Ottoman Women

Myth and Reality

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II

Ottoman Women in the Household Harem

Women are not prisoners in any sense of the word, nor are they pining behind their latticed windows as we are sometimes led to believe... This seclusion does not rest heavily upon Mohammedan women, and she would be the first to resent the breaking of her seclusion... as showing that she had lost value in her husband's eyes.[41]

Elizabeth Cooper, 1916

◀ Osman Hamdi, *Dressing Up*

◀ Ottoman house interior, Istanbul

The Myth

For centuries the harem myth has immensely influenced the minds of Westerners. According to the myth, Ottoman women (Oriental women in general) were indolent, erotic and untrustworthy. They were depicted in both words and pictures as sex objects whose main purpose of existence was to provide pleasure for the male libido. This stereotype was typically represented in paintings of the female slave or odalisque (*odalık* in Turkish), drawn as an exotic nude reclining on a sofa awaiting the amorous attentions of her master. Sensual scenes of nude females lounging in the Turkish *hamam* (public bath) were also popular expressions of this stereotype. At the same time, Ottoman women were portrayed as pitiable victims, creatures captive in the harem without any individual agency. They were described as suppressed and constrained by a life of imprisonment in the confines of the harem.

The origin of this myth lies in the work of the early Orientalist scholars, one of the most famous of which is the translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*. First printed in French during 1707–1714 and then in several different English versions, this imaginary and exotic account of the harem became immensely popular in the West. Its great success set off a literary trend, and this work was followed by the publication of many more oriental and pseudo-oriental tales. The popularity of *The Arabian*

Lewis, *The Reception*, 1873

Nights is significant because the female stereotypes it conjured up became the template for Westerners' perception of Ottoman women. On the one hand, we have a stereotype of lewd and deceitful women behaving indecently in the tales, and, on the other hand, in the narrator Sheherezad we have a pure and sexually neutral female *persona*.

These female stereotypes were not new but only took on a more exotic hue in regard to Oriental women. These polarized images of women had long existed in Western men's consciousness. However, we cannot trace them back to the ancient Greeks. There was no stigma on female sexuality in the Greek myths. Both goddesses and mortal women freely exercised their sexuality without being condemned for it. In Greek art as well, female sexuality as represented in the physical form is elevated to a plane of beauty and perfection. It inspires admiration and awe, not lust and desire. Turning to the Christian tradition, however, we get a very different perspective. The images become polarized. Women are either pure like the Virgin Mary or "fallen" like Mary Magdalene. Virginity is seen as a prerequisite for spiritual purity, and thus we find many early Christians, men and women, living a life of celibacy. Sexuality is seen, at best, as a necessary evil for procreation, and for many men and women of the Catholic Church, celibacy has remained a mandatory and accepted way of life over the centuries.

In view of these parameters regarding female sexuality, it is not difficult to understand why Western males put Oriental women in the erotic or "fallen" category. After all, until the mid-eighteenth century they put most Western women in that category as well. It was only in the nineteenth century that domestic Victorian married women were allowed in the category of "respectable" women, but only at the cost of being "the angel in the house,"[42] who endured the evil of sexual activity only for the sake of having children. Many Victorian men, on the other hand, indulged their sexual fantasies with prostitutes who were more enjoyable partners than their "angelic" wives. This led to a double social standard that condoned the promiscuity of "respectable" men, but which condemned female infidelity.

The Western male's traditional polarized images of women plus the exotic tales of oriental females combined to make a strong case for the myth of the harem. In addition to these, normally no foreign men were ever permitted to enter an Ottoman harem, so there

Van Loo, *Eunuchs Serving the Sultan,* 1772–1773

were no eye-witness reports to contradict the myth. Male travelers cited other male writers, whose information was often based on hearsay or their own fantasies. The truth was often stretched or partially presented, and, at times, there were outright lies. A case in point is the handkerchief story, according to which the sultan supposedly dropped a handkerchief in front of the *cariye* (slave girl) he wanted to invite to his bed. After being bathed and perfumed, the *cariye* supposedly crept into the foot of the sultan's bed. This story was repeated again and again by male travelers, although they had no corroboration of it. It was not until Western women traveled to the Ottoman Empire and saw Ottoman harems and the women in them first hand, that more realistic descriptions of harem life became available.

Lady Montague played a key role in initiating a more realistic discourse on Ottoman women and harem life. She was the first renowned female traveler to the Ottoman Empire who reported more realistic descriptions of women in the harem to her readers. In a letter to Lady Rich she wrote the following criticism regarding the unreliability of male travelers' accounts:

"Your whole letter is full of mistakes from one end to the other. I see you have taken your ideas of Turkey from that worthy author Dumont, who has wrote with equal ignorance and confidence. It is a particular pleasure to me here, to read the voyages to the Levant, which are generally so far removed from the truth, and so full of absurdities, I am very well diverted with them. They never fail giving you an account of the women, whom it is certain they never saw, and talking very wisely of the genius of men, into whose company they are never admitted; and very often describe mosques, which they dare not even peep into."[43]

It was Lady Montague who debunked the handkerchief story. During her visit to Hafize, the former favorite consort of the deceased Sultan Mustafa, who had died a few weeks after being deposed from the throne, Montagué was told that the tale of the handkerchief and creeping into the bed was totally untrue. To the contrary, the sultan's consorts were first informed of the sultan's pleasure by the *kahya kadın* (chief housekeeper) who had learned of it from the *kızlar ağası*, the chief black eunuch, who had been informed by the sultan, himself. Also the sultan was bound by etiquette to visit his concubines in strict order. The first in line was the *Kadın* (consort) he had first favored, then the second, and so on. A consort lost her turn only when she was indisposed for some reason. Montague goes on to normalize the sultan's actions by comparing his behavior to that of European monarchs:

"Sometimes the sultan diverts himself in the company of all his ladies, who stand in a circle around him. And she (Hafize) confessed, they were ready to die with envy and jealousy of the happy she that he distinguished by any appearance of preference. But this seemed to me neither better nor worse than the circles in most courts, where the glance of the monarch is watched, and every smile is waited for with impatience, and envied by those who cannot obtain it."[44]

In addition to Lady Montague, there were a number of nineteenth-century female travelers like Julia Pardoe, Lucy Garnett and Fanny Blunt who continued to normalize the harem and the women in it by describing them realistically rather than exotically. In the writings of these Western women they focused on every kind of detail: the harem furnishings, the women's dress and manners, the food they ate, the slaves and how they were treated, the children and how they were cared for, visits to the public baths, outings, religious rituals, holidays, and so on—all were dealt with at length and in great detail. Having examined the lives of Ottoman women at close hand, many Western women no longer saw Ottoman women either as exotic creatures or as captives in the harem.

Victorian female travelers not only divested the harem of its negative images as a nest of eroticism and a prison for Ottoman women, which Western Orientalists and male travelers had given it previously, but they actually praised it as a sacred sphere for women, separate from the profane public sphere of men. Now it was claimed that women were secluded in the harem because their husbands valued and respected them so much, not because their husbands were suppressing them. Women were seen as sacred personages who must be protected from the common multitudes:

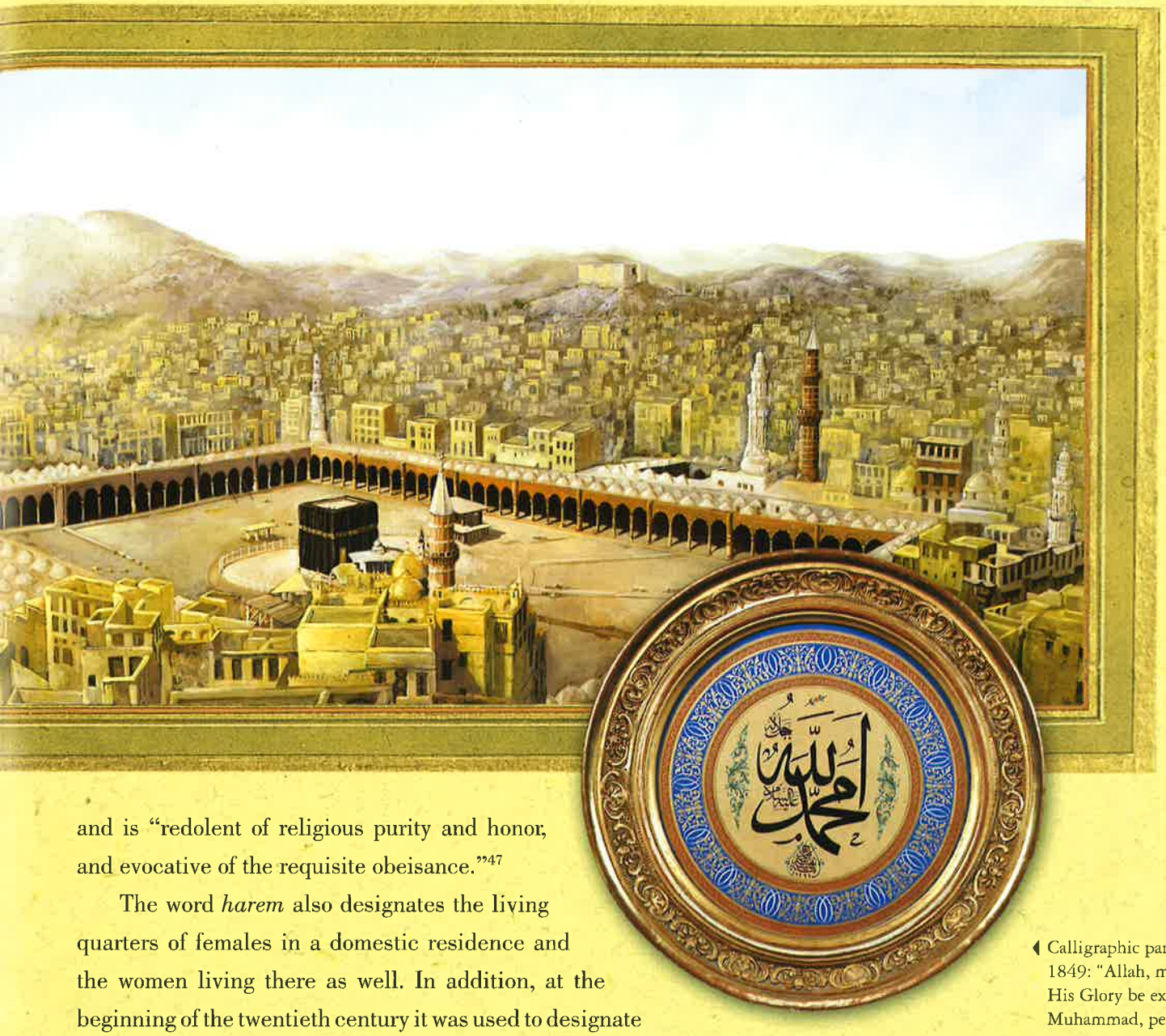
"The seclusion of the Harem appears to be no more than the natural wish of the husband to guard his beloved from even the knowledge of the ills and woes that mortal man betides... he wishes to protect 'his lady bird' 'the light of his Harem' from all trouble and anxiety... as we carefully enshrine a valuable gem or protect a sacred relic from the profane gaze of the multitude, so does he on the same principle hide from the vulgar kin his best... The Turks, in their gallantry, consider the person of a woman sacred, and the place of her retreat, her haram, is always respected."[45]

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Ottoman men and women recognized both the sacred as well as the physical natures of women.

The Ka'ba, Mecca

Sacred Space

The word *harem*, stemming from the Arabic root *h-r-m*, does, in fact, mean "sacred" or "forbidden," but it does not pertain only to a female space. The sacred cities of Mecca and Medina are referred to by Muslims as the *Haremeyn-i Şerifeyn*. The Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem is called the Noble Sanctuary or *Harem-i Şerif*. Also, in Ottoman usage the inner courtyard of a mosque was a harem.[46] When Topkapı Palace was newly built during the reign of Fatih Sultan Mehmed (the Conqueror), the women and children of the royal household were still living in the Old Palace. Even though the new palace was only inhabited by males at that time, the inner precinct of the palace or the sultan's living quarters were known as the imperial harem or *Harem-i Hümayûn* because of the sultan's presence there. The term *harem* is one of respect

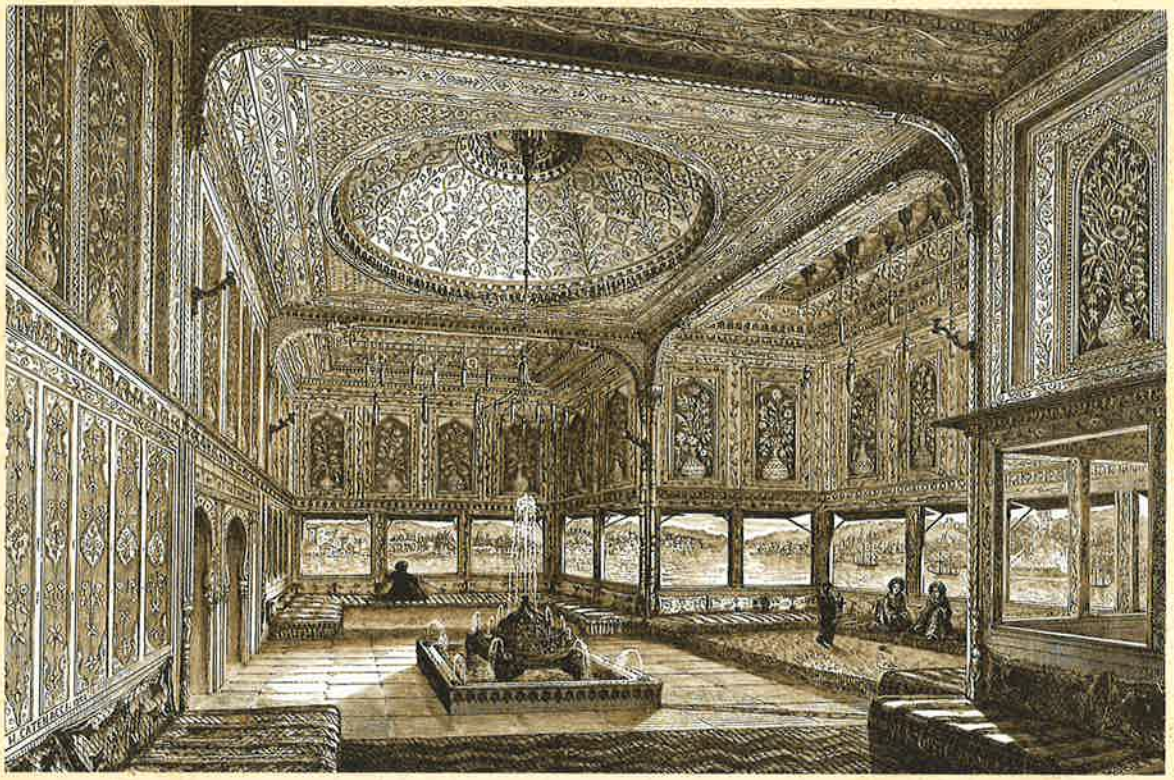


Calligraphic panel, 1849: "Allah, may His Glory be exalted; Muhammad, peace be upon him"

and is "redolent of religious purity and honor, and evocative of the requisite obeisance."[47]

The word *harem* also designates the living quarters of females in a domestic residence and the women living there as well. In addition, at the beginning of the twentieth century it was used to designate women's compartments in railway trains, ladies' waiting rooms at train stations and space reserved for them on steamers and tramcars.[48] In general, access to the female harem is forbidden to males, except that in domestic harems this ban does not apply to a woman's immediate male relatives which include her husband, father, uncles, brothers, sons and father-in-law. In Ottoman society respect for the female harem and the

Ottoman *yali* (seaside house) on the Bosphorous, 18th century



Catenacci, *Amcazade Hüseyin Paşa Yalısı (Köprülü) Divanhanesi*, 1863

women living in it was strictly observed by males publicly and privately. Many Western female travelers comment upon the fact that an Ottoman woman's husband would not think of intruding into his own harem if he saw women's slippers at the harem door, a sign that there were female guests in the harem.

Incense burner, 1885
Topkapı Palace

Physical Space

Ottoman houses were divided into two sections: the *selamlık* and *haremlik*. The *selamlık* was the room or rooms where the man of the house received male visitors, who were served by male slaves. The *haremlik* was the part of the house where the husband lived with his wife, children and any other female relatives he was taking care of. They were attended by female slaves. The harems were usually described as spacious and sparsely furnished rooms. There would be a large anteroom (*sofa*) in the middle with smaller rooms branching off from it. The anteroom was where much of the social interaction took place. The lady of the house, her children, female

Mustafa Paşa Kiosk, Topkapı Palace

Wall recess. Baghdad Kiosk, Topkapı Palace

relatives, female slaves and female guests all socialized here. Meals were usually eaten here and in some homes beds were spread in this room at night for sleeping. The rooms were usually multi-functional. That is, they were used for different purposes rather than having a specific purpose such as dining, sitting or sleeping.

Furnishings usually consisted of built-in sofas, which were wooden platforms raised off the floor, often on three sides of the room. Large cushions covered with rich materials (according to the means of the home owner) were placed on these raised platforms and formed the seating space used by both family

members and guests. The fourth wall often contained a large cupboard where bedding was stored during the day and a few shelf niches where water pitchers, rose-water ewers or other household items were placed. Curtains and carpets completed the furnishings. Although the furnishings were sparse, the rooms were attractive with painted and gilded ceilings and many windows allowing for abundant light. In the homes of the wealthy, marble fountains were sometimes found in the anterooms, and the fabrics used were made from rich material like silk and brocade in elegant designs. At meal time large round trays were brought into the anteroom by slaves and placed upon a small portable base. Cushions were put around the trays where family members or guests sat for the meal. Slaves carried in and out various dishes of food and then collected the trays again after the meal was over. The houses were heated in the winter by a brazier called *tandır*. It resembled a short round table in which hot ashes were put and was covered with a large cloth, often cashmere. People would sit around it with their feet under the table and much of their bodies under the cover in order to keep warm. They would socialize, work, read and sometimes even sleep at the *tandır*.

The following first-hand description of an Ottoman house is given by Lady Montague. She describes the house in Edirne where she and her husband, the British ambassador, lodged when they came to the Ottoman Empire in 1717:

"Every house, great and small, is divided into two distinct parts, which only join together by a narrow passage. The first house ... is the house belonging to the lord, and the adjoining one is called the harem, that is, the ladies' apartment ... it has also a gallery running around it towards the garden, to which all the windows are turned, and the same number of chambers as the other, but more gay and splendid, both in painting and furniture. The second row of windows is very low, with grates like those of convents; the rooms are all spread with Persian carpets, and raised at one end (my chamber is raised at both ends) about two feet. This is the sofa, and is laid with a richer sort of carpet, and

all around it a sort of couch, raised half a foot, covered with rich silk according to the fancy or magnificence of the owner. Mine is of scarlet cloth, with a gold fringe; round this are placed, standing against the wall, two rows of cushions, the first very large, and the next little ones; and here the Turks display their greatest magnificence. They are generally brocade, or embroidery of gold wire upon white satin—nothing can look more gay and splendid. These seats are so convenient and easy, I shall never endure chairs as long as I live. The rooms are low, which I think is no fault, and the ceiling is nearly always of wood, generally inlaid or painted and gilded. They use no hangings, the rooms being all wainscoated with cedar set off with silver nails or painted with flowers, which open in many places with folding doors, and serve for cabinets, I think, more conveniently than ours. Between the windows are little arches to set pots of perfume, or baskets of flowers. But what pleases me best is the fashion of having marble fountains in the lower part of the room, which throw up several spouts of water, giving at the same time an agreeable coolness, and a pleasant dashing sound, falling from one basin to another. Some of these fountains are very magnificent. Each house has a bagnio, which is generally two or three little rooms, leaded at the top, paved with marble, with basins, cocks of water, and all conveniences for either hot or cold baths."[49]

Preziosi, *Spice-seller*, 1861

A more detailed first-hand account of a Turkish harem is given by Lucy Garnett:

"The larger division of the house constitutes the 'haremlik,' which has its separate entrance, courtyard and garden, and contains all the private apartments of the family. As in the generality of Eastern houses, the front door opens into a large hall, which gives access to rooms on each side of it, and has several windows at the opposite end. One of these rooms is the 'kahve-ocak,' or 'coffee-hearth,' where an old woman may always be found presiding over a charcoal brazier ready to boil coffee at a moment's notice; the others are storerooms and sleeping apartments

of the inferior slaves. The kitchen, which is very spacious, is generally an out-building. One side of it is occupied by the great arched cooking-stove with its numerous little grates, on which the contents of brightly burnished copper pans simmer over charcoal fires, fanned with a turkey's wing by the negress cook. A wide staircase leads from the entrance floor to the upper hall, the centre of which is generally occupied by a spacious ante-room, on which other apartments open. In some of the older houses the 'divan-khane,' or principal reception room, contains a large alcove, the floor of which is raised about a foot above the level of the rest of the apartment. A low divan furnishes its three sides, and its most comfortable corner is the 'hanum's' habitual seat. If the 'divan-khane' has not such a recess, one end and half the two adjoining wings of the room are usually occupied by a continuous sofa, and the fourth is furnished with a marble-topped console table surmounted by a mirror and candelabra, and flanked on either side by shelves in niches, containing rose-water sprinklers, sherbet goblets, and other ornamental objects. A few European chairs stand stiffly against the wall in every space left vacant and one or two walnut tray-stools, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, are placed near the divan to hold cigarettes, ash-trays, matches, coffee-cups and other trifles. A few framed 'yaftas,' or texts from the Koran, may be seen on the walls, but pictures are, generally, conspicuous by their absence...

"Bedsteads are not used by old-fashioned Turks. Each room contains a large cupboard, built into the wall, in which the bedding is piled during the day, and at night the slaves come in, when summoned, to make up the beds on the floor. Other bedroom furniture in the shape of washstands, dressing-tables, and wardrobes is dispensed with as superfluous. For everyday ablutions there is a small washing-room with a hole in the floor for the water to escape through, and when it is proposed to wash the hands and face only, a slave brings in the 'leğen' [basin] *and 'ibrik'* [ewer] *and pours the water; while, for special ablutions, the private 'hammams' or the public baths will be resorted to. The 'hanum' 'does her hair' or has it done for her, seated cross-legged in*

Preziosi, *Confectioner*, 1861

Lewis, *Entrance to the Harem*, 1871

her corner of the divan; and the quaintly carved and painted walnut-wood chests and coffers in her treasure-room suffice to hold her gauzes and brocades, her silks and embroideries."[50]

It can be seen by Lucy Garnett's description of the harem, which was published in 1909, that furnishings, for the most part, are still Ottoman in traditional families. Beds (mattresses), for example, are still stored in closets during the day and brought out at night. The rooms are still multi-functional, being used as sitting rooms, dining rooms, bed rooms and living rooms as needed in contrast to Victorian houses where rooms were uni-functional. A few items such as chairs, a console table and mirror are mentioned, indicating that the European influence has begun. The use of European furnishings increased with time, often leading to an eclectic and esthetically displeasing mixture of furniture. After commenting on the beauty and richness of traditional Ottoman carpets, textiles and embroidery, Garnett adds:

"The Oriental mind seems, as a rule, to become confused when it endeavours to assimilate its own notions of luxury and magnificence to those suggested by the civilization of the West. The highest developments of art are brought into close contact with objects of the most tasteless construction, and magnificence is thrown into strong and unpleasing relief by juxtaposition with tawdriness; ... shabby chintz hangs side by side with rich brocade and velvet; and a cheap rug "made in Germany," and representing a dog or lion, is spread side by side with a silken carpet of almost priceless value."[51]

Social Space / Social Roles

Ottoman household harems were very social and gregarious places. Here all the women and young children of the house lived and worked together. This often included the mother-in-law, particularly if she was widowed, and sometimes other elderly women such as aunts, the wife, her young children and numerous female slaves. Large harems of the Ottoman elite were known to have as many as a hundred slaves to perform the daily household tasks. In addition, female friends, relatives, neighbors, vendors and singers were always welcome to drop in. Emine Fuat Tugay writes that in her childhood (b.1897) place settings for sixteen were laid every day at lunch and that there were rarely any empty places. She, two brothers, her mother and their two governesses took up six seats, while the rest were left for unexpected guests.[52] Women of all ages, races and social status mingled in the harems, but a strict etiquette was in force at all times. The mistress of the house and distinguished guests sat

on the sofa, while women of lower social status sat on cushions on the floor. The democratic nature of the harems is summarized by Tugay as follows:

"Whatever their status everyone was well received, according to the old Ottoman tradition. That period represents the last stages of a patriarchal hospitality, and was in actual fact a truly democratic system in the only genuine meaning of the word, since persons of every class had access to and were made welcome by the highest in the land. Good manners among all classes were the rule. A woman of inferior rank would never presume to sit close to the mistress of the house, but when asked to be seated, would of her own accord choose a chair placed at some distance from her hostess. Women of humbler condition sat near the door, on stiff cushions placed on the floor for that purpose. But all, whenever they wished to come, had the satisfaction of being admitted to the presence of even the greatest ladies in the land."[53]

Role of Mother-in-law

If she lived with her son, the *kayın valide* [the bride's mother-in-law] was at the top of the social hierarchy in the household harem, similar to the role of the sultan's mother, the *valide sultan*, in the imperial harem. The mother-in-law in both the imperial and household harems was always held in the highest esteem and was shown great respect by other harem members. This privileged position can be traced to the command in the Holy Qur'an to "Reverence the wombs,"[54] a command that the Ottomans fully honored. The mother-in-law had the final say in all matters related to the harem, and she oversaw its daily operations. The following excerpts from Western travelers' reports underscore the importance of the mother-in-law's role in the Ottoman household harem:

"The chief personage in the harem is the husband's mother, and owing to the patriarchal custom of married children living under the parental roof, she is more frequently a member of the household than are mothers-in-law with us. She takes precedence of the wife, and as long as she lives is the 'buyuk hanum,' the great lady of the house. The utmost deference is paid to her."[55]

"If a man's widowed mother reside permanently under his roof, which is not unusual, his wife's position in the house is but secondary, and she is required to defer to her mother-in-law in all things. Hand-kissing being the usual mode of respectful greeting, the wife kisses the

hand of her 'Kain Valide,' [mother-in-law] *as also that of her husband, on the occasion of any family event, or any anniversary, and also on special Moslem holidays, such as the opening of the Bairam* [eid] *festival. The wife may not seat herself at table before her husband's mother has taken her place, nor be the first to help herself to the dishes, nor may she smoke a cigarette in the presence of 'the first-lady' until invited by her to do so."*[56]

Role of Wife

In the absence of the husband's mother, the wife was the head of the Ottoman household harem. She had full authority over the running of daily activities, the harem economy, female slaves and child-rearing. This was often no small task due to the size of some harems, particularly those of the elite. However, young girls were trained for these duties from childhood on. By the time they married, they had learned the skills necessary for successfully running a household. The harem became the arena in which women could display their talents and ingenuity. Marriage, and motherhood in particular, gave them respect and security both in the family and in society at large.

As mentioned previously, girls were trained for their role as wife and mother at an early age. They attended a primary school (*sıbyan mektebi*) where they learned basic Islamic knowledge such as the Arabic alphabet, recitation of the Qur'an and memorization of some of its verses, catechism, the proper performance of ritual prayers, writing, arithmetic, geography and history. These schools were usually attached to a mosque and they were in existence for centuries. They were also widespread. Western travelers wrote that there was no village too small to have a primary school.

In 1858 the first girls' secondary school was opened in Istanbul. By 1901 the number of these schools in Istanbul had increased to eleven. Classes were held every day except for Friday during ten months of the year. There were thirty-six hours of lessons per week and eighteen different subjects. The broad curriculum included the Alphabet and Verbal Studies, the Holy Qur'an and Rules of Recitation, Religious Studies, Reading, Writing, Literature, Ottoman Grammar, Arabic, Persian, Calligraphy, General Information about Life, Household Management, Ethics, Health, Arithmetic-Geometry, Geography, History and Handcrafts.

Lewis, *School*, c. 1850

In addition to offering a broad curriculum, these schools taught detailed information regarding household management that prepared young girls for the responsibilities they would face when they married. This is obvious from the following topic headings in the course on Household Management:

What is a home? What things are necessary in order for a house to be called a home? How can it be set up, protected, heated, aired and lighted? The characteristics of a good home; arranging furniture; inner divisions; sanitary conditions; the characteristics of furniture; conditions and solutions for cleaning and protecting the kitchen and other rooms, the bath and ablutions cabin, furniture suites, chairs, cushions, curtains, rug and bedding; cleaning copper,

Frères, *Sultan Ahmed middle school for girls*

bronze, marble and jewelry; solutions for getting rid of bugs, flies, bedbugs, fleas and lice; the characteristics of summer and winter rooms; information about fuel; setting up and cleaning stoves and fireplaces; lighting means: resinous wood, candles, olive oil, liquid gas, natural gas, lamps, candlesticks and night light (small kerosene lamp).

Protecting clothing in different seasons; sewing; weaving underwear; weaving carpets and rugs; information about looms; cleaning clothes with lime water, soda and soap; starching and ironing; removing stains; embroidery; needlework; different kinds of covers.

Making bread; yeast; preserving food in different seasons; drying fresh vegetables and fruit in season; making pickles, jams, syrup, braised meat, pastrami-sausages, plain foods and those made with olive oil, pastries, compotes; pantries; and determining minimum weekly consumption of basic foods according to the number of family members.

Home pharmacy: Making tooth powder and water and creams for chapped hands and lips; natural and

Frères, *Students of a private school*, 1880–1893

artificial toothbrushes; bath luffas; wash cloths and bathrobes. Introduction to natural herbs and home medicines. Information on bleeding, poisoning, and so on.

Home medical information: Regarding wounds, bruises, sprains, broken bones and burns. Caring for people who have just recovered from illness. Conditions for choosing a family doctor.

Clothing and food for every season; arranging meal times; daily nutrition for children, middle-aged persons and the elderly; sleeping times according to age; daily and weekly cleaning.

Information on keeping the sitting room ready for guests; ...rules of etiquette; customs regarding speaking, serving, respect and love; characteristics of servants; things to be done when staying alone; always being prepared for unexpected guests; being clean and well-kept; visiting rules.

Keeping a daily accounts notebook; making a monthly budget; making savings; being respectful of rental conditions if renting; and keeping up the home whether owner or renter.[57]

Whether educated at school or in the home, young Ottoman girls were well-prepared for taking up their responsibilities in the household harem. They were equipped with the knowledge and experience necessary for their wifely roles. In addition to being taught practical knowledge, Ottoman girls and boys were carefully trained in social manners and refinement. There was a strict hierarchy based on seniority in homes and in society, and children of all classes were raised to respect its rules. The younger always showed respect to the elder, and this was the case even among siblings. On the other hand, the older siblings were responsible for the well-being of the younger children.

The role of wife offered the Ottoman woman many benefits including her maintenance, the companionship of a husband, support from her family throughout her life and a secure and respectable place in society. Objective Western travelers overwhelmingly agreed that Ottoman women had full control over their own domains. In fact, some travelers went so far as to say that those who thought otherwise deserved to be laughed at.[58] According to Western travelers' reports, Ottoman women were treated kindly, compassionately and respectfully by their husbands. Western women were particularly impressed by the respect for women's privacy shown by Ottoman men. In general, Ottoman men treated their wives with so much

respect and courtesy that Lady Craven suggested the behavior of Turkish men towards their wives should be taken as an example by all nations.

Physical abuse of Muslim women was rare in Ottoman society. Both the law and social mores protected women. Men were forbidden to speak to women on the streets, and it was considered shameful for men even to look directly at women other than their own wives or close female blood relatives. A striking example of this is related by Antoine-Ignace Melling (1763–1831), an architect in the employment of Hatice Sultan, sister to Sultan Selim III. While working on Hatice Sultan's palace, Melling was able to see the female slaves in the palace courtyard. The palace foreman, who accompanied the European architect, always turned his head to avoid seeing the slave girls, saying that God commanded men not to stare at women other than their own.[59] Lady Ramsey gives an interesting anecdote from her own travels regarding male behavior towards females. Although she traveled widely in the Ottoman Empire, she saw only one example of abuse to a woman. In her own words:

"It was a lovely sunny morning, and I was taking a look about, while the men packed up our belongings and my husband made notes of the locality. My attention was attracted by an angry shout from the opposite side of the glen. I looked across and saw a middle-aged man, in peasant garb, shouting and gesticulating violently, and evidently in a very bad temper. He was accompanied by four or five women carrying hoes. I suppose they were going to work in the fields. The man had stopped and turned at the top of a steep road and the women had stopped and turned also. I saw that the angry individual addressed himself to another woman, who was some yards behind, and I made out that he was ordering her to go back to the house. Still farther down the road a wee child, hardly able to walk, was doing its little utmost to overtake the woman.

"While the man roared and gesticulated the woman stood still; but the moment he turned his back to continue his way she slowly followed. When this had happened three or four times, his rage became unbounded, he made a rush at her, lifted her in his two hands high in the air (she was a little bit of a thing), and threw her with all his force against a wall. She did not utter a sound so far as I heard, but lay huddled up and motionless like a bundle of clothes. But the baby, that had by this time almost reached her, lifted up its voice in shrieks of anguish and terror, and the four or five women who were with the man stooped with one accord, each picked up a stone and let fly at him. I think some of them hit him. I sincerely hope they did. He was apparently ashamed of himself, for he took no notice of this action on the part of the women, but walked hastily away leaving them to follow."[60]

The remarkable aspect of this anecdote is not the angry man's abuse of his intractable wife, but the village women's reaction to the man's abuse. They showed neither fear nor abject submission in the face of a male's physical force. They apparently didn't fear for their livelihood either. Their swift reaction to physical force with physical force suggests that they were confident of being morally and legally in the right. Moreover, the lack of any reaction to the women's stone-throwing further suggests that the furious man thought they were in the right, too.

Roles of Mother and Children

Motherhood further enhanced and consolidated the Ottoman wife's position because mothers were revered and honored in Ottoman society. The hadith, "Heaven is under the feet of mothers," indicates the strong religious basis for this attitude. Ottoman women were devoted mothers. They showed great care and tenderness towards their children. Either the mother, herself, saw to the needs of her child or she oversaw the care given by slave women who served as nurses. Many of the activities of child-raising took place in the large anteroom of the harem. Children mixed freely with adults and were included as a natural part of harem activities. This led some Victorian women, who were accustomed to children being kept in totally separate quarters, to conclude that children, both girls and boys, in Ottoman families were overly indulged by their mothers and nurses.

Young boys usually remained with their mothers in the harem until the age of seven, at which time they began to participate in all-male functions in the *selamlik*. Girls remained in the harem until they married and took on the responsibility of running their own households. Both boys and girls were treated with great affection, but mothers were also careful to cultivate refined manners in their children. Due to the seclusion of Ottoman women, they devoted almost all of their time and energy to their husband and children. In turn, children were highly respectful and considerate of their elders. They were particularly devoted to their mothers both in childhood and adulthood. According to Julia Pardoe,

"An equally beautiful feature in the character of the Turks is their reverence and respect for the author of their being ... the mother is an oracle; she is consulted, confided in, listened to with respect and deference, honored to her latest hour, and remembered with affection and regret beyond the grave."[61]

◀ Rogier, *Female Servant Serving Coffee*, 1848

Preziosi, *Caique*, 1858

The strong bonds between parents and children, the devotion and care given by parents to their children when they were young and by the children to their parents in their old age, the refinement of manners and behavior towards all family members, and the solidarity and unity of purpose led to the Ottoman family's being, what one Swiss family-law professor described as, "the strongest family hearth in the world."[62] Of course there were many significant factors that contributed to the success of the Ottoman family. The Ottomans' strict adherence to Islam, their honoring and practicing cultural values, traditions and customs that gave importance to the family, and the support and protection of family values by Ottoman institutions like the neighborhood administration system, guilds, religious organizations and government—all were vital aspects of Ottoman family synergy.

Speaking from her own personal experience as a child born in 1906 into an Ottoman family, Münevver Ayaşlı Hanımefendi said, *"I don't believe that the beauty, purity and sincerity of Ottoman family life have existed anywhere else. The Ottoman Islamic life was life at the pinnacle of beauty. Love and respect towards one another, the visits of the young to their elders on religious holidays, the caresses and compliments from adults to the young—it was truly a life full of poetry. If you ask me what Ottoman life was, I would answer that it was a beautiful, flower-embellished poem."*[63]

Social Activities

The Ottomans were socially oriented people. Just as there was much social interaction among members of the harem, which included daily intermingling of all ages, races and classes of women, there was also a lot of social activity in the harem that included females from outside of the harem. As a society, both Ottoman men and women shared significant events in their lives with others through ceremonies in celebration or commemoration of those events. Births, circumcisions, engagements, marriages and religious holidays were all major events celebrated in accordance with prescribed traditions and customs, and they were experiences shared among relatives, neighbors and friends. In addition, there were many minor events celebrated as well such as the appearance of the baby's first tooth, a child's first day at school, a child's first complete reading of the Qur'an, a young girl's first veiling, a young man's entrance into and return home from the military, an adult's return from the holy pilgrimage, and so on. There were

also social events, as well, other than celebrations such as weekly visits to the public baths, visits and return visits, shopping excursions, picnics, and so on. Although Ottoman women were secluded in their harems and basically excluded from the public domain of men, they were in no way confined to a life of loneliness. There was an exclusively female social realm that provided Ottoman women with ample social activity and interaction. This woman's world is described nostalgically below by a ninety-seven-year-old Ottoman woman to her great, great granddaughter in a twentieth century Turkish short story:

"There was a woman's world then, separate from the men, but it's completely vanished today. It was a very wide world. Thousands of women met, spoke with and entertained each other. They had their own special pleasures and amusements. There was no fashion. Young girls wore their mothers' clothing, and grandmothers gave their jewelry to their granddaughters. Silver embroidered slippers, red cloaks... ah, those red cloaks... Women shone like poppies on spring's green grass in excursion places. There were no ugly, that is, weak or sickly ones among them. Men only knew their own women; they came home early from work; and they created scenes of insatiable love and affection for their wives... There were no disaster areas like coffeehouses, casinos, beer halls, clubs, theaters, musical cafes or brothels that separate all Turkish men from their wives and leave miserable Turkish women alone like forgotten keepers in their houses. Women lived with men without worrying. They came together and were amused and happy in those great houses with large halls, in yards with arbors and pools, in gardens, and in huge, unique seaside mansions. What games and customs and pleasures there were then, but they have all been forgotten today...

"Everything was pleasure and fun for us. Everything—childhood, starting school, veiling, marrying, giving birth, even getting old... They all had ceremonies. These events in a woman's life were a vehicle of pleasure and entertainment for many other women. Our whole life passed in pleasure. Not a single week passed without there being a start to school, a circumcision, a wedding, a visit to a mother after childbirth. Our clothing and henna were even a reason for amusement. We had poems and songs. We would get together and consult among one another. On winter evenings we looked for good omens; even the seasons were a source of entertainment for us. Each season had its own customs, amusements and traditions."[64]

Weddings

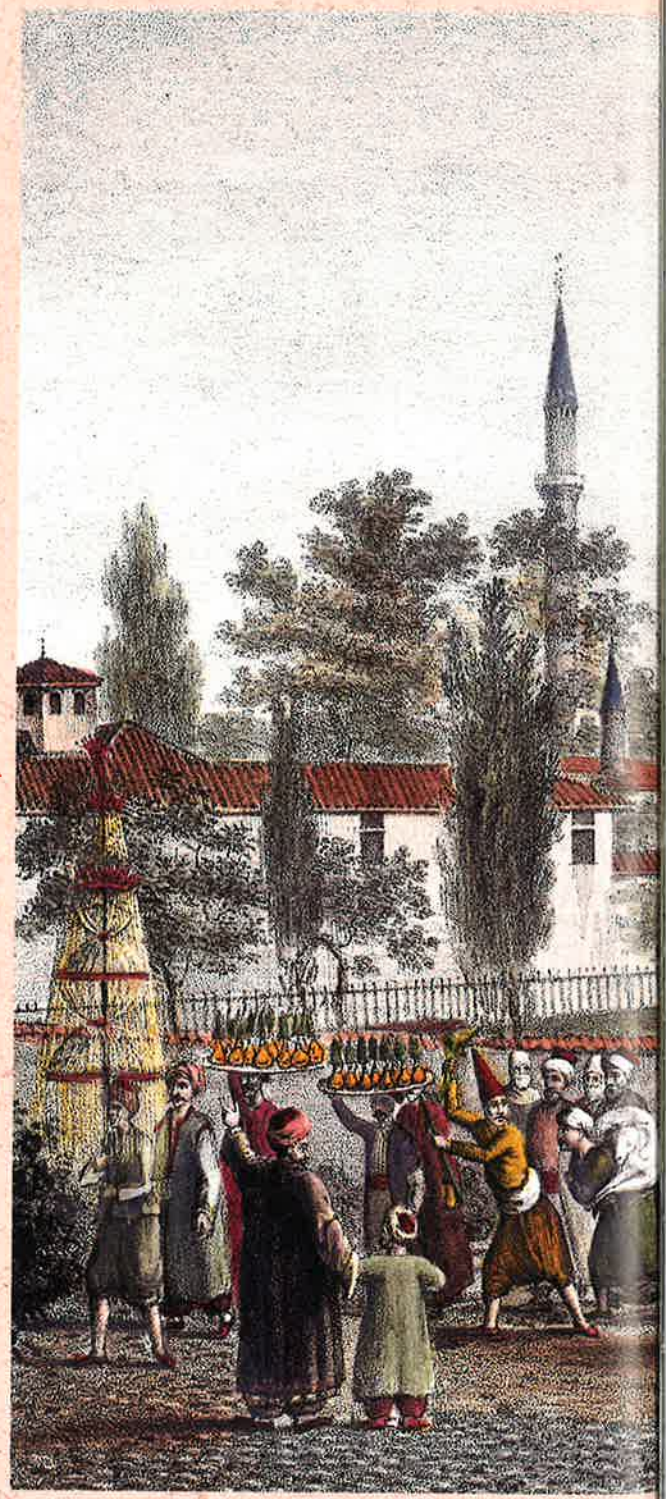
One of the most important events in the life of an Ottoman woman was, of course, her wedding. Since marriages were arranged, the marriage process began with a visit to the eligible girl's home by the prospective groom's mother and sometimes a matchmaker, who might be a relative, friend, neighbor or a professional matchmaker. The purpose of the visit was for the prospective mother-in-law to see the girl at close range. Once the visitors were seated in the best room and the young girl had dressed for the occasion, she would serve Turkish coffee to the guests. While slowly sipping her coffee, the mother of the prospective groom carefully but discreetly looked the girl over. As soon as the coffee drinking was finished, the young girl would collect the empty cups on a tray and withdraw from the room.

If the woman approved of the girl, she would inform her husband, and son and the family would arrive at a decision. If it was positive, the boy's father and several male relatives called on the girl's father and asked for the bridal candidate's hand in marriage. Before giving an answer, the girl's father would have investigated the character and resources of the boy's family, if he did not know them already. This time, the girl's family decided whether or not to accept the marriage proposal. If the family agreed and if the girl gave her consent, then the go-ahead was given by the girl's father. A number of visits between the two families ensued. Terms of the marriage were discussed and agreed upon and gifts were exchanged during these visits.

One of the most important points discussed between the two parties was the amount of the *mahr* to be paid to the bride. Unlike a dowry (which a bride brings with her to the marriage) or a bride price (which goes to the father of the bride), the *mahr* is a sum of money or property paid or promised by the groom to the bride. It is a mandatory condition of marriage in Islam, and the marriage should not be consummated until the terms of the *mahr* have been agreed upon and the necessary payment made. During Ottoman times one part of the *mahr* was paid before the marriage and one part was left to be paid in case of divorce or death of the husband. It is both a means of financial security for the woman in case of divorce or death, and it is also a deterrent to divorce for the man. The amount of *mahr* was usually determined in correlation with the bride's social status.

When all terms had been agreed upon between the two families, the couple became engaged. The bride's family sent a large bundle of gifts to the groom's family, which included sweets and presents for the groom and all members of the immediate family. If the girl's family had the means to do so, gifts could be included for extended family members as well. In turn, the groom's family sent an even more elaborate engagement set of gifts and food to the bride's family, described as follows by Fanny Blunt:

"The 'nişan takımı' [engagement set sent by the groom's family] *was usually much more elaborate than the 'nişan bohçası'* [bundle of gifts sent by the bride's family] *and, among the rich, consisted of five trays carried on the heads of five servants. The first tray contained handsome 'çitpit,' or house slippers, for the bride and for her female relatives, and 'terlik,' less elegant slippers, for her family's servants; a silver hand-mirror; perfumes in tiny crystal bottles; and a filigree silver box, or 'çekmece,' in which lay the 'nişan yüzüğü,' the ring that would serve as both engagement and wedding ring. It was usually set with a single large emerald, ruby, or diamond. The second tray carried flowers; the third baskets of fruit; the fourth baskets of sweets and spices, coffee,*



Melling, *Turkish Wedding Parade*, 1819

Bruyn,
Women's Turbans, 1700

colored wax candles, and bags of Mecca henna. On the fifth were the material for the wedding dress and other fabrics, a pair of handsome 'nalın' (clogs) inlaid with mother-of-pearl and equipped with pearl-embroidered straps, a small silver basin, and some elaborate combs for the bride's bath. These trays were each tied in muslin and decorated with ribbons."[65]

At a later appointed date the official marriage ceremony took place at the bride's home in the presence of the *imam*, the male parents or guardians of the bride and groom and male witnesses. A marriage contract was signed between the two parties, containing any conditions the bride and groom wanted specified like the amount of the *mahr*. The bride followed the ceremony in an adjacent room and the groom might be there in person or be represented by someone. The official ceremony was followed by a dinner attended by both parties.

The wedding ceremonies, the social celebration of the couple's marriage, followed the official ceremony at an appointed time. The marriage was consummated on Thursday night, and events preceding this night took place on a traditional timetable. On the Monday preceding the wedding night the bride's trousseau was taken in a procession to the groom's home and displayed there by her female relatives and friends for the curiosity and admiration of relatives and neighbors or any other female visitors. The bride's mother would begin to prepare her daughter's trousseau shortly after she was born. Later, when the girl was capable enough, she, too, would contribute to the preparation of the trousseau, which would usually include:

"...numerous silver trays, bowls, and pitchers. In the nineteenth century, it also contained vases made of çeşm-i bülbül *(nightingale's eyes), a type of colored glass marked by spiral white stripes; tulip vases called* lâledan*; crystal bowls; household items ornamented with* sırma*, an embroidery done with gold or silver thread, in this case much of it by the bride's own hand; jewels protected by glass; two* oda takımları*, that is, sets of furniture for two rooms—such things as braziers, inlaid mother-of-pearl stools, rugs, and fringed* makats*, divan covers, of the same material as the pillows and window curtains, in most instances a* sırmalı *red velvet; kitchen, eating, and ablution utensils. Even the dustpans were elaborate—of walnut inlaid with silver. There might be as many as fifty sets of bedding. And, of course, there was the girl's wardrobe, which consisted of everything from* geceliks *(nightgowns) to* yaşmaks *(veils), much of it embroidered with* sırma *by the bride."*[66]

Şerbet mahraması, Fruit drink kerchief

The trousseau items would be attractively displayed in the rooms designated for the new couple. The rooms were elaborately decorated and in one corner the women and girls would make a canopy from beautiful materials and embroideries under which the bride would later sit like a queen during the wedding festivities to receive both her husband and her female guests.

The public bath was the scene of celebrations on Tuesday. The bride would be taken there with great ceremony. Her female relatives and friends would attend the traditional bridal bath, the expenses of which were borne by the groom. The bride was thoroughly soaped, scrubbed, shampooed and perfumed by bath attendants, and her hair was braided and adorned with jewels and gold coins. She then proceeded to the cooling room where the guests were waiting. She kissed the hands of the elderly and received the congratulations of all the ladies there. Entertainment was provided by female musicians, singers and dancers, and the bride would follow the entertainment seated on her bridal throne which was adorned with gauze and ribbons. Refreshments were served to all the guests. After the bridal bath it was custom for the girl to dress in borrowed clothes, which she wore until she put on her wedding dress.[67]

On Wednesday afternoon the female relatives of the bridegroom paid a visit to the home of the bride. The bride's mother and female friends met them at the door and escorted them upstairs to a sitting room. There they were served refreshments such as sherbet and Turkish coffee. Shortly thereafter the bride would appear, still dressed in borrowed clothes, escorted by two women who had not been married more than once. After kissing the hand of her mother-in-law, the bride would kiss the hands of the other women there and then sit a few minutes next to her mother-in-law. As a token of affection, they would exchange pieces of candy from which each had taken a bite. After being entertained for some time by musicians and dancing girls, the mother-in-law and her party would take their leave, being invited to the henna festivities that evening. The bride would escort her mother-in-law and guests to the door where she would be showered with small coins by the guests. Children and beggars would wait close to the door to get their share of money that was always distributed at wedding events.

That evening the *kına gecesi* (night of henna), which is a kind of farewell to girlhood, took place. Lucy Garnett described it as follows:

"When the company are again assembled in the evening, a taper is handed to each of the younger members of the party, who, led by the bride and escorted by the musicians and dancing girls, descend to the garden. Winding in a long and wavy line, now between the fragrant flower-beds, and now in the shadow of the trees and shrubs, their rich dresses, bright jewels, fair faces, and floating hair fitfully lighted by the flickering tapers, their feet moving to the rhythm of the tinkling castanets and wild strains of the dusky-hued Gypsy girls, one might imagine them a troop of Peris engaged in their nocturnal revels. Returning to the house, the bride, divested of her gay attire, enters the reception-room, holding her left arm across her brow, and seats herself on a stool in the center of the apartment. The fingers of her right hand are then covered thickly with henna paste, on which the bridegroom's mother sticks a gold coin, the other guests following suit. This hand, covered with a silken bag, is now held across her face, while the left hand is similarly plastered and decorated by the bride's mother and friends. When the maiden's toes have been similarly treated, the ceremony is terminated with a wild pantomimic dance by the Gypsy performers, at the conclusion of which these women fall into exaggerated postures before the principal ladies in order to receive their guerdon, which is looked for as much from

the guests as from the hostess. The bride is then left to repose until the henna is considered to have stained her fingers to the requisite amber hue, when it is washed off."[68]

On Thursday morning the bride finally put on her wedding finery, which was heavily adorned with gold or silver thread and pearls. She wore a silk gauze blouse and silk *şalvar* pants under an elaborately embroidered velvet dress, usually of a dark red color. One of the most beautiful embroidery designs was the *bindalli* (one thousand branches) in which the dress is almost covered with an elegant branch motif. The bride also wore beautiful jewelry that usually included gold, pearls, diamonds and other precious stones. Her hair was braided into small braids with silver tinsel strands intertwined, and she wore a large veil that hung down over her dress. Her head cover might also include a silver ornamented headpiece or a short fez ornamented with gold coins or, if from a wealthy family, a crown studded with jewels.

When her adornment was complete, it was custom for the bride to appear before her father who would tie a "bridal girdle" consisting of a metal belt or fine shawl around the waist of his daughter, who would kiss his hand for the last time as a member of his household.[69] After this ceremony the bride would be escorted by the groom's family to her new home. The wedding procession was a colorful affair with men on horseback and women in carriages. The bride was accompanied by a female relative called a *yenge* who would help the new couple get acquainted. The procession would occasionally be interrupted by people on the street who expected some gold coins before getting out of the way, knowing that it was customary for money to be distributed at this time.

The groom was not a part of the wedding procession; rather he waited at the door of his family home to welcome the new bride when she arrived. Once the bridal procession reached its destination, the groom and the *yenge* escorted the bride to the bridal chamber, which had been previously decorated for this occasion. Here the groom had a few minutes alone with the bride for the first time in his residence and, if he was successful in raising the veil, he might get what was often his first opportunity to see the bride's face. Then the groom went to attend to his male guests and the female guests, bringing gifts, entered the bridal chamber to see the bride and examine her trousseau.

Male and female guests were hosted, fed and entertained in separate areas of the house, the men in the *selamlık* and the women in the harem, until the evening prayer. At that time the groom and his guests went to a mosque for prayer. Upon returning home, the groom was sent to the bridal chamber amidst good wishes. The *yenge* led him inside the room where his bride was waiting. If he had not previously lifted his bride's veil, he did so now and presented her with a gift for being able to view her face. The *yenge* left them alone while she prepared them a light dinner. After dinner they were left alone for the night, but the *yenge* stayed close by in case her assistance was needed. The wedding festivities continued for two more days with feasting and visiting.

Ottoman society held the feminine in high esteem, and this was particularly apparent in the traditions and ceremonies surrounding weddings. Throughout the wedding celebration, the bride was the focal point of attention and activity. She was treated like a queen, and her every activity was attended by ceremony and celebration. Even her bath and the application of henna were social occasions shared with other women. The sending of the trousseau and the claiming of the bride were activities accompanied by public processions. The bride's passage from girlhood to marriage was an event shared and celebrated by family and friends, and strangers as well. Ottoman brides received support, prayers and good wishes from the whole community, a powerfully positive note on which to begin a new cycle in life.

Childbirth

A wife's entrance into motherhood was another event elaborately celebrated in Ottoman society. Subsequent births were celebrated as well, but the first birth was particularly significant. The new mother gave birth to her child sitting in a birthing chair, which was a special chair with a high back and arms but the bottom of which had been mostly carved out to facilitate the birth. She would be attended by an experienced midwife who would help with the delivery. Once the child was born, the women present would proclaim the *şehadet* (the Muslim declaration of faith) and the midwife would cut the umbilical cord and swaddle the baby in muslin cloth. The new mother, called *lohusa*, would recline on a divan specially decorated for this occasion. It was covered with richly embroidered pillowcases and sheets

and satin or velvet-covered quilts. A Qur'an would hang in an embroidered bag at the head of the bed for protection from the evil eye. Later, the father would be called in to chant the *ezan* (call to prayer) and *şehadet* in the baby's right ear and *bismillah* in its left ear. He would also pronounce the baby's name three times.

If the new mother was feeling up to it, a celebration of the birth with family and friends would be held on the third day. Julia Pardoe described a birth celebration in these words:

"Long before I reached [the hanım's apartment], I was deafened with the noise which issued from its door; the voices of the singing women, the rattle of tambourines, the laughter of the guests, the shouts of the attendant slaves, the clatter of the coffee and sherbet cups, I could scarcely believe I was ushered into a sick chamber...

"Directly opposite to the door stood the bed of the Hanoum the curtains had been withdrawn, and a temporary canopy formed of cachemire shawls arranged in festoons, and linked together with bathing scarfs of gold and silver tissue; and, as the lady was possessed of fifty, which could not all be arranged with proper effect in so limited a space, a silk cord had been stretched along the ceiling to the opposite extremity of the apartment, over which the costly drapery was continued. Fastened to the shawls were head-dresses of coloured gauze, flowered or striped with gold and silver, whence depended oranges, lemons, and candied fruits. Two coverlets of wadded pink satin were folded at the bed's foot; and a sheet of striped crape hung to the floor, where it terminated in a deep fringe of gold.

"The infant lay upon a cushion of white satin richly embroidered with coloured silks, and trimmed like the sheet; and was itself a mass of gold brocade and diamonds. But the young mother principally attracted my attention.

Birthing chair, 18–19th century

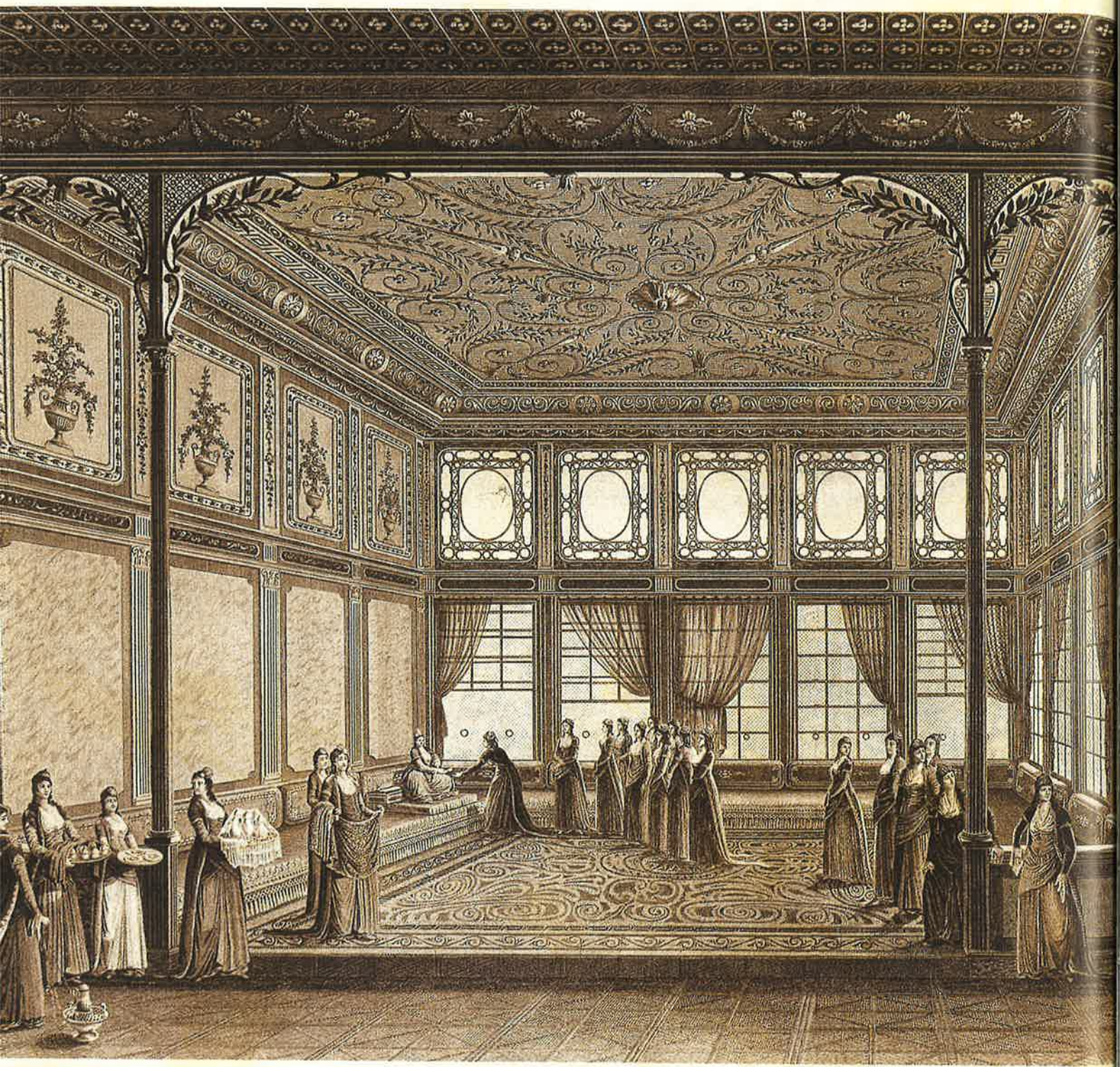
"Her dark hair was braided in twenty or thirty small plaits, that fell far below her waist... Her throat was encircled by several rows of immense pearls, whence depended a diamond star, resting upon her bosom; her chemisette was delicately edged with a gold beading, and met at the bottom of her bust, where her vest was confined by a costly shawl. Her head-dress, of blue gauze worked with silver, was studded with diamond sprays, and ornamented with a fringe of large gold coins, which fell upon her shoulders, and almost concealed her brilliant ear-rings. Her satin antery was of the most lively colours, and her salva were of pale pink silk, sprinkled with silver spots. A glass of white lilies rested against her pillow, and a fan of peacocks' feathers, and a painted handkerchief, lay beside her."[70]

The new mother remained *lohusa* for forty days to permit her internal organs to recuperate. On the fortieth day after birth, an elaborate celebration was held at the public bath. The mother and child were bathed amidst special ceremonies. The mother's body was plastered with a healing ointment "composed of honey and various aromatic condiments, held to possess strengthening and recuperating properties."[71] After about an hour, the ointment would be washed off, and the mother, dressed in a robe with gold or silver embroidered edges, would return to her guests in the cool room. After the new mother kissed the hands of her elders, entertainment was made and refreshments were served throughout the rest of the day.

There were many other special occasions that enlivened harem life, like celebrations of a child's first tooth, a child's first complete recitation of the Holy Qur'an, the first day of school, a boy's circumcision, a girl's first veiling, the sending off and return of a soldier and the return of a *hacı* from the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. Frequent visits were also a common event in the harem.

Visits among relatives often lasted for extended periods of time. Many Ottoman women held a *kabul günü* once a month at which time they would officially receive visitors. At the same time, drop-in visitors were always welcomed, as were female vendors. In addition, there were *masalcı* women or storytellers who were invited to entertain in the harem, especially on long, cold winter evenings. Preparation of trousseaus also occupied a great deal of time for women, their daughters and other female relatives. Most Ottoman women were highly accomplished in the art of embroidery, and they beautified all articles of clothing, bedding, towels, covers, and so forth.

Cradle. Topkapı Palace Museum



Melling, *Hatice Sultan Palace*, interior. 19th century.

Religious Holidays

Wall decoration. Fruit Room, Topkapı Palace

Other significant times for celebration in the harem were Islamic religious holidays. In Islam there are a number of *kandils* or religious celebrations commemorating particular events like the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the night of his conception, his ascension to the heavens and others. There are two major religious celebrations, one of which is the four-day Eid ul-Adha, a commemoration of Prophet Abraham's (peace be upon him) sacrifice of a ram in lieu of his son Ishmael. During this holy celebration Muslims who can afford it sacrifice a sheep or a group sacrifices a cow or camel. One third of the meat is distributed to the poor and one third to relatives, and one third can be kept for the immediate family. In addition to making a sacrifice, visits are made to friends and relatives, gifts are given to family members and children, and alms are given to the poor.

The other major religious holiday is Eid ul-Fitr, which is celebrated after one month of fasting and worship during the month of Ramadan in lunar calendar. Emine Fuat Tugay gave the following details about Ramadan in her childhood:

"During the month of Ramadan ... gates and house doors would be opened to the public. An imam *and a* muezzin *were engaged for the whole month at our house, and the latter would chant the call to evening prayer from the top of the stairs leading into the garden. Prayer-rugs facing south-east towards Mecca had been spread in the main hall for the men, and the drawing-rooms were similarly prepared for the women. As soon as a cannon boomed, announcing that the sun had set, the fast was broken with olives and bread, prior to the short evening prayer. The household, with its resident guests and any strangers who had come in, then sat down at different tables to* 'iftar,' *as the first meal after the fast is called. The men were all served in the* selamlik, *whether they were known to my father or not. He dined separately with his guests, but the food was the same for all.*

"Strange women did not often come to iftar, *nevertheless a table was always ready for the 'Allah misafiri,' the guests of God. Special dishes were served at* iftar. *Black and green olives, several kinds of sliced cheese, a variety of jams, very thin slices of a sausage made from mutton, and the dried meat of mutton or turkey, the two last-named being the only foods flavored with garlic which were ever eaten in the* konaks, *had been placed, each one separately, in tiny dishes before each plate. Goblets containing sherbet always stood beside the glasses for water. The meal invariably began with soup, followed by eggs cooked either with cheese or meat, sausage, or dried meat, and usually ended after a large number of courses with the serving of 'güllaç,' a sweet made from thin wafers of starch. Two hours after sunset, the* müezzin *again chanted his call to the last prayer of the day, the 'Yatsi Namaz.' During Ramadan only, another prayer, the 'Teravih Namaz,' immediately follows the* yatsi, *both together lasting over an hour. My father, with his sons and household and those of his guests who wished to participate, never missed any of these prayers. I used to pray with the other women in the drawing-room, where screens placed in front of the wide-open double doors enabled them to hear the recitations without being seen. Those who fast are permitted two meals only, the* sahur, *an hour before sunrise, and the* iftar *on sunset. During the interval nothing may pass down the throat, even smoking being prohibited, since smoke can be swallowed."*[72]

After the *teravih* prayer, people usually stayed up all night until the *sahur* meal before sunrise. Some of the time might be spent in religious devotion, but there were amusements in the harem as well. One of the most popular persons during Ramadan evenings was the storyteller woman, who would be hired to enchant her listeners with imaginary tales. Also there were public festivities special to the month of Ramadan. The minarets were all lit up and there were banners hung between the minarets with illuminated designs and good wishes. Occasional fireworks would further light up the skies. The public squares would be filled with people taking part in the Ramadan festivities.

The twenty-seventh night of Ramadan is an especially holy time called *Kadir Gecesi*, or the Night of Power. Worship on this night has power equal to one thousand months of worship. The mosques would overflow with people, some of whom would spend the whole night in worship. Women, who did not regularly attend prayer services at the mosques, would sometimes participate in the mosque services as well. Others spent *Kadir Gecesi* in worship in the privacy of the harem.

Preparations for the three-day celebration that begins after the end of the month of Ramadan would begin a week earlier. The houses were thoroughly cleaned from top to bottom and special dishes, particularly sweets like baklava, would be prepared in anticipation of guests to come. A new suit of clothing would be either bought or sewn for everyone. Lucy Garnett described the Ramadan holiday activities:

"The conclusion of Ramadan is celebrated by the three days' festival of 'Bairam,' also called by names signifying respectively the 'Breaking of the Fast' and the 'Feast of Alms,' during which no work of any kind is done. On the first day of Bairam, every well-to-do person makes a present to his children, his slaves, and his subordinates, besides giving liberally to the poor. In the mornings the streets are thronged with people in holiday costume, who go from house to house paying complimentary visits to friends and official superiors; and after attending the 'midday namaz' in the mosques, the whole Moslem population abandons itself to decorous amusement."[73]

Outings

In addition to paying visits to friends, relatives and neighbors, attending special occasions like weddings and births in other harems, and celebrating religious holidays by means of short excursions and visits on Eid, it was the custom of most Ottoman women to go out to a public bath once a week. This was an event at which women not only bathed and groomed their bodies, but it was a day of socializing with many other women as well. The women often took their small children with them and were accompanied by a party of slaves (according to their means), who carried with them in bundles all items necessary for bathing such as towels, basins, soap and combs. The servants also brought clothing to be put on after the bath and plenty of food and refreshments as the bath was an all-day affair.

Inside the bath women wore raised wooden clogs which were usually decorated with silver or inlaid mother-of-pearl and a thin linen wrap. There were several different rooms, the first one being the cooling room, which is described as follows by Julia Pardoe:

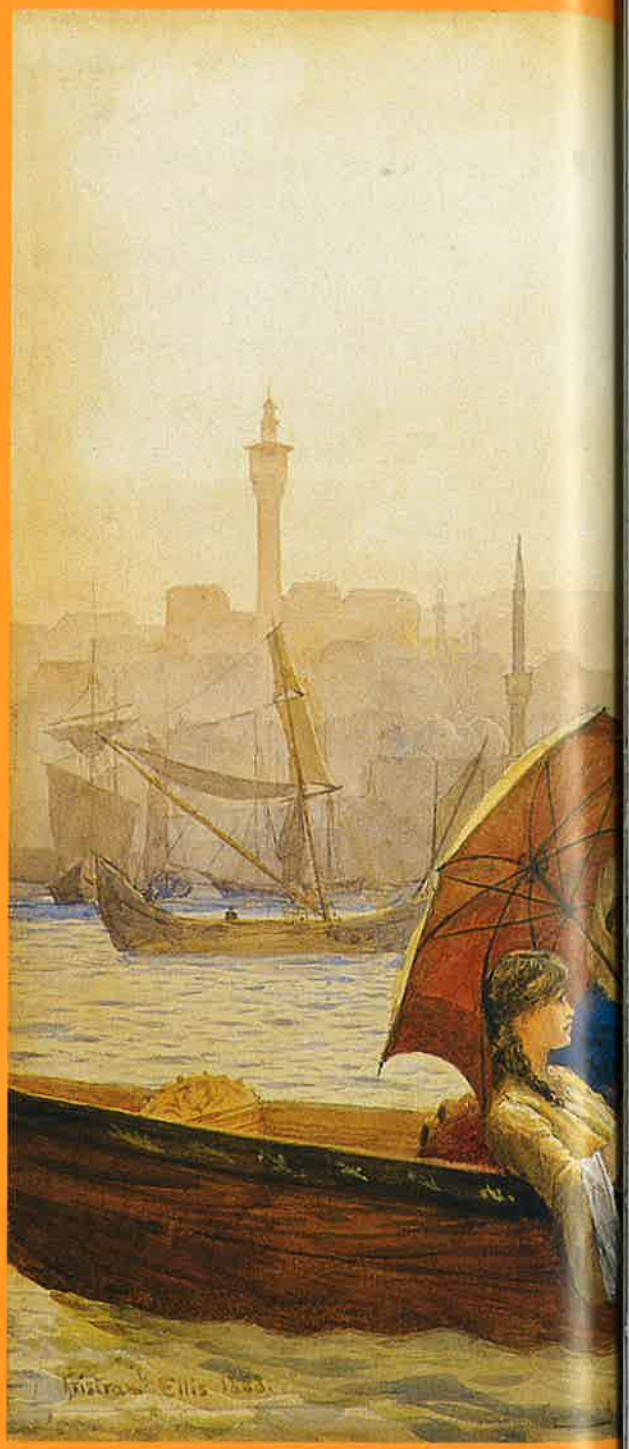
"Having passed through a small entrance-court, we entered an extensive hall, paved with white marble, and surrounded by a double tier of projecting galleries, supported by pillars; the lower range being raised about three feet from the floor. These galleries were covered with rich carpets, or mattresses, overlaid with chintz or crimson shag, and crowded with cushions; the spaces

between the pillars were slightly partitioned off to the height of a few inches; and, when we enter, the whole of the boxes, if I may so call them, were occupied, save the one which had been reserved for us.

"In the centre of the hall, a large and handsome fountain of white marble, pouring its waters into four ample scallop-shells, whence they fell again into a large basin with the prettiest and most soothing sound imaginable, was surrounded by four sofas of the same material, on one of which a young and lovely woman lay pillowed on several costly shawls, nursing her infant.

The boxes presented the oddest appearance in the world—some of the ladies had returned from the bathing-hall, and were reclining luxuriously upon their sofas, rolled from head to foot in fine white linen, in many instances embroidered and fringed with gold, with their fine hair falling about their shoulders, which their slaves, not quite so closely covered as their mistresses, were drying, combing, perfuming, and plaiting, with the greatest care. Others were preparing for the bath, and laying aside their dresses ... while the latest comers were removing their 'yashmacs' and cloaks, and exchanging greetings with their acquaintance."[74]

The second hall of the bath was called the "cooling room," where women remained for some time lying round and relaxing after coming out of the "hot room," or main bathing area. There were a number of fountains (Pardoe counted eight) in the



Tristam (Tristram), *Excursion on the Golden Horn*, 1888

main hall for bathing, available to those who could not afford a private bathing booth. Two pipes of water, one hot water and the other cold water, ran into a marble basin from which water was poured on to the bather either by her personal slave or by bath attendants. Women usually spent a couple of hours in the hot room, where every kind of hygienic and beautifying process was completed, similar to today's spas. Depilatory paste and perfumed soaps were used on the body, and natural dyes and henna were used on the hair and nails.

After the bath was complete and the women had reclined for some time in the cooling room, they returned to the first room, a kind of lounge, where there was a very festive atmosphere. There they dined, listened to music, were entertained by dancing girls and chatted with other women. In addition to the foods that had been brought from home, there was fruit, pudding, sherbet and lemonade available for sale. After catching up on all the recent news, the women would return to the privacy of their own harems.

Another favorite outing of Ottoman women was the picnic. During fair weather women would flock to the meadows of Kağıthane and the Göksu valley or to different spots on the shores of the Bosphorus. They frequently traveled by means of *arabas* or covered carts drawn by oxen. Men would usually ride on horses or mules. If crossing over the Bosphorus Straits, they traveled by *caiques*. After arriving at the picnic area, men sat separately from the women and children. Servants would prepare the picnic spreads and, in addition to plentiful food brought from home, there were many sellers of puddings, sherbets and various sweets. Both Ottoman women and men had a strong love for nature, and picnics provided them with just the right setting to indulge this pleasure.

Liotard, *Turkish Woman with her Slave*, 18th century ▸

Julia Pardoe painted in words the enchanting atmosphere of Ottoman picnics:

"The Valley of Guiuk-Suy [Göksu], thronged as I have attempted to describe it, presents a scene essentially Oriental in its character. The crimson-covered carriages moving along beneath the trees, the white-veiled groups scattered over the fresh turf, the constant motion of the attendant slaves, the quaintly-dressed venders of 'mohalibe' and 'sekel' (or sweetmeats) moving rapidly from point to point with their plateaux upon their heads, furnished with a raised shelf, on which the crystal or china plates destined to serve for the one, and the pink and yellow glories of the other, are temptingly displayed; the 'yahourt' [yogurt] *merchant, with his yoke upon his shoulder, and his swinging trays covered with little brown clay basins, showing forth the creamy whiteness of his merchandise; the*

Bowl. Silver, 19th century ▾

vagrant exhibitors of dancing bears and grinning monkeys; the sunburnt Greek, with his large, flapping hat of Leghorn straw, and Frank costume, hurrying along from group to group with his pails of ice; and recommending his delicate and perishable luxury in as many languages as he is likely to earn piastres; the never-failing water-carrier, with his large turban, his graceful jar of red earth, and his crystal goblet; the negroes of the higher harems, laden with carpets, chibouks, and refreshments for their mistresses; the fruit-vendors, with their ruddy peaches, their clusters of purple grapes from Smyrna, their pyramidically-piled filberts, and their rich plums, clothed in bloom, and gathered with their fresh leaves about them; the melon-merchants sitting among their unheaped riches; the 'pasteks' with their emerald-coloured rinds, and the musk-melons, looking like golden balls, and scenting the breeze as it sweeps over them; the variety of costume exhibited by the natives, always most striking on the Asiatic shore; the ringing rattle of the tambourine, and the sharp wiry sound of the Turkish Zebec, accompanied by the shrill voices of half a dozen Greeks, seated in a semicircle in front of a beauty-laden araba—all combine to complete a picture so perfect of its kind, that, were an European to be transported to Guiuk-Suy, without any intermediate preparation, he would believe himself to be under the spell of an Enchanter, and beholding the realization of what he had hitherto considered as the mere extravagance of some Eastern story-teller."[75]

Yet another source of pleasure for Ottoman women were the illuminations commemorating important events such as the Prophet Muhammad's birthday or celebrations regarding the royal family. The parks, gardens and facades of houses along the Bosphorus shore would be illuminated with thousands of little lamps made into magnificent designs in honor of the special occasion. The gardens were open to the public for viewing the different illuminations, and many would go by boat up and down the Bosphorus. Emine Fuat Tugay gave a first-hand description of the illuminations for the Sultan's birthday that she witnessed as a child:

"We children first admired our garden from the windows, and then soon steamed off in my father's launch to look at the illuminations along the shore of the Bosphorus. The whole family, with a few intimate friends, left the landing-stage at Moda and then sat watching the city unfolding its galaxy of lights, and with these the long glittering facade of the Dolma Bahçe Palace, all reflected in the water. A row of palaces, many of them now no more in

existence, formed a wide ribbon of light as far as the Chirağan [Çırağan] *Palace, with the Yildiz Park in the background, which looked like a piece of the starry sky above reflected below. As the deepening darkness effaced their outlines, the palaces of the Sultanas, the great yalis* [waterside residence], *and the rolling hillsides of the parks assumed an unearthly beauty, forming luminous designs reflected in the sea, and throwing a network of lights over the hills which melted into the infinity of the firmament above. At Büyükdere we crossed over to the more sparsely populated Asian coast, where the illuminations were framed and enhanced by spaces of velvety blackness. It was the most beautiful sight of its kind that I have ever seen, and made unique by its setting in the Bosphorus, unspoilt as this lovely stretch of water was in those days."*[76]

One more outing that can be mentioned is the moonlight concert on the Bosphorus. This event was held during the summer when the reflection of the full moon shone on the waters of the straits. Hundreds or even thousands of small boats would assemble for the concert and proceed according to a fixed route. Men and women attended these concerts, which were given by famous persons such as princes and grand viziers, in separate boats. The music and singing echoed from the concert boat across the water as it made its way down the Bosphorus Straits. The procession of boats would sometimes stop at a famous seaside mansion before continuing on its way under the moonlit sky. The concert would come to an end with the break of dawn.