

1450 C.E. to 1750 C.E.

writhe under your yoke, we have resolved to lay aside our imperial robes in order to put on the shelf and coat of mail, to raise our ever victorious banner, to assemble our invincible armies, to take up the gauntlet of the avenger, to march with our soldiers, whose sword strikes mortal blows. . . . In pursuit of this noble resolution, we have entered upon the campaign, and guided by the hand of the Almighty, we hope soon to strike down your tyrannous arm, blow away the clouds of glory and grandeur which trouble your head and cause your fatal blindness, release from your despotism your trembling subjects, smother you in the end in the very mass of flames which your infernal [spirit] raises everywhere along your passage, accomplishing in this way on you the maxim which says: "He who sows discord

can only reap evils and afflictions." However, anxious to conform to the spirit of the law of the Prophet, we come, before commencing war, to set out before you the words of the Qur'an, in place of the word, and to exhort you to embrace the true faith; this is why we address this letter to you. . . .

But if, to your misfortune, you persist in your past conduct; if, puffed up with the idea of your power and your foolish bravado, you wish to pursue the course of your iniquities, you will see in a few days your plains covered with our tents and inundated with our battalions. Then prodigies of valor will be done, and we shall see the decrees of the Almighty, Who is the God of Armies, and sovereign judge of the actions of men, accomplished. For the rest, victory to him who follows the path of salvation!

Women in Ottoman Society: Oigier de Busbecq

The energy of the Ottoman Empire perhaps reached its zenith under the direction of Sultan Süleyman "the Lawgiver" (r. 1520–1566). One of the most important assessments of Süleyman's influence came from Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the ambassador from Austria to Süleyman's court at Istanbul from 1554–1562. Busbecq had been dispatched in the recent wake of the unsuccessful Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1529. His mission was to use his diplomatic skills to prevent another possible attack on the city. Busbecq's letters reveal much about Süleyman, his court, capital, Islamic traditions, and treatment of women.

Question:

1. *What is the role of women in Ottoman society?*

Consider This:

- *Why are women completely covered in Ottoman society? What were the expectations for women at this time and what distinctions were made between wives and concubines?*

The Turks are the most careful people in the world of the modesty of their wives, and therefore keep them shut up at home and hide them away, so that they scarce see the light of

day. But if they have to go into the streets, they are sent out so covered and wrapped up in veils that they seem to those who meet them mere gliding ghosts. They have the means of seeing

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men through their linen or silken veils, while no part of their own body is exposed to men's view. For it is a received opinion among them, that no woman who is distinguished in the very smallest degree by her figure or youth, can be seen by a man without his desiring her, and therefore without her receiving some contamination; and so it is the universal practice to confine the women to the harem. Their brothers are allowed to see them, but not their brothers-in-law. Men of the richer classes, or of higher rank, make it a condition when they marry, that their wives shall never set foot outside the threshold, and that no man or woman shall be admitted to see them for any reason whatever, not even their nearest relations, except their fathers and mothers, who are allowed to pay a visit to their daughters at the [festival of Bairam].

On the other hand, if the wife has a rather high rank, or has brought a larger dowry than usual, the husband promises on his part that he will take no concubine, but will keep to her alone. Otherwise, the Turks are not forbidden by any law to have as many concubines as they please in addition to their lawful wives. Between the children of wives and those of concubines there

is no distinction, and they are considered to have equal rights. As for concubines, they either buy them for themselves or win them in war; when they are tired of them there is nothing to prevent their bringing them to market and selling them; but they are entitled to their freedom if they have borne children to their master. . . . The only distinction between the lawful wife and the concubine, is that the former has a dowry, while the slaves have none. A wife who has a portion settled on her [a dowry] is mistress of her husband's house, and all the other women have to obey her orders. The husband, however, may choose which of them shall spend the night with him. He makes known his wishes to the wife, and she sends to him the slave he has selected. . . . Only Friday night . . . is supposed to belong to the wife; and she grumbles if her husband deprives her of it. On all the other nights he may do so as he pleases. Divorces are granted among them for many reasons which it is easy for the husbands to invent. The divorced wife receives back her dowry, unless the divorce has been caused by some fault on her part. There is more difficulty in a woman's getting a divorce from her husband.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789)

Born in Benin in the late 18th century, Equiano was enslaved as a young boy and passed through a variety of experiences, many of them horrible; but he managed to acquire enough learning and independence to become a major voice advocating an end to slavery. His Narrative, written in English in 1789, immediately became a sensation, and has remained a classic source for our knowledge about the European slave trade from the point of view of the slave.

In what ways does Equiano contrast slavery within Africa with the sort of slavery he encountered in the western hemisphere? What sufferings does he describe on the slave ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean? In what ways were slaves cheated by whites?
