Mary favoured fashions that were less excessive in terms of makeup and showing off. However, this is interesting when contrasted with how Lady Mary spoke mildly about how

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<sup>195</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIII,” 49.

<sup>196</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 164.

<sup>197</sup> Montagu, “Letter LV,” 161.

<sup>198</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 113.

Greek and Turkish ladies generally lined their eyes with a “black tincture” which darkened the appearance of their eyes.<sup>199</sup> This could be due to variations in how extensive the use of makeup was but it does offer a contradiction regarding how Lady Mary favoured Turkish fashions and criticised European fashions,

### 3.4. Women’s Spaces

A popular topic of interest in many discussions regarding both Orientalism and the lives of women in the Ottoman Empire. The Orientalist view of the Ottoman Empire rested heavily on the segregation and forced confinement of the Turkish women. In many ways, the harem began to exemplify the Ottoman Empire, showing how sexualised and backwards the culture was.<sup>200</sup> Research regarding the harem has often focussed on how different harem imagery was from the lived reality of Turkish women.<sup>201</sup> In a sense, the harem became associated intrinsically with the Turkish women and represented the same characteristics assigned to them. It was considered to be “sensual, muted and subjugated.”<sup>202</sup> While Lady Mary set out to counter these ideas, her descriptions of the bagnio and harems do differ in their content from the spaces reserved for women in European Courts.

An example of women’s spaces within the Ottoman Empire is the bagnio Lady Mary visited in the city of Sophia. In this letter, Lady Mary discussed many aspects of the experience; however, one of the most prevalent aspects is the lack of men. Lady Mary referred to the person permitting entry to the bagnio is a “portress,” meaning that she was a woman. She mentioned how the “women of quality” paid the portress a crown or ten shillings, indicating a price for entry or, at the very least, a tip to the portress. Lady Mary did carefully describe the appearance of the bagnio, though this bears little relevance for this analysis. To summarise Lady Mary’s description, the bagnio was described with heavy emphasis on the amount of marble and the numerous fountains, in addition to the amount of steam in the bagnio. The ladies of the bagnio were described in their states of undress. There was a hierarchy to the women in the bagnio, with the ladies being seated on the first sofas, which were described as being covered in

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<sup>199</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 70.

<sup>200</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,” 50.

<sup>201</sup> Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders : The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*, 4.

<sup>202</sup> Secor, “Orientalism, gender and class,” 390.

cushions and carpets, and their slaves being seated on the second sofas, which lacked further description.

There was a certain dissonance in Lady Mary's descriptions. While she described a subtle segregation of the ladies and the slaves that was marked by the sofas they used, Lady Mary claimed that there was no distinction of rank by the way they are dressed, as they are all naked. This comment that one could not tell them apart by clothing seems redundant when placed besides a comment that they were easily distinguishable by their positions and assigned places in the bagnio. Lady Mary also emphasised how there was no "wanton smile or immodest gesture" among the ladies there and focused on the grace they use. Popular Orientalist imagery of the time showed a sexualised and often homoerotic perception of the harems and women-only spaces in the Ottoman Empire; something Lady Mary appears to have been aware of.<sup>203</sup> By highlighting the fact that there were no sexual smiles or gestures, Lady Mary directly contradicted the highly sexualised view of women and instead highlighted a space in which women were able to gather and mingle as they would fully clothed.

In a description of the ladies' appearances and an assessment of their bodies, Lady Mary also mentioned what the ladies were doing. She described how some women were engaged "in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions, while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty fancies." Beyond this, Lady Mary made a comparison to a familiar concept to the English. Lady Mary wrote that "In short, 'tis the women's coffee-house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented etc."<sup>204</sup> Again, this showed how the space was simply a space for women to socialise, likening it to the coffee-house and subsequently comparing it to a centre for society and the exchange of information and knowledge that the coffee-house had become in England.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, this removed the abnormality of an all-female area by likening it to a typically male-dominated institution, in a sense, raising the prestige or respectability of the harem.<sup>206</sup> Lady Mary described how she was welcomed into the bagnio and the ladies there tried to help her participate by undressing her, though Lady Mary used her stays as a way to dissuade them from this idea. Lady Mary finished her description of the bagnio with a comment pertaining to the nature of this women's space.

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<sup>203</sup> Secor, "Orientalism, gender and class," 390.

<sup>204</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXVII," 59.

<sup>205</sup> Baktir, *The Representation of the Ottoman Orient*, 30.

<sup>206</sup> Secor, "Orientalism, gender and class," 391.

She wrote how “I am sure I have now entertained you with an account of such a sight as you never saw in your life, and what no book of travels could inform you of, as 'tis no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places.” This shows how strictly this space was kept for women only and how any man to enter a bagnio would be put to death.<sup>207</sup>

Lady Mary also discussed the harems in great detail. This was largely due to a combination of curiosity and misinformation. In her letters, she frequently commented on the ignorance of male travel writers who would not have likely even seen the women they were describing.<sup>208</sup> In some letters, she even compared this ignorance to stupidity, further asserting both her derision towards male travel writer while also elevating her own position as a travel writer.<sup>209</sup> In the letter discussing her visit to the Sultana Hafise, Lady Mary wrote how the sultana’s husband was required to respect her as a queen and “not to inquire at all into what is done in her apartment.”<sup>210</sup> Lady Mary again mentioned the rules of the harem and how this equated to a form of freedom for the women in the quote from her letter to Lady Mar. She wrote that the Grand Signior himself “never violates the privileges of the harem, (or womens apartment) which remains unsearched and entire to the widow” when a pasha was executed.<sup>211</sup> This whole area of discussion was frequently interwoven with a discussion on how previous travel writers wrote inaccurate descriptions of harems because due to them not being able to enter the harems as they were men. She commented that they could only ever see the outside which was often removed from sight and surrounded by walls in order to maintain the privacy of the women.<sup>212</sup>

Lady Mary was also able to describe spaces reserved for women while in Europe. When Lady Mary described the empress’s drawing-room in Vienna, she made sure to highlight the fact that no man was permitted entry to the drawing-room save for the grand-master and the emperor. Additionally, she noted that the grand-master was only permitted entry in order to inform the empress of the emperor’s imminent arrival. She compared this to the English drawing-room into which men were permitted entry and emphasised that this was a surprise to her, as she was constantly waiting for men to pay court to the empress.<sup>213</sup> She emphasised that

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<sup>207</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 60.

<sup>208</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVIII,” 85.

<sup>209</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>210</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 114.

<sup>211</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>212</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIII,” 85.

<sup>213</sup> Montagu, “Letter IX,” 18.

this room was “very different” from England, using a comparison to show the addressee how novel it was. Beyond that, the idea that this space was reserved for women alone was a surprise to her, but she did not comment on that aspect so there is no way to accurately ascertain whether her opinion was positive or negative.

While her discussions on women’s spaces were usually reserved for spaces to which men were denied entry, she did mention a lesser version of this when describing waiting on Empress Amelia. She described how she was able to observe an event in which women shot at targets, as described earlier in this thesis; however, the object of note is that, while men were allowed to observe, they were not allowed to participate. However, the men seemed to be amicable to this exclusion, as she commented that the emperor in particular enjoyed the spectacle, mentioning that it was “the favourite pleasure of the emperor.”<sup>214</sup>

While the previous examples involve a comparison between the harem and the European courts in terms of spaces reserved for female nobility, there is also a comparison to be made in terms of religious gendered segregation. In Vienna, Lady Mary was able to visit a convent of St Lawrence. In this context, it constitutes a space reserved for women alone. In a sense, it bears a remarkable similarity to the harem, in which women are secluded due to religious reasons. She commented on the neatness of the place but spoke negatively of the cloistering of certain women. She highlighted a young lady who she found to be beautiful and lamented seeing “so agreeable a young creature buried alive.” This is interesting when compared to the seclusion of women in the harem.<sup>215</sup> In the harem, Lady Mary discussed the women secluded there with a focus only on their appearances and the activities within. In one letter she even commented to Fatima that, if all women were as beautiful as Fatima, she understood why it was necessary to confine them and keep them away from public view.<sup>216</sup> This is heavily contrasted with the discussion regarding the cloistering of young nuns, in which she lamented them being kept out of the public eye. While this could be due to a difference in perspective, it also reflects the Orientalist view which interpreted the segregation of women as an act of subjugation and necessary in order to temper their sexuality.<sup>217</sup> While Lady Mary often disputed this, the fact that both examples show women secluded out of religious reasoning and

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<sup>214</sup> Montagu, “Letter IX,” 20.

<sup>215</sup> Montagu, “Letter XII,” 28.

<sup>216</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 119.

<sup>217</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,” 53.

both are described differently indicates at least a subconscious difference in how Lady Mary interpreted each situation.

### 3.5. The Romanticisation and Sexualisation of the Turkish Women

While Lady Mary is often described as having countered the Orientalist interpretation of the harems, there has been criticism levelled her way in regards to her perceived participation in the sexualisation of Turkish women.<sup>218</sup> While there are certain differences, such as Lady Mary's ability to see into the hidden spaces, this has remained a popular topic of discussion.<sup>219</sup> Part of the reason why there are so few Turkish sources describing the harem at the time is due to the Turkish belief that the women in the harem were not only out of sight of men but also not to be perceived by them in any way. This meant that most accounts of the harem came from European writers who did not respect this privacy.<sup>220</sup> By writing about and telling others about what she saw and experienced in the harems and the bagnio, Lady Mary essentially betrayed the secrecy and privacy of these spaces by opening them up for both female and, following the publication of the letters, male observation.<sup>221</sup> Beyond this, this portrayal reiterates the spaces as an area of interest for the European observer and, by exposing what happened within, she removed this mystery and allowed English readers to once again claim themselves as knowing the secrets of the Ottoman Empire, including that which had previously been kept hidden.<sup>222</sup> Lady Mary became complicit in allowing the male gaze into these spaces by highlighting that which was intentionally kept private. While other's interpret her descriptions as countering the Orientalist views on the harem by removing the space from male fantasy, both sides of this discussion should be considered when discussing the intent behind these spaces and Lady Mary's descriptions of them.<sup>223</sup>

Lady Mary was confident that her views and opinions on women's appearances were grounded in a general admiration of the aesthetic and completely separate from sexualisation or romanticisation. She wrote in a letter from Adrianople;

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<sup>218</sup> Heffernan, "Feminism against the East/West Divide," 210.

<sup>219</sup> Hall, Sagal, and Zold, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy Letters: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism."

<sup>220</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 113–114.

<sup>221</sup> Scholz, "English Women in Oriental Dress," 90.

<sup>222</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 21.

<sup>223</sup> Dadabhoy, "'Going Native,'" 53.

I am afraid you will accuse me of extravagance in this description. I think I have read somewhere that women always speak in rapture when they speak of beauty, but I can't imagine why they should not be allowed to do so. I rather think it a virtue to be able to admire without any mixture of desire or envy.<sup>224</sup>

As this quote implies, Lady Mary did not only believe she had the ability to do so, but also that it was a positive character trait or virtue that she, as a female traveller, possessed unlike the men who came before her. While Lady Mary spoke often of the beauty of the women she met, there is a slight difference in how she discussed women in the Ottoman Empire compared with how she discussed women in Europe. The gendered segregation of women from men and the religious and societal requirement to wear a veil were frequently interpreted in England through an Orientalist lens as being due to the Turkish women's dangerous sexuality.<sup>225</sup>

While Lady Mary set out to challenge this hypersexualised view of women and women's spaces, her descriptions still alluded to these views. When recounting her experience in the bagnio, Lady Mary described how the women were naked and took the opportunity to describe the scene, focusing heavily on the appearance of the women. Lady Mary wrote;

There were many amongst them as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of a Guido or Titian, and most of their skins shiningly white, only adorned by their beautiful hair divided into many tresses, hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or ribbon, perfectly representing the figures of the Graces.<sup>226</sup>

This inclusion of male painters has in previous research been interpreted as Lady Mary inserting the male gaze into the scene by comparing the scene to those created by male painters.<sup>227</sup> While Lady Mary described the scene more in terms of a work of art, there is an underlying fixation on the naked bodies of women that would build upon or be linked to previous sexualised ideas of the bagnio and harems. Despite her fixations on beauty and appearance, Lady Mary did in certain letters suggest a degree of self-awareness in this prioritising of appearances. She wrote in one letter how she had often thought that there would

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<sup>224</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 90.

<sup>225</sup> Dadabhoy, "Going Native," 53.

<sup>226</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXVII," 59.

<sup>227</sup> Scholz, "English Women in Oriental Dress," 87.



be less focus on the face if it were the fashion to go naked.<sup>228</sup> She supported this with a recollection that the women who had “finest skins and most delicate shapes” in the bagnio drew her attention despite their faces holding less aesthetic appeal for Lady Mary than others.<sup>229</sup> In regards to the bagnio letter, it is perhaps worth noting that the description of the women’s appearances came after Lady Mary’s praising of their manners. It is, however, difficult to determine whether this is due to Lady Mary prioritising their manners, societal propriety, or a reluctance to shock the reader by leading with a description of the ladies in their state of undress.<sup>230</sup> The way she described her journey to the bagnio also contains relevance for this interpretation of her letters. Dadabhoy writes “Montagu’s use of “design” and “incognito” suggests that her visit contains a hint of impropriety, which is why she must conceal her identity as the English ambassador’s wife”<sup>231</sup> While Lady Mary may not have explicitly described the bagnio as inappropriate, her use of these words at the very least allude to a degree of subconscious bias and fear for the impact visiting such a place would have on her reputation.

Lady Mary used a description of clothing to further elaborate on the appearance of the ladies she encountered during her time in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>232</sup> Lady Mary, as mentioned above, approached the descriptions of appearances as purely an appreciation of beauty, not sexualisation or romanticisation. Lady Mary discussed in a letter to Lady Mar how “every beauty is more common here than with us.”<sup>233</sup> By contrasting the looks of the Turkish women with English women, Lady Mary elevated the appearances of the Turkish ladies above those of the English ladies. However, as Lady Mary elaborated on what this exactly entailed, certain patterns can be seen. Lady Mary highlighted their hair and their “large black eyes” as being direct contributors to their overall beauty.<sup>234</sup> Because these traits were considered typical for the Turkish women, this instead suggested a sexualised or romanticised view of the ladies appearances, which would in turn change the connotations behind Lady Mary’s professed preference.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether Lady Mary’s opinions regarding the appearances of the ladies in the Ottoman Empire were due to a genuine preference for their

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<sup>228</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59.

<sup>229</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59.

<sup>230</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59.

<sup>231</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,” 56.

<sup>232</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 69–70.

<sup>233</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 70.

<sup>234</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 70.

<sup>235</sup> Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders : The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*, 69.

features in general, or due to the novelty of seeing the features for the first time after reading and hearing about them from a romanticised source.

When Lady Mary discussed the appearances of the ladies she observed in the European courts, she used milder language and more limited descriptions, in comparison to her extensive descriptions of the Turkish women. In a letter from Leipzig, Lady Mary briefly mentioned the general appearances of the ladies she met, writing that they “have generally pretty faces,” but quickly moved on to critique the manner with which they moved and spoke.<sup>236</sup> Lady Mary also visited Hanover and once again described the ladies she met among the nobility there. As with other cases, Lady Mary discussed their appearances stating;

All the women here have (literally) rosy cheeks, snowy foreheads and bosoms, jet eyebrows and scarlet lips, to which they generally add coal-black hair. These perfections never leave them, till the hour of their death, and have a very fine effect by candlelight; but I could wish they were handsome with a little more variety.<sup>237</sup>

Though Lady Mary discussed the appearances of the ladies quite thoroughly, she focused on their complexions, the colour of their hair and “scarlet lips” but quickly critiques the lack of variety in their appearances, hinting that, while she found the girls to be “handsome,” she was not particularly surprised or impressed with the overall appearances of the girls in that region. Similarly, while she mentioned the beauty of the Hungarian ladies, commenting that they were “much handsomer than those of Austria,” she did not elaborate on in which ways this beauty was superior or what she found appealing.<sup>238</sup> While there was mention of their bosoms and figures, it was more connected to the way in which they dressed and not a direct comment on the appearance of the women and their bodies. While the women in the bagnio were indeed all naked, Lady Mary discussed their bodies at length, commenting on the variety of body shapes and the overall impression.

Beyond this example of sexualisation in which Lady Mary highlighted the traits of Turkish women that were stereotypically associated with them, there is also a point to be made regarding how she discussed skin tone. In the quote about the ladies of Hanover, Lady Mary

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<sup>236</sup> Montagu, “Letter XV,” 32.

<sup>237</sup> Montagu, “Letter XVIII,” 37.

<sup>238</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIII,” 49.

praised their “snowy foreheads,” holding pale skin in high esteem.<sup>239</sup> However, while this might be expected in Europe, this preference for pale skin is also visible in her descriptions of the women of the Ottoman Empire. In the bagnio, Lady Mary described the ladies’ skin as “shiningly white” while describing their beauty.<sup>240</sup> This indicates a praising and idealising of white skin that was not exclusive to Europe, but imposed on women regardless of ethnicity.<sup>241</sup> Moreso, Lady Mary described women she met in Kiskoi, in Bulgaria, saying that they were “not ugly, but of tawny complexions.”<sup>242</sup> Again, this alludes to the praising of pale skin as her description, while refraining from calling them ugly, mentioned their “tawny complexion” as something that made them less attractive. Ultimately, this was a common thread that could be found at several points in the letter collection and indicated how English beauty standards shaped how Lady Mary interpreted the beauty of those she met on her travels.

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<sup>239</sup> Montagu, “Letter XVIII,” 37.

<sup>240</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59.

<sup>241</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 22.

<sup>242</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 65.

#### 4. Women in Society

While Lady Mary wrote to many of her acquaintances, it is notable that a majority of the letters used in this thesis were addressed to women. When writing to her female friends and her sister, Lady Mar, Lady Mary discussed her surroundings and her visits to various highborn women, in addition to frequent descriptions of the societal expectations placed upon women in the places visited. Meanwhile, when writing to men, for example the Abbé Conti, Lady Mary discussed other, more academic matters. While Lady Mary did occasionally discuss women, it was often in conjunction with more academic or religious topics such as in a letter in which she discusses the religious aspect of marriage.<sup>243</sup> Lady Mary also often painted more vivid pictures of the Ottoman Empire than of the places visited in Europe. This could be due to several influences, such as Orientalism as a topic of intrigue or a general interest in the novelty of the Ottoman Empire to the average English lady.

##### 4.1 Freedoms Within Society

The Orientalist perception of the positions of women in Turkish society relied heavily on the subjugation of women and how this method was inferior to more “modern” treatments of women in England.<sup>244</sup> The idea that women were kept locked away in a backwards sense of traditionalism was challenged by Lady Mary in her letters, in which she claimed the men who started those rumours had no experience with the women and no understanding of how free Turkish women were, in her eyes.<sup>245</sup> While there are many letters that discuss the ways in which Turkish women can be considered free, the most blatant quote that shows Lady Mary’s opinions stated;

Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire. The very Divan pays respect to them and the Grand Signior himself, when a pasha is executed, never violates the privileges of the harem (or womens apartment) which remains unsearched entire to the widow. They are queens of their slaves, which the husband has no permission so much as to look upon, except it be an old woman or two that his lady chooses.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVI,” 100.

<sup>244</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 10.

<sup>245</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 10

<sup>246</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

This quote is particularly relevant as it not only indicates the ways in which the women were freer than the English ladies, but also shows how Lady Mary interpreted the situation as a whole and shows her opinions on the matter. This came at a time where the English woman was told how she was supposed to behave and how their gender dictated how she was supposed to dress, act, and live in general. Conduct manuals, written by men, laid out every detail of how an upper-class woman was supposed to act and women were supposed to be aware of this constantly, if she wished to remain respectable.<sup>247</sup>

Lady Mary discussed multiple aspects regarding the freedom of the Turkish women. One of the less mentioned yet still relevant aspects is that of the Turkish women's financial independence. In a letter from Adrianople, Lady Mary wrote "Neither have they much to apprehend from the resentment of their husbands, those ladies that are rich, having all their money in their own hands."<sup>248</sup> Indeed, women in the Ottoman Empire had many ways to both show their wealth and secure it. There exist several examples of Turkish women who held vast amounts of wealth independently.<sup>249</sup> While Lady Mary highlighted money as the indicator of wealth, there were other ways Turkish women held wealth, particularly through consumption. Women's wealth would often be made up of clothing and other fabric wares, household items, jewellery, cash capital, as mentioned by Lady Mary, and, in certain instances, slaves.<sup>250</sup> Unlike in English law, women were also guaranteed inheritance shares and were able to go to court to gain access to inheritance denied to them.<sup>251</sup> Additionally, property held by the wife was not included in a marriage contract meaning that the ownership of said property was uncertain in the eyes of the law.<sup>252</sup>

Lady Mary also discussed the financial position of women in a letter discussing the positions of women in Austria. Lady Mary mentioned that Austrian ladies would give up to two thousand florins or two hundred pounds English to their husband as their portion of dowry with the rest of her fortune remaining entirely in the lady's own possession. This meant that

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<sup>247</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 22.

<sup>248</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXX," 71–72.

<sup>249</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek and Mark David Baer, "Social Boundaries of Ottoman Women's Experience in Eighteenth-Century Galata Court Records," in *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Madeline C. Zilfi (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 50.

<sup>250</sup> Göçek and Baer, "Social Boundaries of Ottoman Women's Experience," 52.

<sup>251</sup> Göçek and Baer, "Social Boundaries of Ottoman Women's Experience," 58.

<sup>252</sup> Colin Imber, "Women, Marriage, and Property: Mahr in the Behcetü'l-Fetāvā of Yenişehirli Abdullah," in *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Madeline C. Zilfi (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 9.

there were several ladies at court who held more money than their husbands.<sup>253</sup> While Lady Mary herself did not draw comparisons between the two, it is interesting to read how, though the Turkish example is linked implicitly to their freedom, she made no claims regarding the link between financial independence and freedom when discussing the Austrian example. Again, this could be connected to the Orientalist stereotypes portraying Turkish women as prisoners in their own homes with no freedom.

While Lady Mary placed significant emphasis on the societal aspects that provided the women with freedom through finances and respect to the women's domains, Lady Mary also placed a similar emphasis on the topic of freedom through anonymity. Turkish laws and institutions placed many rulings and regulations on the ways in which women were to be seen or hidden and veiling was an example of this. While the most proclaimed purpose of the veiling was to keep social order, the practice did stem from the idea that women's sexuality would cause disorder and should subsequently be controlled.<sup>254</sup> In Orientalist stereotypes, as mentioned, the veiled woman came to represent the ways in which Islam and the Ottoman Empire were more backwards and traditionalist than the supposedly rational and Christian English society.<sup>255</sup> Lady Mary famously challenged this interpretation of the veil.<sup>256</sup> In her letters, Lady Mary specified how the ladies were protected from damage to their reputations when they moved about in public by their veils.<sup>257</sup> Again, Lady Mary herself drew comparisons between the English and European ladies and the Turkish ladies, with her main argument being that the Turkish ladies had more freedom than their European counterparts. She went on to discuss how, while women were not allowed out without being veiled, the same veil provided them with anonymity. Lady Mary wrote that "there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street."<sup>258</sup> Lady Mary discussed how this allowed the ladies to move about without fearing damage to their reputation or harassment as no one was able to see who the lady was.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Montagu, "Letter XI," 25.

<sup>254</sup> Madeline Zilfi, "Muslim Women in the Early Modern Era," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey Vol. 3*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 232.

<sup>255</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 9.

<sup>256</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 1.

<sup>257</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXX," 71.

<sup>258</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXX," 71.

<sup>259</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXX," 71.

Lady Mary made a brief comment on the mourning clothes worn in Vienna, in conjunction with her commentary on the empress mother. While the women were not so entirely covered as the women in the Ottoman Empire, this excerpt does involve a discussion regarding the ways in which women were expected to cover themselves. Lady Mary write that;

There is not the least bit of linen to be seen; all black crepe instead of it; the neck, ears and side of the face covered with a plaited piece of the same stuff and the face that peeps out in the midst of it looks as if it were pilloried. The widows wear over and above, a crepe forehead-cloth, and in this solemn weed go to all the public places of diversion without scruple.<sup>260</sup>

While these two cases both discuss the requirements on women to cover themselves out of propriety or religious devotion, Lady Mary's attitudes towards the two cases were notably different. Lady Mary took a position of defending the veiling of the Turkish women.<sup>261</sup> Instead of fixating on the requirement to wear a veil, Lady Mary discussed how the ladies made use of this to benefit themselves and their own mobility.<sup>262</sup> While previous travel writers had depicted the veil as an oppression of the women and a symbol of a woman's low position in society, Lady Mary claimed it more as a symbol of freedom, freeing women from scrutiny and providing them with the anonymity that protected them from ridicule, stains on their reputations, and unwanted advancements. The Viennese example, while used in a different context, was described as unflattering and uncomfortable, with the clothing being described as "dismal." While the two cases cannot be compared directly, it does suggest a difference in attitude or expectation held by Lady Mary, which in turn led to differing views on the practice of covering oneself in public.

In an example that is perhaps closer to the Turkish example, Lady Mary discussed the veiling of Christian women in her discussions regarding the nuns she met in the convent of St Lawrence in Vienna. She described the nuns habits as "becoming," describing a white robe and small black crepe veils.<sup>263</sup> However, beyond that she did not discuss the reasons behind wearing the veil in either context, instead simply addressing the overall look of the veil. While she held

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<sup>260</sup> Montagu, "Letter IX," 19.

<sup>261</sup> Dadabhoy, "Going Native," 60.

<sup>262</sup> Hall, Sagal, and Zold, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Turkish Embassy Letters: A Survey of Contemporary Criticism," 3.

<sup>263</sup> Montagu, "Letter XII," 27.

the opinion that the nuns were entombed in the convent, she viewed the women of the Ottoman Empire as being freer than in England; an observation that has become the focus of many works discussing *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. However, this perspective neglected the context of the Ottoman Empire when discussing how women were able to move about freely. While women were granted anonymity by their veils, women were not allowed to leave the house without permission from her husband as, if she did, she would be viewed as disobedient and forfeit her right to financial maintenance from her husband. Additionally, the husband was also permitted to prevent any strangers from visiting the house and limit relatives' access to the wife.<sup>264</sup> While Lady Mary made claims of freedom for the women, she either neglected to mention or was unaware of the fact that this freedom was only available to the woman who was permitted to leave the house by her husband.

Beyond this more abstract and distanced discussion of the freedom the veil provided the Turkish women, Lady Mary was also able to recount how the Turkish dress with the veil provided her with that same anonymity. In a letter from Adrianople, Lady Mary wrote;

I had the curiosity to go to see the Exchange in my Turkish dress which is disguise sufficient, yet I own I was not very easy when I saw it crowded with janissaries; but they dare not be rude to a woman and made way for me with as much respect as if I had been in my own figure.<sup>265</sup>

This particular excerpt is relevant as Lady Mary drew a comparison between the respect she was given while in her usual dress as an English ambassadress and the respect given when she was disguised by the veil. As seen in this quote, Lady Mary was doubtful of how much respect she would be given when she was the one wearing the veil, which is particularly interesting when contrasted with her previous strong claims on the respect veiled women in the Ottoman Empire were given. While her previous claims of freedom for women are dampened by her neglect of the husband's power over his wife, this quote actually exemplifies how anonymity and freedom from scrutiny would have been seen as positive to someone who did not have the same rules as a Turkish woman. In England at the time, being a well-perceived woman entailed a constant self-monitoring due to constant visibility.<sup>266</sup> Her wording is also worth mentioning

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<sup>264</sup> Imber, "Women, Marriage, and Property," 84.

<sup>265</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXV," 92.

<sup>266</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 112.



as she claimed that the janissaries<sup>267</sup> “dare not be rude to a woman,” indicating the culture of inherent respect to the veiled women, despite and due to them not knowing which lady was beneath the veil. This excerpt shows how the veil provided freedom of movement through anonymity and how Lady Mary both witnessed and experienced this first hand. It also shows how Lady Mary experienced the anonymity of the veil within the context of the constant scrutiny she was accustomed to in England.

Lady Mary generally did not discuss freedom in the European courts. While this could be due to a familiarity, there is also the fact that European customs and norms were not as different as the English typically claimed.<sup>268</sup> While in Nuremberg, Lady Mary mentioned the sumptuary laws dictating the way different social classes and ranks were allowed to dress. Lady Mary expressed the opinion that she wished the laws existed in other parts of the world as they prevented “the excess which ruins so many other cities” and created a more agreeable scene to the eye. She elaborated by commenting that the manner in which people dressed to gain respect and cause envy was immoral and led to misery.<sup>269</sup> However, this neglected the fact that there were also sumptuary laws in the Ottoman Empire that dictated how different social, religious, and ethnic groups were supposed to dress in public. While they were not particularly strict at the time, they existed nonetheless, though Lady Mary made no reference to them.<sup>270</sup> Additionally, her dislike for envy appears contradictory with her admiration of the riches in the Ottoman Empire. Beyond this, Lady Mary did not discuss which freedoms the European women had which, in itself is an interesting omission as it shows what she found interesting, and what she thought her reader would be aware of already.

## 4.2 Religion and Superstition

An important aspect of the daily lives of women and how Lady Mary chose to interpret the cultural differences is that of religion. In the Ottoman Empire, the Quranic rules on protecting women’s bodies had been adapted into institutions and physical segregations that were intended to fulfil this protection while also limiting their mobility and independence.<sup>271</sup> English Orientalism essentially framed Islam as a religion that oppressed women and aligned the

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<sup>267</sup> Janissaries: Members of the Ottoman infantry corps.

<sup>268</sup> Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness*, 24.

<sup>269</sup> Montagu, “Letter V,” 9.

<sup>270</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 48.

<sup>271</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,”” 53.

religion with tradition and contrasted it with the modern secular view they were trying to promote in England at the time.<sup>272</sup> This divide further shifted the view that Islam and the orient were irrational and decadent and the things the English had decided they themselves were not.<sup>273</sup>

In her letters, Lady Mary comes across as keenly aware of the religious aspects of daily life and based several of her observations on religion, such as in a letter from Adrianople in which Lady Mary justified her opinion that the Turkish court holds more “beauties” than any other court she’s visited, by emphasising that the court of England is “the fairest in Christendom.”<sup>274</sup> I interpret this comment in two different ways, with two different implications. Initially, this particular comment functions as a way of justifying her views of the Turkish women and their beauty, while still maintaining the Englishwomen’s beauty as a superior beauty within a certain group. By dividing the world into Christendom and Islam, Lady Mary created two different worlds and allowed both types of beauty to be the most highly held within their respective worlds. But this division of Christendom and Islam also contributed to a sense of othering. By clarifying that the Court of England was the fairest in Christendom, Lady Mary created a clear separation between the Turkish women and the English. Their beauty could not be considered equal as they could not exist in the same world. Lady Mary compared the two courts, creating a way of praising them both that simultaneously highlighted the divide between the two. The English were the most beautiful in the civilised world, while the Turkish were the most beautiful in the mythicised Orient.

Lady Mary based a number of her observations on the comparisons and contrasts between the Muslim ladies of the Ottoman Empire and the Christian ladies of the European courts. In one letter, Lady Mary wrote that “the Turkish ladies don’t commit one sin the less for not being Christians.”<sup>275</sup> The thought expressed here is worth noting as it exemplifies how Lady Mary approached her analysis and discussions of the Turkish culture and customs; by comparing them and holding them up to the standards of Christianity, as she perceived them. Lady Mary also described how the women were not permitted outside without veils, describing the veils in detail and emphasising how this applied to women of any rank but, in the same letter did not mention the religious reasoning behind this. While this does occur in conjunction with a

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<sup>272</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,” 53.

<sup>273</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 8.

<sup>274</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 70.

<sup>275</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 71.

discussion regarding the morality of Turkish women, Lady Mary did not emphasise religion and instead represented it as a novelty that the addressee would find entertaining.<sup>276</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Lady Mary was more prone to discuss religion in her letters to the Abbé Conti. In one such letter, Lady Mary presented a more in-depth discussion regarding what religion entailed for the women of the Ottoman Empire. Lady Mary wrote of two “particularities.”<sup>277</sup> While a detailed description of the particularities and Lady Mary’s opinions on these follows, the use of the word “particularities” is already interesting. At the time, the word “particularity” was often used to describe something that would cause surprise or something that was considered odd.<sup>278</sup> While this may have been used to convey how interesting Lady Mary found them, there is the simultaneous act of minimising the religious customs or reducing them to a spectacle.

Lady Mary described the first aspect, being the customs surrounding divorces as being “so odd to me I could not believe it.”<sup>279</sup> Lady Mary continued to use words that conveyed confusion or peculiarity in her description, continuing the tone caused by the use of the word “particularity” earlier in the quote. The first aspect revolves around the custom that a divorced man had to let the wife he divorced “pass a night” with another man before he was allowed to marry her again. The language used indicates a great deal of surprise from Lady Mary that this was the only term, to her knowledge regarding this remarriage. She also made sure to note that there were examples of men submitting to that law in order to have his wife back, which also indicated an amount of surprise, not only with the law, but also with the fact that people adhered to it. It is also worth noting that Lady Mary started the discussion by talking about religion, yet also specified that this was a law, reflecting her understanding of the connection between religion and state. Indeed, there were several laws regarding divorce and the processes behind the event in the Ottoman Empire. For example, women were in certain cases allowed to petition for separation from her husband, though these cases were limited and often required immediate action from the wife.<sup>280</sup> Men, on the other hand could divorce freely.<sup>281</sup> There are several aspects of divorce that one could consider worth discussing, such as the fact that a mere threat

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<sup>276</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 71.

<sup>277</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVI,” 100.

<sup>278</sup> “4b. Particularity,” Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.vasa.abo.fi/view/Entry/138266?redirectedFrom=particularities#eid>

<sup>279</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVI,” 100.

<sup>280</sup> Imber, “Women, Marriage, and Property,” 85.

<sup>281</sup> Imber, “Women, Marriage, and Property,” 84.

to divorce ones wife, if witnessed, could not be recanted and the wife would have legal standing for a divorce.<sup>282</sup> However, Lady Mary fixated on the aspect of divorce that would permit the woman to “pass the night” with another man. While this may have been shocking to her, it nonetheless contributes to the ongoing Orientalist sexualisation of Turkish women. Stereotypes constantly alluded to the Turkish woman’s dangerous sexuality and the subsequent degeneracy of the harem, contributing to the supposed superiority of the English and the inferiority of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>283</sup> By focusing on this aspect of marriage and divorce laws in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary hinted at a subconscious sexualisation and internalised Orientalism in her world views. In England, separation was strongly cautioned against and would carry with it damages to one’s reputation, so to carry out a separation was relatively rare.<sup>284</sup> Lady Mary did not mention how common it was in the Ottoman Empire, choosing only to focus on the sexual side of what a divorce could lead to.

The second aspect Lady Mary saw fit to mention was the religious customs surrounding the position of the married and fertile woman in society and religion. While subsequent sections of this thesis focus on this aspect in greater detail from a cultural and more practical standpoint, this section focuses on Lady Mary’s perception of the religious reasoning behind this. Lady Mary described the doctrine which specified that a woman’s purpose was regarded as being to bear children, emphasising that the religion looked down on unmarried women. Here, Lady Mary mentioned that “their way of life, which shuts them out of all public commerce, does not permit them any other” in regard to this singular purpose. This particular quote is worth highlighting as it contrasts to Lady Mary’s aforementioned positive views on the veil and the harems, instead indicating an opinion that this segregation of women limited a woman’s choices beyond childbearing. However, Lady Mary used this discussion as an entry point through which to discuss the Christian views on Islam and how their values presented differently. Lady Mary denied the English notion that “they do not own women to have any souls,” instead clarifying that, while a woman’s soul was not seen as equal to a that of a man, they still possessed a soul and were able to enter “a place of happiness destined for souls of the inferior order where all good women are to be in eternal bliss.”<sup>285</sup> Female writers who opposed the position of women in the Ottoman Empire, largely based on Orientalist stereotypes, were

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<sup>282</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 113–114.

<sup>283</sup> Dadabhoy, ““Going Native,” 53.

<sup>284</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 87.

<sup>285</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVI,” 100.

often in the position of objecting to the notion that women did not have souls. Instead, they took the position that women were taught that they did not have souls as an example of the intentional lack of information Turkish men gave to the women. They used this as a way to both elevate their own education while also decrying the perceived treatment of Turkish women.<sup>286</sup> In a sense, Lady Mary went against this notion by highlighting the flaw in this perception that women were taught they did not have souls by highlighting the reality of the situation and undermining this faulty view of Turkish women.

Lady Mary also discussed the terms for achieving the afterlife, mentioning how women had to be married in order to enter this afterlife and compared this idea to the Christianity's praising of virginity. At the time, women in England were expected to aspire to both modesty and chastity which highly emphasised sexual purity.<sup>287</sup> However, the Ottoman Empire held different values that praised fertility. Lady Mary asked the addressee, the Abbé Conti, which religion was more rational, stating that she left such a question up to him.<sup>288</sup> In a separate letter to the Abbé Conti, Lady Mary raised similar questions when describing the positions of women according to Islam. Following a description of how women's duties were to bear children and raise said children, she raised the question;

What will become of your saint Catharines, your saint Theresas, your saint Claras and the whole bead roll of your holy virgins and widows, who, if they are to be judged by this system of virtue will be found to have been infamous creatures that passed their whole lives in a most abominable libertinism.<sup>289</sup>

As in her previous comments, Lady Mary drew her own comparisons between the avenues of virtue in Christianity and Islam by pointing out that the saints and generally perceived virtuous women of Christianity would have been viewed as having been lazy and shirking their holy duty if they were judged by the values of Islam. What is particularly interesting is that, while Lady Mary presented these values of virtue as a novelty, she did not explicitly position herself in regard to which system she found more logical. If anything, her comments were remarkably objective, instead placing the responsibility of having an opinion on the addressee of her letter.

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<sup>286</sup> Cahill, *Intelligent Souls?*, 199.

<sup>287</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 22.

<sup>288</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXVI," 100.

<sup>289</sup> Montagu, "Letter XL," 110.

Beyond the religious customs that ruled the daily life of the Turkish women, Lady Mary also discussed the superstitions. While her comments regarding the religious aspects of Turkish harem life were riddled with comparisons to Christianity and were largely positive, her comments regarding the superstitions were more derisive and patronising, in a sense. Lady Mary described a discussion she had with an unnamed Turkish lady in which they discussed magic and the use of charms. Lady Mary commented how the lady “who really talks very sensibly on any other subject” attributed several “ridiculous marriages” to enchantments of some persuasion. Lady Mary disputed this idea and commented on how there are several such marriages in England where they were “entirely ignorant of all magic.” Lady Mary commented that she laughed at these notions, despite other women believing similar things. Again, Lady Mary placed herself in a position of superiority regarding her disbelief in these superstitions and completely disconnected these ideas of magic from rationality, firmly placing herself in the latter category and expressing surprise that sensible women would believe these things.

Furthermore, Lady Mary commented that, if these women were to talk of such things in England, they would be able to accrue an estate quickly. Again, this minimised these women’s beliefs to simple superstition and something that would only be used to trick the less learned and critical.<sup>290</sup> Lady Mary commented that the lady claimed to be able to use enchantments, highlighting a comment in which the lady stated that “no enchantments would have their effects upon me; and that there were some people exempt from their power, but very few.”<sup>291</sup> This particular excerpt is noteworthy because of the various attitudes exposed. Lady Mary not only highlighted how ridiculous she found the notion, but also highlighted the comment that placed herself above the influence of the very thing she disregarded. This simultaneous act of degrading the superstitions while using them to portray herself as superior is clearly visible and is reflected in many of her comments regarding the superstitions of the Turkish women, further reflecting the Orientalist view that the Ottoman Empire was irrational at its core.<sup>292</sup>

### **4.3 Marriage, Mistresses, and Lovers**

In the discussion regarding the “two particularities” of Islam, Lady Mary commented on the religious reasons behind marriage and the culture surrounding marriage; however, this section

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<sup>290</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVIII,” 105–106.

<sup>291</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVIII,” 105–106.

<sup>292</sup> Heffernan, *Veiled Figures*, 8.

focuses more on the practical ramifications of these views. Lady Mary mentioned that a woman dying unmarried meant she died in a state of condemnation, meaning that she did not die performing her duty as a woman and as such would not achieve the “place of happiness” she would otherwise be destined for. Subsequently, Lady Mary wrote how “Many of them are very superstitious and will not remain widows ten days for fear of dying in the reprobate state of a useless creature.”<sup>293</sup> This shows an interesting side of marriage and how religion informed custom. However, the most notable part of this comment is not the discussion regarding why the ladies remarried and the haste with which they did so, but the language used to describe these attitudes. Lady Mary used the word “superstitious” to describe the women who followed this custom. The use of the word “superstitious” separated, in a sense, the actions from religious piety and instead moved the custom and attitudes to the realm of old wives tales. While this may have been subconscious, there is an element of superiority exhibited here, in which Lady Mary viewed these religious reasonings as somewhat inferior.

Lady Mary also discussed the women who were less inclined to follow this custom, mentioning that “those that like their liberty and are not slaves to their religion content themselves with marrying when they are afraid of dying.”<sup>294</sup> Again, the language is not as positive as in other letters, with Lady Mary commenting that the women who liked their liberty and waited to remarry were not “slaves” to their religion, implying that the aforementioned “superstitious” women were. While there was not the same need to be married at death in Christianity, a woman was nonetheless expected to marry to be accepted in English society.<sup>295</sup> However, Lady Mary’s history in regard to marriage is also potentially relevant. As mentioned earlier, Lady Mary eloped to avoid an arranged marriage she did not agree with, instead choosing to marry for love.<sup>296</sup> While this may not be directly connected, there is an argument to be made that Lady Mary had experience with rejecting customs particularly in regard to choosing when and who to marry, while claiming a certain degree of independence while doing so.

Lady Mary used the marriage of the Grand Signior’s eldest daughter as an example for how a marriage could take place and how the topic of matrimony was conducted in the Ottoman

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<sup>293</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVI,” 100.

<sup>294</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVI,” 100.

<sup>295</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Mary Wortley Montague*, 12.

<sup>296</sup> Desai, “Introduction,” xiii.

Empire.<sup>297</sup> Lady Mary did not witness this marriage as it had occurred a few days before their arrival. She described how the bride had been married before, likening the marriage more to a contract as she had never lived with him. Again, wealth was mentioned as she had inherited a majority of his wealth following his death. She mentioned how the bride reportedly burst into tears when she saw her new 50-year-old husband after which she mentioned that the bride was only 13 years old.<sup>298</sup> There are several items worth noting. The initial comment to highlight is the use of “contract” to describe the marriage of the girl to her first husband. Lady Mary also mentioned the marriage contract in a comment regarding the marriage of a young princess. “Ibrahim Pasha, the reigning favourite, has made for the young princess his contracted wife, whom he is not yet permitted to visit without witnesses, though she is gone home to his house.”<sup>299</sup> The marriage contract would not have been an unfamiliar concept for Lady Mary. At the time in England, marriage among the upper classes dealt primarily with finance and was seen as a contract of both a social and economic kind. This contract mainly focused on protecting private property and male inheritance.<sup>300</sup> Marriage in the Ottoman Empire was similarly an arrangement which was legally defined in a contract.<sup>301</sup> Lady Mary, though describing this aspect of the marriage did not make further reference in regard to her opinion on the marriage contract, despite her previous rejection of her own arranged marriage.<sup>302</sup>

The most noteworthy aspect of this description was the mention that the bride was 13 years old and cried at some point during the wedding. From a modern perspective, this bears negative connotations; however, 18<sup>th</sup> century Turkish society had different views on this. Though a bride’s consent was necessary for the marriage to be brought into effect, verbal consent was not required. Crying was considered a sign of consent if the bride was not crying too hard, as it was interpreted as “maidenly bashfulness.”<sup>303</sup> While Lady Mary did not mention anything in regard to this contextual background, she did comment that the bride was likely not enthused with her husband and attributed her mood to this. Regardless, as marriage was considered a matter of economics and position, not love, it is unsurprising that Lady Mary reacted as mildly to this as she did.

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<sup>297</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIX,” 65.

<sup>298</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIX,” 65.

<sup>299</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXI,” 76.

<sup>300</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Mary Wortley Montague*, 12.

<sup>301</sup> Imber, “Women, Marriage, and Property,” 86.

<sup>302</sup> Desai, “Introduction,” xiii.

<sup>303</sup> Imber, “Women, Marriage, and Property,” 86.



While in the bagnio, Lady Mary made an interesting comment while describing her interactions with the ladies there. In a description of a scenario in which Lady Mary showed them her stays, she commented that “I saw they believed I was locked up in that machine, that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband.” While this is, in the broader scope of the letter in question, a small aside comment, it could be interpreted to reflect how the Turkish ladies viewed the European clothes and how they immediately perceived the stays as being a way for a man to exercise control over his wife.<sup>304</sup> This is interesting when contrasted with the English view that the stays were a signifier of modesty and propriety.<sup>305</sup> Beyond this, there appears to have been an awareness of Orientalist stereotypes among the Turkish upper classes. For the Turkish women, bringing female European travellers into their harems and dictating what they saw was a way to engage with European culture and dictate how the European women experienced the often-sexualised harem.<sup>306</sup> This clash of the Turkish interpretations of the stays and the perceived confinement within the stays provides a mirror to the perceived confinement of Turkish women within the harem.

Though Lady Mary did not mention marriage in Europe with any frequency or consistency, she did occasionally choose to highlight those aspects of marriage that were either unfamiliar or surprising to her. In a letter from Vienna, Lady Mary explained how marriage was intricately linked to a woman’s position, describing how a woman would lose her position and rank the moment her husband died, with widows not having a place or role in Vienna. Beyond this, the topic of marriage itself was not discussed in a European context, likely due to similarities between English and European customs. Lady Mary did go on to discuss how station informed various types of relationships. In a comment on how the men would not marry below their station, she also commented that they would not sleep with a woman below their station, indicating how prevalent extramarital affairs were.<sup>307</sup>

Beyond marriage, Lady Mary also discussed the existence of mistresses and adultery in the Ottoman Empire and how it compared to Europe. She discussed this topic initially in conjunction with the topic of marriage in the Ottoman Empire. She commented on the

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<sup>304</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59–60.

<sup>305</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 86.

<sup>306</sup> Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders : The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*, 13.

<sup>307</sup> Montagu, “Letter XI,” 25.

Orientalist stereotype of the Turkish men having multiple wives and the prevalence of this, writing;

'Tis true, their law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it. When a husband happens to be inconstant, as those things will happen, he keeps his mistress in a house apart, and visits her as privately as he can, just as 'tis with you.<sup>308</sup>

This is thought-provoking as it opposed the sexualised idea of the harem that was prevalent in England at the time, pointing out that the Turkish lady, if she were a woman of rank, would not permit this and that a “man of quality” would also not have this number of wives. It is worth noting that Lady Mary was mainly using the upper classes and nobility as her reference point and did not provide insight into this aspect from a more generalised perspective. While there is no way to accurately determine the extent to which this is accurate in Lady Mary’s experience, she appeared to hold the Turkish ladies’ positions in their marriages in high esteem and challenged English ideas that the Turkish men took several wives and flaunted their mistresses. An example of this is how Lady Mary recounted that the Turkish men kept their mistresses separate and private, explicitly mentioning that they took mistresses with the same discretion as the English.<sup>309</sup>

This is interesting as other research on Turkish women shows that having multiple wives and a large house and household was a way of status signalling and an indication of favour from the sultan.<sup>310</sup> Lady Mary’s disagreement with this could be due to surprise at the discretion with which this was practiced or due to a certain level of ignorance regarding the positions of women in the harem or the cultural norms. Like other cultures of the time, adultery was punishable by death in the Ottoman Empire, though they tended to resolve adultery privately in court or through fines as adultery claims required four eyewitnesses in order to convict the accused.<sup>311</sup> However, as mentioned, the practice of having multiple wives or slaves as concubines within the harem allowed for other avenues that did not involve adultery.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>309</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>310</sup> Faroqhi, *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women*, 17.

<sup>311</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 71.

<sup>312</sup> Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 120.

Lady Mary also compared the secrecy regarding mistresses to that in England, highlighting that the secrecy and privacy in the Ottoman Empire was comparable.<sup>313</sup> Lady Mary continued to discuss that, among the men of the upper classes, she only knew of the *testerdar*<sup>314</sup> having “a number of she slaves, for his own use” and commented that he was “spoke of as a libertine, or what we should call a rake” specifying that his wife refused to see him anymore, which Lady Mary assumed was due to this matter.<sup>315</sup> Lady Mary also discussed the secrecy surrounding extramarital affairs when discussing the privacy afforded by the veil. She wrote;

The great ladies seldom let their gallants know who they are, and 'tis so difficult to find it out that they can very seldom guess at her name they have corresponded with above half a year together. You may easily imagine the number of faithful wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from their lover's indiscretion, since we see so many have the courage to expose themselves to that in this world, and all the threatened punishment of the next, which is never preached to the Turkish damsels.<sup>316</sup>

The expected overt sexuality of the Turkish women and the harem clearly influenced Lady Mary's expectations. Beyond that, she knew what her reader would expect her to recount and made sure to determine the facts for her reader. However, Lady Mary also discussed the topic of mistresses, lovers, and extramarital affairs in her letters from Europe. In a letter from Vienna, Lady Mary mentioned the prevalence of extramarital affairs and discussed how many of the ladies had both a legal and nominal husband. At one point, Lady Mary wrote;

These engagements are so well known that it would be a downright affront and publicly resented if you invited a woman of quality to dinner without, at the same time inviting her two attendants of lover and husband, between whom she always sits in state with great gravity.<sup>317</sup>

She went on to discuss how these engagements could last twenty years and that women started looking for a lover as soon as they were married “as part of her equipage, without which she could not be genteel.” She also discussed a pension that was owed to the woman should her

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<sup>313</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>314</sup> “Treasurer,” in Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>315</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>316</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 71.

<sup>317</sup> Montagu, “Letter X,” 22.

lover be “inconstant.” She connected this pension to their position in society, as the amount was often well-known and the women would be seen as less respectable if they became a mistress with no prospect of monetary gain. Lady Mary even mentioned that enquiries had been made regarding why she had not yet found a paramour, having been in Vienna for a fortnight.<sup>318</sup> In the same letter, Lady Mary discussed the matter of affairs and romantic conquests, though she used it mainly as a way to explain how the perception of women’s youth was different to that in England. She commented that “wrinkles, or a small stoop in the shoulders, nay grey hair itself is no objection to the making new conquests.” She also commented that a woman’s reputation was not as damaged by having a lover than it was in England.<sup>319</sup>

While Lady Mary focused on affairs while discussing both marriage and the topic of women’s anonymity in the Ottoman Empire, in Vienna, Lady Mary discussed it as a comment on the connection between age and beauty. Despite her mentions of affairs in Vienna, she mainly mentioned it only to point out how women were perceived as beautiful and how the topic was not as scandalous, to her perception, as it was in England. In the Ottoman Empire, however, Lady Mary commented on the stereotypes of the harem, instead highlighting reality and what previous travel writers had not been able to experience but had written about regardless. Lady Mary concluded these discussions on marriage and extramarital affairs with a note that the prevalence of and attitudes towards the matter were not as different in the two countries as previous travel writers had claimed, commenting that she understood how adding lies would make the account more interesting while also claiming that “nothing seems to me so agreeable as truth.”<sup>320</sup>

#### **4.4 The Prevalence of Pregnancy**

As mentioned earlier, the religious culture in the Ottoman Empire entailed that women marry and birth children as part of their moral duties as women.<sup>321</sup> As a lady, Lady Mary had first-hand experience with this cultural norm and expectation. During her time in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary gave birth to a daughter. In her letters, she discussed the circumstances

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<sup>318</sup> Montagu, “Letter X,” 23.

<sup>319</sup> Montagu, “Letter X,” 21.

<sup>320</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 72.

<sup>321</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVI,” 100.

that led to this choice and how the societal norms impacted the decision. In a letter from Pera in Constantinople, Lady Mary wrote;

To say the truth I am at this present writing not very much turned for the recollection of what is diverting, my head being wholly filled with the preparations necessary for the increase of my family, which I expect every day. You may easily guess at my uneasy situation, but I am, however, in some degree comforted by the glory that accrues to me from it, and a reflection on the contempt I should otherwise fall under.<sup>322</sup>

This quote not only hints at the cultural pressure to have children but also alludes to the general opinion Lady Mary would have expected from England at the news. In the quote, Lady Mary mentioned that the addressee would interpret the situation as being uneasy for Lady Mary, suggesting that the pregnancy would not necessarily be interpreted as a positive event among her peers. In a separate letter, she wrote “I know you will tell me that I have done very badly,” in reference to the pregnancy and birth, again indicating what the attitudes in England would be.<sup>323</sup> While maternity had been once again strongly linked to femininity among the English upper classes, there was much emphasis on the need for the mother to remain at home to help care for her child. This would have impacted the social lives of mothers greatly.<sup>324</sup> Additionally, Lady Mary commented that, without this pregnancy, she would have been negatively perceived in the Ottoman Empire and, by instead falling pregnant, placed herself in a positive position within the cultural and religious norms of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish culture placed a high value on fertility and children in society were highly valued, as can be seen in the letters in which Lady Mary discussed the topic of pregnancy.<sup>325</sup>

In the same letter, Lady Mary described in detail the attitudes towards pregnancy and the expectations placed on women to have several of them. While this aspect had been previously discussed in conjunction with her descriptions of religious virtue in Islam and how this impacted the daily lives of women, she had not elaborated on the practical implications this had for women. Lady Mary discussed how a woman not having children was seen as an indicator that she had become too old to have children, no matter how young she looked. As such, she posited that bearing children had become equivalent to a proof of youth which was a

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<sup>322</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIX,” 107.

<sup>323</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLVII,” 132.

<sup>324</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 223.

<sup>325</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 173.

necessary part of being “a received beauty.”<sup>326</sup> In addition to the high value placed on fertility, the failure to produce a son could also lead to a woman being called barren, despite her having several daughters who had made it to adulthood.<sup>327</sup> This made the woman’s position even more precarious. She not only had to produce a child; in some cases, she needed to produce a male child in order to maintain her position. Women gained position and authority with both childbearing and advanced age, raising her position within the harem.<sup>328</sup> She continued to describe how this perception had influenced the women to attempt to prove their youth and virtue to avoid this scandal through what she implied were dangerous methods, commenting that the ladies “often kill themselves by them.”<sup>329</sup> While Lady Mary did not elaborate on what these methods were, she nonetheless managed to convey how much a woman’s reputation rested on her fertility and her ability to bear children successfully.

In Vienna, Lady Mary mentioned how age was connected to beauty in the topic of finding a lover. The context for the two discussions is, however, different, with one focusing on how beauty was linked to fertility and the other discussing how the age at which one was considered old.<sup>330</sup> However, in both contexts, Lady Mary described how beauty is intrinsically linked to reputation and how, when one stopped being considered as such, the prestige one held diminishes. The letter even brought England into the conversation by mentioning how the women of Vienna were considered beautiful for much longer than in England. The noteworthy comment regarding this topic is the use of the word “barbarous” to describe the customs of England in regard to the age at which one was considered to be old.<sup>331</sup> As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the English created a strong connection between youthfulness and beauty, with women over the age of fifty being considered to be old in appearance.<sup>332</sup> By using such a negatively connotated word to describe the English way, Lady Mary took a strong stance and clearly chose to favour the Viennese way over the English, at least in regard to beauty standards.

In the Ottoman Empire, it was common to have numerous children.<sup>333</sup> Lady Mary discussed how all the women she had met had approximately twelve or thirteen children and

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<sup>326</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIX,” 107.

<sup>327</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 173.

<sup>328</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 18.

<sup>329</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIX,” 107.

<sup>330</sup> Montagu, “Letter X,” 21.

<sup>331</sup> Montagu, “Letter X,” 21.

<sup>332</sup> Ottaway, *The Decline of Life*, 42.

<sup>333</sup> Zilfi, “Muslim Women in the Early Modern Era,” 245.

the older women she had met had had up to 25–30 children. She also clarified that the women were not expecting the children to grow to adulthood, commenting that the plague would kill approximately half of them. Lady Mary also commented that this proposed mortality rate was of no concern to the parents and mentioned that they were instead pleased with the amount of children they had been able to have, though it is difficult to ascertain the veracity of this comment and whether this reflected the culture as a whole or the upper-class social circle Lady Mary moved in.<sup>334</sup>

Lady Mary used some comparative elements to convey how childbearing was the most important aspect of a woman's reputation in the same letter. In the comment "in this country it is more despicable to be married and not fruitful than it is with us to be fruitful before marriage." Lady Mary used the European ideals of reputation and what constituted a scandal to put the cultural differences into perspective.<sup>335</sup> In the Ottoman Empire, children born outside wedlock were not typically looked down upon due to illegitimacy.<sup>336</sup> The topic of illegitimate children in England was a scandalous one. Women who had "fallen" by either romantic scandal or an illegitimate child were considered to have done irreparable damage to both their reputation and their religion and souls.<sup>337</sup> By contrasting this with the idea that it was better to have children out of wedlock than to be infertile in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary not only illustrated how different the cultures were, but also put into perspective just how scandalous and damaging to one's reputation infertility was.

As discussed in the first paragraph of this section, these cultural expectations also extended to the foreign ambassadors in the Ottoman Empire, with Lady Mary bearing one child during her time there. In the same letter Lady Mary mentioned that "The French ambassador is forced to comply with this fashion as well as myself. She has not been here much above a year and has lain in once and is big again."<sup>338</sup> Beyond illustrating that Lady Mary was not the only one expected to bear children to save her reputation, it also suggested that having one child while in the Ottoman Empire was not enough, but that the ambassadors were expected to bear children as frequently as possible in order to prove their fertility and maintain their positions and reputations in society.

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<sup>334</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIX," 107.

<sup>335</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIX," 107.

<sup>336</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 110.

<sup>337</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 29.

<sup>338</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIX," 107.

Lady Mary discussed the differences and provided an opinion on the matter. Contrary to in England, in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary described how women were allowed to see anyone they chose on the day of the birth and were able to start making visits again after a fortnight, specifying that they usually went out in their jewels and in new clothes.<sup>339</sup> Lady Mary gave an opinion both explicitly and by using language to convey her attitude. She commented that she would likely not follow the Turkish customs, despite her wishes that she would be bold enough to try the different customs. This would suggest a favourable attitude towards these practices. More subtly, the language she used also suggests that she would have preferred the Turkish customs. She referred to the English customs as “the curse entailed on the sex” and proceeded to mention that the Turkish way was “wonderful.” Moreso, when she mentioned that she would likely continue with the English manner she used the phrase “I fear” to convey this expectation, placing a negative connotation on the statement.<sup>340</sup> Again, women were expected to remain at home following the birth in England in order to provide care, with a growing emphasis on maternal breastfeeding as opposed to wet-nursing which had held more popularity before.<sup>341</sup>

In a separate letter to Lady Mar, Lady Mary mentioned having given birth to her daughter five weeks prior. She discussed how the matter of childbirth “is not half so mortifying here as in England.” She compared the English and Turkish attitudes towards childbirth to the difference between a cough from a generic head cold and the consumption cough, again drawing on a familiar comparison to highlight strong cultural differences.<sup>342</sup> Contrary to her previous letter in which Lady Mary mentioned that she likely would not follow the Turkish customs, in this letter she discussed how the Turkish customs were more to her liking. Instead of staying at home for a month “lying in,” as was the English norm, likely due to the aforementioned emphasis on maternal breastfeeding, Lady Mary instead recounted how she only stayed home for three weeks as she did not find the English custom necessary enough to keep.<sup>343</sup> She even mentioned crossing the sea between Pera and Constantinople four days prior which, judging by the language used, was an unusual thing to do.<sup>344</sup> Here one can see an evolution in her opinions. Whereas she had earlier claimed she would not follow the Turkish

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<sup>339</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIX,” 108.

<sup>340</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIX,” 108.

<sup>341</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 220.

<sup>342</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 113.

<sup>343</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, 220.

<sup>344</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLI,” 113.



manner as she felt she was not bold enough to shake customs, in the later letter, Lady Mary mentioned that she had not, in fact, followed the English manner as she did not deem it necessary. This change in opinion is notable as it is one of the rare examples of an evolution of opinion in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. Moreso this prior claim she would adhere to English customs is interesting when contrasted with her earlier derision of customs in regard to the French ambassadress.<sup>345</sup>

In another letter, Lady Mary informed the addressee that she had given birth and again commented on the culture surrounding fertility. She commented that “if you had been in my place I believe, God forgive me, that you would have produced two or three.”<sup>346</sup> In this letter, Lady Mary referred to this pregnancy as also being a result of idleness and the lack of something better to do. However, the comment that makes this letter particularly noteworthy is the quote “For that reason, among innumerable others, I wish with all my heart to hasten my return, because I am absolutely obliged to lie in every year as long as I remain here.”<sup>347</sup> Contrary to her previous letters which discussed the cultural and religious norms and expectations without expressing a particularly strong opinion on the matter, in this letter Lady Mary clearly showed that she disliked the expectations and would have liked to leave before being pressured into having another child. She also alluded to the frequency with which women were expected to bear children, mentioning that she would be expected to have a child a year while in the Ottoman Empire. She also discussed how it was difficult to convince the ladies of the Turkish harems that she could not have another child at the time the letter was written, commenting that her husband being “a hundred leagues away” from her was almost not a sufficient excuse.<sup>348</sup>

A commonly held idea in many works regarding *The Turkish Embassy Letters* is that Lady Mary was entirely reluctant to leave the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, she commented on her reluctance in letters to her husband.<sup>349</sup> Following her return to England she sat for portraits in which she wore the Turkish dress, and her wholehearted and almost voyeuristic enjoyment of the Ottoman Empire has become strongly associated with her character.<sup>350</sup> However, this letter shows an alternative perspective that would support the idea that, despite this reluctance, Lady

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<sup>345</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXIX,” 66.

<sup>346</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLVII,” 132.

<sup>347</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLVII,” 132.

<sup>348</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLVII,” 132.

<sup>349</sup> Halsband, *The Life of Mary Wortley Montague*, 87.

<sup>350</sup> Scholz, “English Women in Oriental Dress,” 93.

Mary found certain aspects of their departure to be to her liking. Her dislike of the Turkish customs regarding pregnancy are apparent in her letters and cast the attitudes towards their departure in a new light.

#### 4.5 The Invisible Women

Despite much research being done in regard to the Ottoman Empire, the focus shifted to women relatively late on.<sup>351</sup> This is considered in part due to a lack of sources and a lack of reliable sources on the matter.<sup>352</sup> However, beyond the sultanas and great wives of the Ottoman Empire, there was a separate group of invisible women. The slaves of the Turkish harems were an important part of both Orientalist imagery and the female private life, though research regarding this aspect of Turkish slavery has been similarly lacking.<sup>353</sup> Lady Mary, as a female visitor to the Ottoman Empire, was not only able to observe the harems, but also the free women and slaves within. Her letters on the matter vary in detail and tone; however, they all show an aspect of the lived experience of Turkish women and the ways in which Lady Mary interpreted said experience. While in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary made references both to maids and slaves. Even in research literature, it is difficult to determine a proper difference between slaves put on display, slaves in the position of maidservants, or potential free women working as maids, if there were any.<sup>354</sup> Subsequently, in this section, the term maid and slave are used relatively interchangeably within the Turkish context.

Lady Mary, despite her position in the upper echelons of society, did make frequent mentions of the slaves and maids in the Ottoman Empire. In a letter to Alexander Pope, sent from Adrianople, Lady Mary commented that the princesses and great ladies were surrounded by their maids when they went about their days, commenting that the maids “are always very numerous.”<sup>355</sup> While Lady Mary made frequent mentions of female slaves, the ways in which she described them is particularly interesting to discuss. In the letter recounting her visit to Grand Viziers’ lady, Lady Mary described how the furnishing of the lady’s house was not particularly extravagant with the exception of the number of slaves and the clothes they were dressed in. Lady Mary then moved quickly on to discuss the reasons behind the modest

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<sup>351</sup> Zilfi, *Women in the Ottoman Empire*, 1.

<sup>352</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 175.

<sup>353</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 104.

<sup>354</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 169.

<sup>355</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXI,” 75.

decoration of the home.<sup>356</sup> While there is not much description of the slaves, the way they were brought up by Lady Mary is revealing. Instead of describing them as people, she referred to them in conjunction with the furniture. In a sense, this reduced the enslaved women to little more than decorations in the house. Similarly, when describing her visit to Fatima, Lady Mary described the scene she saw upon her arrival. She wrote;

I was met at the door by two black eunuchs who led me through a long gallery between two ranks of beautiful young girls, with their hair finely plaited almost hanging to their feet, all dressed in fine light damasks brocaded with silver. I was sorry that decency did not permit me to stop to consider them nearer.<sup>357</sup>

There is much to analyse about Lady Mary's description. As with other letters, Lady Mary did not specify if she interpreted the girls as maids or slaves, though, given their tasks, they were likely slaves on display.<sup>358</sup> The first thing she saw fit to mention was the appearance of the girls and the way they were dressed, again describing them more as furnishing than people.

Lady Mary also discussed the tasks the slaves owned by the Grand Viziers' lady were given. In the letter to Lady Mar, she described how two slaves were tasked with scenting her hair, clothes, and handkerchief with perfume while kneeling. This was referred to as a high mark of respect on the host's behalf. Following this, the lady ordered her slaves to dance and play music, apologising to Lady Mary for their lack of musical talent. Lady Mary recalled how her host commented that she had not bothered to have her slaves musically trained.<sup>359</sup> Harem slave girls were considered to be an extension of their mistresses and were often trained to reflect the image their mistress wished to project.<sup>360</sup> Musical instruments were also a part of Turkish luxury consumption and were held in high regard. Using the instruments or having slaves able to do so indicated the high position of the host.<sup>361</sup> A great deal of training went into creating palace concubines or harem slaves and their performance reflected on their master or

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<sup>356</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 87.

<sup>357</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 88.

<sup>358</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 169.

<sup>359</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 90.

<sup>360</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 168.

<sup>361</sup> Faroqhi, *Stories of Ottoman Men and Women*, 49.

mistress.<sup>362</sup> In a separate letter, Lady Mary discussed how the “fine” slave girls were bought at the age of eight or nine and were trained in singing, dancing, and embroidery, for example.<sup>363</sup>

Beyond the focus on the appearance of the girls, Lady Mary mentioned how she would have liked to be able to stop as “consider them nearer.”<sup>364</sup> While this could be interpreted as an aside comment that had little intention behind it, the language used was nonetheless interesting. Lady Mary wrote about looking at the girls in the same way one would talk about admiring a painting or the furnishing in the house. Lady Mary described them in the same way she described the furnishings of the harem and, as such, either intentionally or subconsciously relegated the girls to furnishings; dehumanising them and reducing them to inanimate objects within the scene described. In a separate letter, Lady Mary described the maids upon her entry to Fatima’s harem. She again described the number of them, there being twenty of them, and the way in which they were arranged. She compared the overall look to the pictures she had seen of ancient nymphs.<sup>365</sup> Again, this exemplifies both the romanticising and sexualising of the Turkish slaves by comparing them to a well-known type of European imagery, often influenced by the aestheticizing painter’s point of view.<sup>366</sup>

In the bagnio in Sophia, Lady Mary mentioned the slaves in passing, commenting on where they were stood and in the same sentence commenting that one could not tell anyone’s rank based off their clothing, as everyone was naked.<sup>367</sup> In her following description of the activities the ladies of the bagnio were engaged in, she mentioned that the slaves were busy plaiting their owner’s hair in various styles. She commented that the slaves were generally around 17 or 18 years old and pretty but moved on without further description.<sup>368</sup>

The link between slave ownership and financial position was also explored in a letter to Lady Mar, in which she described her visit to the Sultana Hafise. She mentioned that the Sultana Hafise owned thirty slaves in addition to ten young slaves under the age of seven. She described that;

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<sup>362</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 116.

<sup>363</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXVIII,” 104.

<sup>364</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIV,” 88.

<sup>365</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXXIV,” 90.

<sup>366</sup> Secor, “Orientalism, gender and class,” 391.

<sup>367</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59.

<sup>368</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXVII,” 59.

These were the most beautiful girls I ever saw, all richly dressed, and I observed that the Sultana took a great deal of pleasure in these lovely children, which is a vast expense, for there is not a handsome girl of that age to be bought under 100£ sterling.<sup>369</sup>

There is an interesting contrast between humanising and dehumanising elements in this letter. Lady Mary did not relegate the slaves to part of the furnishings as she had done in previous letters. She referred to the sultana's pride in the children; however, she went on to draw a direct correlation between the girls' beauty and their monetary value. As mentioned earlier, slaves were considered part of a person's total wealth, alongside material possessions such as fabrics and household items.<sup>370</sup> This acknowledgement of their monetary value also puts other descriptions of the slaves she described as beautiful into perspective. While her comments on slaves' beauty connected them to the furnishings and overall appeal of the harems, this awareness of the monetary value of a "handsome girl" suggests that her previous comments were also intended to reflect on the wealth of their owners.

Lady Mary went on to discuss the appearances of the slaves, writing about the way they wore garlands of flowers and wore habits "all of gold stuffs," again focusing on the value of what they were wearing, adding to a perceived understanding of their monetary value. She continued to describe how they served her coffee while kneeling and brought her water to wash with. Beyond these duties, that were similar to those described in other letters, Lady Mary also wrote in this letter about the additional job given to the older slaves of taking care of the young slaves, teaching them to embroider, and caring for them as if they were the sultana's own children.<sup>371</sup> As mentioned earlier, this reflected the idea that slave girls in the harem were considered extensions of their mistresses and were trained to perform in a way that would reflect well.<sup>372</sup> The Sultana Hafise's interest in the slaves is an interesting reflection of this.

Lady Mary also discussed her stance on the positions of slaves in the Ottoman Empire, which could provide insight into how she observed the slaves she encountered. She wrote;

I know you'll expect I should say something particular of the slaves, and you will imagine me half a Turk when I don't speak of it with the same horror other Christians have done before me, but I cannot forbear applauding the humanity of the Turks to these creatures.

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<sup>369</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 117.

<sup>370</sup> Göçek and Baer, "Social Boundaries of Ottoman Women's Experience," 52.

<sup>371</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLI," 118.

<sup>372</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 168.

They are never ill used and their slavery is in my opinion no worse than servitude all over the world.<sup>373</sup>

The first aspect worth discussing is that Lady Mary equated agreeing with slavery to being “half a Turk,” before claiming that her views were not in line with other Christians who had spoken regarding the subject. This is noteworthy as it distanced her from the topic, both in terms of her nationality and religion, effectively othering the Turks. She also dehumanised the slaves through her use of the word “creatures” in reference to them. While she spoke favourably of the styles of slavery and attitudes towards the treatment of slaves in the Ottoman Empire, she also conveyed a reluctance to admit to that opinion. While this could be authentic, it could also be out of a sense of propriety and adherence to societal morality that she reluctantly expressed her approval of the treatment of slaves.

Finally, Lady Mary commented that she equated their treatment to how those in service were treated “all over the world.” This is naturally a generalisation that Lady Mary would have had no way to support; however, if one interprets this as her finding no difference between the treatment of slaves and the treatment of servants she encountered prior to her time in the Ottoman Empire, there is a comparison to be drawn. Lady Mary’s views reflected a common perception of Turkish slavery. While slavery was not necessarily accepted, the domestic slavery of the Ottoman Empire was often considered to be a mild form of slavery, with their positions likened to that of servants.<sup>374</sup> Lady Mary justified her interpretation of the slaves’ positions by discussing how, despite them not being given wages, they were given clothes that were more valuable than the salaries ordinary servants in England were given. However, she neglected to mention that this was not payment, but instead closer to a way of decoration the slave girls on display.

Lady Mary’s mentions of European maids and servant were much more sparing. In a letter from Rotterdam, Lady Mary made a brief mention of the Dutch maids employed in washing the street pavements, commenting that they did so “with more application than ours do in our bed-chambers.” She also remarked on the common servants and shop-women being “more nicely clean than most of our ladies.”<sup>375</sup> She made a brief reference to the “ruddy milk-

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<sup>373</sup> Montagu, “Letter XLVI,” 130.

<sup>374</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 115.

<sup>375</sup> Montagu, “Letter I,” 3–4.

maid” of England, who she described with a sense of nostalgia.<sup>376</sup> Beyond this, the maids and servants of European courts were indeed invisible, at least in *The Turkish Embassy Letters*.

The juxtaposition between the almost non-existent descriptions of the the European servants and maids and the careful descriptions of Turkish slaves indicated two sides of the same disregard for the invisible women working to serve the upper classes. While the more familiar variety of servants in the European courts were largely ignored or not mentioned in Lady Mary’s letters, the exoticized and sexualised slaves of the harems were described with an almost voyeuristic level of detail. In a place characterised by the English as teeming with overt sexuality and imagery drawing inspiration from the Arabian nights, the slaves became part of that mystery and obscurity.<sup>377</sup> Competing with imagination and in an attempt to portray reality, Lady Mary described what she saw, though the manner with which she did so served to expose how these Orientalist ideas may have formed a bias that permeated the descriptions of the mysterious slaves of the harem

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<sup>376</sup> Montagu, “Letter LVII,” 165.

<sup>377</sup> Secor, “Orientalism, gender and class,” 384–385.

## 5. Conclusion

While Lady Mary's thoughts and opinions reveal a lot, it is worth restating that they are the opinions of an individual and cannot be taken as a representation of the opinions of the masses. As such, the initial purpose of this thesis was to contextualise Lady Mary's opinions of women in the Ottoman Empire within her own experiences and generalised opinions by comparing her observations to those describing women she met in Europe. In this regard, there are several points that should be highlighted. The main aspect that must be noted is that her opinions of women in the Ottoman Empire were generally as positive as or even more positive than her opinions regarding European and English women. While Lady Mary generally leaned towards more critical descriptions of the members of the European courts, her descriptions of Turkish women were almost overwhelmingly positive, both when describing appearances and behaviour. While this could be interpreted as Lady Mary having had no bias against the Turkish women, an argument could be made that this was also due to different expectations when meeting European and Turkish ladies.

While the manners of European courts were generally considered inferior to their English counterparts, the expectations placed on manners of the nobility in the Ottoman Empire were highly influenced by Orientalist ideas of "the savage Turk," who kept women locked away in the harems. With this bias in mind, the manners of the Turkish women would have likely been more exciting, leading to the strongly emphasised positivity in the letters from the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, by continuing the Orientalist pattern of sorting the world into the civilised west and the backwards Orient, Lady Mary was able to make her positive claims while simultaneously maintaining a barrier between the English nobility and the Turkish upper classes. The ability Lady Mary had to actually enter the harems and write about what she saw could warrant an approach using a spatial approach in order to discuss the theme of women's spaces in a more focused manner.

This thesis set out with an additional question regarding whether there was a notable evolution in Lady Mary's thoughts and opinions regarding Turkish women. Surprisingly, such an evolution was lacking. Despite this, there are still points that can be brought up in regard to this aspect of the thesis. As mentioned, despite the Ottoman Empire being viewed as a distant and secretive land, there were still several stereotypes and Orientalist ideas being spread around England that aimed to demystify and remove the veil that hid the Ottoman Empire from English eyes. While this was found to be lacking by Lady Mary, she was by no means completely ignorant when she arrived in Adrianople. Instead of seeing an evolution in which Lady Mary's



opinions gradually grew from negative to accepting, there was a visible methodology to her observations in which she focused on certain topics, particularly surrounding women, and used said topics as an entry point through which she could then challenge false perceptions and portray what she believed to be the truth. While her biases did inform some of her perceptions, such as the overt sexual imagery of the bagnio, she nonetheless focused on finding out a truth. Lady Mary wrote herself as the protagonist in her letters, emphasising her role as the English observer and frequently remained the observer, in a sort of anthropological exploration of the hidden world of the harem.

While there is not a notable evolution in Lady Mary's opinions of women in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish woman's position in general, there is a clear and sharp evolution in one area of her experience. This evolution occurs in regard to the topic of fertility and childbearing. Under the influence of both her learned need to be perceived positively in society and the Turkish societal pressure dictating exactly how that was to be accomplished in the Ottoman Empire, Lady Mary bore a daughter while there, despite letters indicating her reluctance at the prospect. This pressure became apparent in a letter sent briefly before her departure in which she expressed her eagerness to travel home before she felt unavoidably forced to bear another child.<sup>378</sup> Lady Mary expressed positive thoughts towards most other aspects of Turkish life; however, this is the only area in which one can see a shift from merely observing the customs around pregnancy to being pressured into participating in said cultural customs, changing her perception of the matter.

Lady Mary expressed her eagerness to observe the Ottoman Empire and found many of the restrictions and pressures placed upon women to be mere objects of interest, noting only the similarities or differences between Turkish and English life. While she did step outside of the role of observer on a few occasions, such as when she put on the veil to experience the anonymity she lauded, she still had a choice in when to participate and when to stay safely within the confines of an Englishwoman. In the bagnio in Sophia, Lady Mary made a conscious choice to remain in her English clothes, effectively protecting herself within the guise of the English observer.<sup>379</sup> The negative shift in opinion occurs only after Lady Mary was essentially forced out of her chosen role and pressured into participating in an aspect of the Turkish women's lives that she did not wish to, that her opinion changed. This shift from observer to

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<sup>378</sup> Montagu, "Letter XLVII," 132.

<sup>379</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXVII," 59–60.

participant reflects a loss of agency and a change of positions; this was essentially the closest she came to living how Turkish women were expected to and she found the experience was not as romantic or liberating as she had previously claimed.

## 6. Swedish Summary - Svensk Sammanfattning

### **Det Enda Freia Folket i Riket – En komparativ analys av skildringarna och beskrivningarna av turkiska och europeiska kvinnor i Lady Mary Wortley Montagus *Turkish Embassy Letters***

År 1716 reste Lady Mary Wortley Montagu till Osmanska riket med sin man Sir Edward Wortley Montagu, som hade utsetts till engelsk ambassadör där. Under hela resan dit och under hela hennes vistelse där dokumenterade Lady Mary vad hon bevittnade och upplevde i brev till sina vänner och bekanta. Det huvudsakliga syftet med denna avhandling är att diskutera det som Lady Mary Wortley Montagu skrev om kvinnor i brevsamlingen *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, som skrevs under hennes resa till Osmanska riket 1716–1718 samt under tiden hon befann sig där. För att kontextualisera hennes åsikter och iakttagelser kring turkiska kvinnor, jämförs de med hennes åsikter och iakttagelser kring de kvinnor hon träffade på resan genom Europa och hennes vistelse vid olika europeiska hov under resan. Utöver detta diskuteras också ifall det skedde en utveckling eller förändring i Lady Marys åsikter under hennes vistelse i Osmanska riket eller ifall de förblev desamma.

Källmaterialet för denna avhandling är en brevsamling på 58 brev som givits titeln *The Turkish Embassy Letters*. Av de 58 breven i samlingen skrevs 27 medan Lady Mary befann sig på olika orter i Osmanska riket och de övriga 31 på resan till och från Osmanska riket. Den version av brevsamlingen som används i denna avhandling har genomgått vissa små förändringar i grammatik och stavning av ord för att förenkla språket och underlätta läsningen av breven i en modern kontext.<sup>380</sup> Trots dessa förändringar anses versionen ändå vara pålitlig i och med att de inte har påverkat innehållet och det som Lady Mary försökte förmedla till sina läsare. Lady Mary skickade med några undantag främst brev till sina väninnor, vilket innebär att språket och innehållet är mindre filtrerat än om hon hade skrivit dem med syfte att publicera dem senare.<sup>381</sup> Dessutom uttryckte hon själv att hon ville vara sanningsenlig och objektiv i sin beskrivning av Osmanska riket.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Desai, "Introduction," xxxviii.

<sup>381</sup> Dadabhoy, "Going Native," 50.

<sup>382</sup> Precious MacKenzie, "A Protestant in Foreign Catholic and Muslim Spaces: The Turkish Embassy Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu" in *Travel, Discovery, Transformation: Culture & Civilization*, ed Gabriel R. Ricci. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 85-86, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.vasa.abo.fi/10.4324/9781351301169>.

Tidigare forskning har placerat hennes brev i en bredare kontext och fokuserat på dem som exempel på ett större fenomen och en mer omfattande diskussion. Däremot finns det en brist på forskning som använder en komparativ metod för analys av brevinnehållet och inga studier som jämför Lady Marys brev från Osmanska riket med de från Europa. I avhandlingen används genushistoria och mikrohistoria som de huvudsakliga teoretiska perspektiven. Metoden är som sagt främst komparativ. För att komma fram till de slutsatser som presenteras i avhandlingen och direkt kunna jämföra hur Lady Mary diskuterade vissa teman i en turkisk kontext gentemot en europeisk kontext har breven först delats upp enligt innehåll.

I sina iakttagelser av Osmanska riket använder Lady Mary sig av många jämförelser för att kontextualisera det hon upplevde för en brittisk läsare. Lady Mary jämför både hur de turkiska kvinnorna uppförde sig och hur de såg ut och klädde sig med kvinnor vid de europeiska hoven.<sup>383</sup> Hon använder de europeiska hoven, som var bekanta för adressaterna, för att skapa en mer sanningsenlig skildring av sättet och beteendet hos de turkiska kvinnor som hon mötte i Osmanska riket med särskilt fokus på hur de turkiska kvinnorna bemötte en främling. Språket som används väcker positiva konnotationer, särskilt när det jämförs med hur hon beskrev besök vid hov i Europa. När dessa observationer analyseras samtidigt syns ett mönster där Lady Mary lyfter upp de positiva dragen hos turkiska damerna och de negativa dragen hos de europeiska damerna. I Osmanska riket och Europa fick Lady Mary träffa några av de högst uppsatta damerna i samhället och hon skrev noggrant om de olika mötena, inklusive hennes åsikter om dessa. Det finns märkbara likheter mellan de turkiska exemplen och de europeiska exemplen. I båda fallen diskuterar hon hur artiga damerna var, men skillnaden är att hon beskriver utförligt hur de turkiska damerna uppförde sig, medan hon endast kort beskriver de europeiska damernas uppförande. Detta kan bero på hennes intresse för de turkiska kvinnorna i samband med hennes ovana med deras normer och traditioner, men hennes noggranna beskrivningar kan också tolkas som en bekräftelse på att de uppnådde de europeiska standarderna, vilket tyder på en initial tveksamhet hos Lady Mary att de skulle göra det.

Orientalistiska stereotyper syns också i hur Lady Mary skrev om damerna hon träffade. Lady Mary ansåg att hon kunde undvika sexualiseringen och romantiseringen av de turkiska kvinnorna, men det syns ändå drag av detta i det hon valde att skriva om.<sup>384</sup> I både de europeiska exemplen och turkiska exemplen sattes mycket fokus på utseendet hos kvinnorna hon träffade

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<sup>383</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXVII," 58–60.

<sup>384</sup> Montagu, "Letter XXXIV," 90.

men det finns ändå skillnader. I brev om turkiska kvinnor fokuserar hon på deras hår och ögon som de främsta dragen som gör dem vackrare än kvinnorna i England. Dessa drag var kännetecknande och stereotypiska för de turkiska kvinnorna och fokuset på dessa bidrar till en Orientalistisk tolkning av beskrivningarna. Lady Marys beskrivningar av kvinnorna i Europa är mer begränsade och utnyttjar mildare språk för att förmedla dessa. Det är svårt att avgöra ifall skillnaden berodde på att Lady Mary genuint föredrog utseendet hos turkiska kvinnorna eller ifall den berodde på att dragen var något nytt och något hon hade läst och hört om i romantiserande källor, men det sexualiserande aspekten av beskrivningarna kan inte ignoreras. Den sista aspekten av vardagsliv som bör lyftas fram i Lady Marys brev är omnämningarna av de ”osynliga kvinnorna”, det vill säga slavar och tjänsteflickor, och hur de beskrivs i breven. Även om hon ibland nämner tjänsteflickorna i Europa är hennes beskrivningar av slavflickorna i Osmanska riket mycket mer sexualiserande och slavflickornas omständigheter diskuterades inte desto vidare.

Lady Mary diskuterade mycket kring islam och hur den påverkade kvinnor och deras frihet och roll i samhället. I dessa fall finns det inte så många likheter mellan de brev som skrevs i Osmanska riket och de som skrevs i Europa, men det finns ändå en genomgående jämförelse som Lady Mary själv gör mellan kristendom och islam och de förväntningar och ideal de två religioner satte på kvinnor. Lady Mary lyfter också fram de vidskepelser som damerna hade och visade sig ha en relativt hånfull attityd till dessa vidskepelser, som hon inte tyckte var logiska.

Utöver en grundlig inblick i hur de turkiska damerna förhöll sig till religion, förs också en bredare diskussion kring hur religion påverkade deras liv på ett mer praktiskt plan. Enligt islam hade kvinnor den huvudsakliga plikten att gifta sig och föda barn. Då Lady Mary diskuterar lite kring skilsmässor och uttrycker sin ovana med lagarna kring dem kommenterar hon främst älskarinnor samt vanor och attityder kring sexuella relationer utanför äktenskap. Hennes jämförelser visar att det fanns en liknande attityd både i Europa och Osmanska riket där utomäktenskapliga relationer accepteras som en del av vardagen. Lady Mary skriver dessutom en hel del om slöjor och förhöll sig väldigt positivt till dem. Lady Mary uttryckte sig vara av den åsikten att kvinnorna i Osmanska riket var bland de friaste i världen och baserade mycket av denna åsikt på den anonymitet som slöjan gav.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Montagu, “Letter XXX,” 71.

Under sin vistelse i det Osmanska riket födde Lady Mary en dotter. I sina brev diskuterar hon omständigheterna som ledde till detta val och hur de samhälleliga normerna påverkade valet. Enligt Lady Mary var det ”mer avskyvärt att vara gift och inte fruktbar än att vara fruktbar före äktenskapet.”<sup>386</sup> Lady Mary utnyttjar en jämförelse mellan engelska attityder och turkiska attityder för att betona hur viktigt det var. Till en början diskuterar Lady Mary det på ett neutralt och nyfiket sätt, såsom de andra kulturella aspekterna av livet i Osmanska riket. När hon sedan blir gravid, diskuterar hon graviditeten på ett mer personligt sätt, som känns naturlig med tanke på omständigheterna. Men mot slutet av sin vistelse i Osmanska riket förändras hennes ton och ordval samt hennes attityd till livet i Osmanska riket. Lady Mary uttrycker sin motvilja mot att föda ytterligare barn och man ser att detta har påverkat hennes attityd till livet i Osmanska riket som var så positiv i början av vistelsen där. Även om det är svårt att utskilja en utveckling i tankesättet kring andra aspekter av vardagen, syns det en tydlig förändring i diskussionen kring graviditet. Lady Marys attityd till livet i Osmanska riket var positiv ända fram till den punkten där hon slutade vara en observatör och tvingades in i de normer och regler som styrde kvinnors liv i riket.

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<sup>386</sup> “is more despicable to be married and not fruitful than it is with us to be fruitful before marriage.” Montagu, “Letter XXXIX,” 107.

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