

## Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters*, 1555-1562<sup>1</sup>

*Ogier de Busbecq (1522-1590) was a Flemish nobleman who spent most of his life in the service of the Hapsburgs, especially Ferdinand I, the archduke of Austria, king of Hungary and Bohemia, and from 1556 to 1564 Holy Roman Emperor.*

*In 1555, Ferdinand sent Busbecq to Constantinople to represent Hapsburg interests in a dispute over control of Transylvania, a region that had been part of Hungary and today is a region in Romania. Both the Hapsburgs and the Ottomans wanted control of the region, but after six years of discussion they devised a compromise by which Transylvania became an independent state but continued to pay annual tribute to the sultan.*

*During his seven years in Turkey Busbecq recorded his observations and impressions and sent them in the form of four long letters, written in Latin, to a friend and fellow Hapsburg diplomat, Nicholas Michault. Although not intended for publication, all four letters were published in a Paris edition in 1589. Subsequently appearing in numerous Latin versions and translated into the major European languages, Busbecq's letters provide a wealth of insight and information about Ottoman society. Because Busbecq was trying to bring about reform at home, he did not dwell on the very real problems with Ottoman government.*

It is time that I should tell you something of the inns which we frequented; you have probably been long expecting an account of them. At Nish I was lodged in the public inn, or caravanserai, as it is called in Turkish. It is the most usual form of lodging in these parts, and consists of a vast building, rather long for its breadth. In the middle is an open space for the baggage, camels, mules, and vehicles. It is usually surrounded

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<sup>1</sup> From C. T. Forster and F. H. B. Daniel, eds., *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, vol. I (London: Kegan Paul, 1881), pp. 86-88, 152-156, 219-222, 287-290, 293; <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1555busbecq.asp> and Andrea and Overfield, *The Human Record*, Vol. II (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Houghton Mifflin, 1994). 86-88, 102-103 and Edward Forster, trans. *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq* (Louisiana University Press, 2005; orig. 1927), 16-21; 51; 61-64; 150-159.

completely by a wall some three feet high, adjoining and built into the outer wall of the building. The top of the low wall is flat and about four feet broad, and serves the Turk for bed and dining-table; on it they also cook their food, for there are fireplaces at intervals built into the outer wall. This space on the top of the wall is the only place which the traveller does not share with the camels, horses, and other animals; and, even so, these are tethered to the foot of the wall in such a way that their heads and necks project right over it, and they stand there like attendants, while their masters warm themselves and even dine, and at times take bread or fruit or other food from their hands. On this wall also the Turks make their beds, first unfolding a rug, which they generally carry attached to their horse-cloths, and laying a cloak on the top of it. A saddle serves as a pillow, and they wrap themselves up at night in the long robes reaching to their ankles and lined with fur, which they wear in the daytime. Thus they have none of the usual blandishments wherewith to court sleep.

These inns provide no privacy; everything must be done in public, and the darkness of night alone shields one from the sight of all. This kind of inn inspired me with particular disgust; for the Turks kept their gaze fixed upon us in astonishment at our habits and customs. I always, therefore, tried to find accommodation beneath the roof of some unhappy Christian, but their hovels are so small that very often there is no room to place a bed; so I often slept in a tent or in my carriage.

I sometimes lodged in a Turkish khan. These are most spacious and quite imposing buildings with separate bedchambers. No one is refused admittance, whether Christian or Jew, rich or poor; the door is open to all

alike. They are used by Pashas and Sanjak-Beys<sup>2</sup> when they travel. I was always given as hospitable a reception as if it were a royal palace.

It is customary to offer food to all who lodge there; and so, when dinner-time arrived, an attendant used to present himself with an enormous wooden tray as large as a table, in the middle of which was a dish of barley-porridge with a piece of meat in it. Round the dish were rolls of bread and sometimes a piece of honeycomb ....

Sometimes, if I could find no quarters in a house, I put up in a shed...It will perhaps occur to you to ask how I consoled my followers for such bad lodging; for you will surmise, and quite rightly, that wine, the usual remedy for uncomfortable nights, is not too plentiful in the middle of Turkey. Wine, it is true, is not to be found in every village, especially where the inhabitants are not Christians. Now it often happens that the Christians, weary of Turkish insolence and contempt, withdraw from the main roads into more inaccessible parts, which are less fertile but safer, and leave the better land to their masters. Whenever, therefore, the Turks saw that we were approaching a wineless district, they would warn us that no wine would be obtainable; and then our steward was sent a day ahead, accompanied by a Turk, to seek a supply from the nearest Christian villages. Thus my people were never without this alleviation of their hardships; and wine took the place of soft mattresses and cushions and all the other appliances for wooing sleep. For myself, I had in my carriage bottles of a better brand of wine, and was thus well supplied. So there was always a provision of wine for myself and my followers.

There remained one annoyance, which was almost worse than a lack of

wine, namely, that our sleep used to be interrupted in a most distressing manner. We often had to arise early, sometimes even before it was light, in order to arrive in good time at more convenient halting-places. The result was that our Turkish guides were sometimes deceived by the brightness of the moon and waked us with a loud clamour soon after midnight; for the Turks have no hours to mark the time, just as they have no milestones to mark distances...Our guides, as I have said, misled by the brightness of the moon, would give the signal for packing-up long before sunrise. We would then hastily get up, so that we might not be late or be blamed for any untoward incident that might occur; our baggage would be collected, my bed and the tents hurled into the carriage, our horses harnessed, and we ourselves girt up and ready awaiting the signal for departure. Meanwhile the Turks, having realized their mistake, had returned to their beds and their slumbers...I dealt with this annoyance by forbidding the Turks to disturb me in future, and undertaking to wake the party at the proper time, if they would warn me overnight of the hour at which we must start.

I explained to them that I had clocks which never failed me, and would arrange matters, taking the responsibility of letting them sleep on; they could, I said, safely trust me to get up. They assented, but were still not quite at their ease; they arrived in the early morning, and, waking my valet, begged him to go and ask me 'what the fingers of my timepiece said'. He did this, and then indicated as best he could whether a long or a short time remained before the sun would rise. When they had tested us once or twice and found that they were not deceived, they relied on us henceforward and expressed their admiration of the trustworthiness of our clocks. Thus we could enjoy our sleep undisturbed by their clamour...

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<sup>2</sup> Pashas and Sanjak-Beys: these are terms for government officials.

At Buda I made my first acquaintance with the Janissaries;<sup>3</sup> this is the name by which the Turks call the infantry of the royal guard. The Turkish state has 12,000 of these troops when the corps is at its full strength. They are scattered through every part of the empire, either to garrison the forts against the enemy, or to protect the Christians and Jews from the violence of the mob. There is no district with any considerable amount of population, no borough or city, which has not a detachment of Janissaries to protect the Christians, Jews, and other helpless people from outrage and wrong.

A garrison of Janissaries is always stationed in the citadel of Buda. The dress of these men consists of a robe reaching down to the ankles, while, to cover their heads, they employ a cowl which, by their account, was originally a cloak sleeve, part of which contains the head, while the remainder hangs down and flaps against the neck. On their forehead is placed a silver gilt cone of considerable height, studded with stones of no great value... To tell you the truth, if I had not been told beforehand that they were Janissaries, I should, without hesitation, have taken them for members of some order of Turkish monks, or brethren of some Moslem college. Yet these are the famous Janissaries, whose approach inspires terror everywhere...

On our arrival... we were taken to call on Achmet Pasha (the chief

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<sup>3</sup> An elite military force in the service of the sultan, the ranks of which originally were filled by young sons of Christian families who were converted to Islam and given over completely to military training. Ideally, they lived according to a strict code of absolute obedience, abstinence from luxury, religious observance, celibacy, and confinement to barracks.

Vizier) and the other *pashas*<sup>4</sup>—for the Sultan himself was not then in the town—and commenced our negotiations with them touching the business entrusted to us by King Ferdinand. The pashas... did not offer any strong opposition to the views we expressed, and told us that the whole matter depended on the Sultan's pleasure. On his arrival we were admitted to an audience; but the manner and spirit in which he [the Sultan] listened to our address, our arguments, and our message was by no means favorable.

The Sultan was seated on a very low ottoman, not more than a foot from the ground, which was covered with a quantity of costly rugs and cushions of exquisite workmanship; near him lay his bow and arrows. His air, as I said, was by no means gracious, and his face wore a stern, though dignified, expression.

On entering we were separately conducted into the royal presence by the chamberlains,<sup>5</sup> who grasped our arms... After having gone through a pretence of kissing his hand, we were conducted backwards to the wall opposite his seat, care being taken that we should never turn our backs on him. The Sultan then listened to what I had to say; but the language I used was not at all to his taste, for the demands of his Majesty breathed a spirit of independence and dignity, which was by no means acceptable to one who deemed that his wish was law; and so he made no answer beyond saying in an impatient way, "Giusel, giusel," i.e. well, well. After this we were dismissed to our quarters.

The Sultan's hall was crowded with people, among whom were several

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<sup>4</sup> Pasha was an honorary title for a high-ranking military or government official; a vizier served the sultan as an adviser or provincial governor.

<sup>5</sup> An official of the royal court involved in matters connected with the king's household.

officers of high rank. Besides these there were all the troopers of the Imperial guard<sup>6</sup> and a large force of Janissaries, but there was not in all that great assembly a single man who owed his position to anything save his valor and his merit...

No distinction is attached to birth among the Turks; the deference to be paid to a man is measured by the position he holds in the public service. There is no fighting for precedence; a man's place is marked out by the duties he discharges. In making his appointments the Sultan pays no regard to any pretensions on the score of wealth or rank, nor does he take into consideration recommendations or popularity, he considers each case on its own merits, and examines carefully into the character, ability, and disposition of the man whose promotion is in question. It is by merit that men rise in the service, a system which ensures that posts should only be assigned to the competent... Those who receive the highest offices from the Sultan are for the most part the sons of shepherds or herdsmen, and so far from being ashamed of their parentage, they actually glory in it, and consider it a matter of boasting that they owe nothing to the accident of birth; for they do not believe that high qualities are either natural or hereditary, nor do they think that they can be handed down from father to son, but that they are partly the gift of God, and partly the result of good training, great industry, and unwearied zeal;... Among the Turks, therefore, honours, high posts, and judgeships are the rewards of great ability and good service. If a man be dishonest, or lazy, or careless, he remains at the

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<sup>6</sup> The imperial guard under Suleiman consisted of approximately 4,000 men who while campaigning camped around his tent at night and served as his personal body-guard in battle.

bottom of the ladder, an object of contempt; for such qualities there are no honours in Turkey!

This is the reason that they are successful in their undertakings, that they lord it over others, and are daily extending the bounds of their empire. These are not our ideas, with us there is no opening left for merit; birth is the standard for everything; the prestige of birth is the sole key to advancement in the public service...

Now come with me and cast your eye over the immense crowd of turbaned heads, wrapped in countless folds of the whitest silk, and bright raiment of every kind and hue, and everywhere the brilliance of gold, silver, purple, silk, and satin. A detailed description would be a lengthy task, and no mere words could give an adequate idea of the novelty of the sight. A more beautiful spectacle was never presented to my gaze. Yet amid all this luxury there was a great simplicity and economy. The dress of all has the same form whatever the wearer's rank; and no edgings or useless trimmings are sewn on, as is the custom with us, costing a large sum of money and worn out in three days. Their most beautiful garments of silk or satin, even if they are embroidered, as they usually are, cost only a ducat to make.

The Turks were quite as much astonished at our manner of dress as we at theirs. They wear long robes which reach almost to their ankles, and are not only more imposing but seem to add to their stature; our dress, on the other hand, is so short and tight that it discloses the forms of the body, which would be better hidden, and is thus anything but becoming, and besides, for some reason or other, it takes away from a man's height and

gives him a stunted appearance....

Ali Pasha, the second Vizier, gave a dinner to the Persians in a garden, which, though it was at some distance and separated from us by a river, was visible from our quarters; for, as I have said, the situation of the town on sloping ground is such that there is scarcely a spot which one cannot see and in which one cannot be seen. Ali Pasha, a Dalmatian by birth, is a delightfully intelligent person, and (what is surprising in a Turk) by no means lacking in humanity. The Pashas reclined with the ambassador under an awning which shaded the table. A hundred youths, all clad alike, served the meal, bringing the dishes to the table in the following manner. They first advanced, drawn up at equal distances from one another, towards the table where the guests were reclining, with their hands empty, so as not to hinder their salutations, which consisted of placing their hands on their thighs and bowing their heads to the earth. After they had performed this salutation, the attendant who had taken up his position nearest to the kitchen received the dishes and handed them on to the man next him, who passed them on to a third; the latter then handed them on to a fourth, and so on, until they reached the attendant who stood nearest to the table... Thus in matters of small moment the Turks like to observe due order, whereas we neglect to do so in matters of the gravest importance. The ambassador's suite was entertained by some Turks not far from their master's table...

The Turkish monarch going to war takes with him over 40,000 camels and nearly as many baggage mules, of which a great part are loaded with rice and other kinds of grain. These mules and camels also serve to carry

tents and armour, and likewise tools and munitions for the campaign... The invading army carefully abstains from encroaching on its magazines<sup>7</sup> at the outset; as they are well aware that when the season for campaigning draws to a close, they will have to retreat over districts wasted by the enemy, or scraped bare by countless hordes of men and droves of hungry animals, as if they had been devastated by locusts; accordingly they reserve their stores as much as possible for this emergency. Then the Sultan's magazines are opened, and a ration just sufficient to sustain life is daily weighed out to the Janissaries and other troops of the royal household. The rest of the army is badly off, unless they have provided some supplies at their own expense. . . . On such occasions they take out a few spoonfuls of flour and put them into water, adding some butter, and seasoning the mess with salt and spices; these ingredients are boiled, and a large bowl of gruel is thus obtained. Of this they eat once or twice a day, according to the quantity they have, without any bread, unless they have brought some biscuit with them.... Sometimes they have recourse to horseflesh; dead horses are of course plentiful in their great hosts, and such beasts as are in good condition when they die furnish a meal not to be despised by famished soldiers.

From this you will see that it is the patience, self-denial and thrift of the Turkish soldier that enable him to face the most trying circumstances and come safely out of the dangers that surround him. What a contrast to our men! Christian soldiers on a campaign refuse to put up with their ordinary food, and call for thrushes, becaficos (a small bird esteemed a dainty, as it feeds on figs and grapes), and suchlike dainty dishes! For each

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<sup>7</sup> magazines: I.e. supplies.

man is his own worst enemy, and has no foe more deadly than his own intemperance, which is sure to kill him, if the enemy be not quick. It makes me shudder to think of what the result of a struggle between such different systems must be; one of us must prevail and the other be destroyed, at any rate we cannot both exist in safety. On their side is the vast wealth of their empire, unimpaired resources, experience and practice in arms, a veteran soldiery, an uninterrupted series of victories, readiness to endure hardships, union, order, discipline, thrift and watchfulness. On ours are found an empty exchequer, luxurious habits, exhausted resources, broken spirits, a raw and insubordinate soldiery, and greedy quarrels; there is no regard for discipline, license runs riot, the men indulge in drunkenness and debauchery, and worst of all, the enemy are accustomed to victory, we to defeat. Can we doubt what the result must be? The only obstacle is Persia, whose position on his rear forces the invader to take precautions. The fear of Persia gives us a respite, but it is only for a time...

I was all the more astonished at their behaviour because their fast (Ramazan), which corresponds to our Lent, was near at hand. Amongst us at this season in the best regulated cities, not to mention the camps, there is a universal din of games, dancing, singing, shouting, revelry, drunkenness, and delirium; in fact, everyone goes mad.

There is, therefore, no wonder that the story has gained credence about the Turk who, having visited our country on state business as an ambassador at this period of the year, related on his return that the Christians at certain seasons become crazy and mad, but afterwards come to their senses and recover their sanity by being sprinkled with a kind of ash in their temples. It

was quite remarkable, he said, to see the beneficial change brought about by this remedy; you could hardly believe that they were the same persons. He meant Ash-Wednesday and the festival which precedes it...

During the days immediately preceding the period of fast they make no change for the worse in their ordinary mode of life, and allow themselves no special indulgence in eating and good cheer and licence. On the contrary, they prepare themselves for abstinence by reducing their usual allowance of food, for fear that they may not be able to put up with the sudden change... The period of fasting is confined to the space of one lunar month. The ordeal is most trying when it falls in the summer, because of the length of the days, for their observance consists of tasting nothing during the day, not even water; nay, they even consider it wrong to wash out the mouth until the stars appear in the evening. The days which are longest and hottest and most dusty are naturally the most trying, especially for those who have to work and gain a livelihood by their own labour. They are allowed, however, to eat before the rising of the sun, when the stars have not yet been dimmed by its light (for the sun must not see anyone eating during the whole period of the fast) ; and for this reason abstinence is easier to bear when it falls in the winter...

...If any illness should occur which prevents them from fasting, they may violate their fast, on condition, however, that they make up afterwards, when they have recovered their health, the number of days which they have lost owing to illness. Also when they are in the enemy's territory and anticipate immediate hostilities, they are warned to postpone their fast to another season, so that they may not engage in battle when they are weakened by hunger. If they show any hesitation in obeying this

order, the Sultan himself takes food publicly at mid-day in view of the army, so that all may be encouraged by his example and do likewise, just as during the remainder of the year their religious scruples keep them from tasting wine and they cannot do so without committing a sin, so they are most particular in observing this rule all through the period of fast, and no one is to be found so wicked or abandoned as not to shun even the odour of wine, much less drink it.

I often inquire why it was that Mahomet so sternly forbade his followers to drink wine, and I remember being told on one occasion the following story: Mahomet once happened to be journeying to visit a friend, and on the way stopped at mid-day at a house at which a marriage feast was being celebrated, in which he accepted an invitation to join. He was immediately struck with admiration at the extreme gaiety of the guests and their numerous demonstrations of genuine goodwill, their grasping of hands, embraces, and kisses. On inquiring from his host, he learned that wine was the cause of this state of feeling; and so, on his departure, he called down a blessing on this beverage, because it united mankind in such strong bonds of affection. But on the following day, when he entered the house on his return journey, he found a very different state of affairs; there were traces everywhere of a fearful fight and the ground was red with blood and strewn with parts of the human body, here an arm and there a leg, and other broken limbs were scattered about. On asking the cause of this fearful state of affairs, he was informed that the guests whom he had seen on the previous day had become so intoxicated with wine that they had gone mad and vented their rage in mutual slaughter and caused a terrible massacre. It was on this account that Mahomet changed his opinion and laid a curse upon the

use of wine and forbade it to his followers for ever.

Thus all is quiet, and silence reigns in their camp, especially at the season of their Lent, if I may so call it. Such is the powerful effect of their military discipline and the severe traditions handed down from their forefathers. There is no crime and no offence which the Turks leave unpunished. Their penalties are deprivation of office and rank, confiscation of property, flogging, and death. Flogging is the most frequent punishment, and from this not even the Janissaries are exempt, although they are not liable to the extreme penalty. Their lighter offences are punished by flogging, their more serious crimes by dismissal from the army or removal to another unit, a punishment which they regard as more serious than death itself, which is indeed the usual result of this sentence; for being deprived of the badges of their corps, they are banished to distant garrisons on the farthest frontiers, where they live in contempt and ignominy; or if the crime is so atrocious that a more impressive example must be made of the offender, an excuse is found for making away with him in the place of his exile...

Although when I say that the camp was exempt from quarrels and tumults, I must except one disturbance which was caused by my own followers. Some of them had gone for a walk outside the camp along the shore, unaccompanied by Janissaries, and taking with them only some Italians who had professed Mahomedanism. These renegades enjoy, among other advantages, the chance to ransom prisoners. They go to the persons in whose possession such captives are, and pretend that they are their relatives or connexions, or at any rate their fellow countrymen. They declare themselves to be moved to pity by their misfortunes and beg their

possessors to accept a sum of money and set them free or else make them over to themselves. The owners make no difficulty about granting this request; whereas, if a Christian were to ask such a thing, they would refuse or only sell at a much higher price. My men having gone out, as I have already said, came across some Janissaries who were washing themselves by swimming in the sea with their heads loosely wrapped round with pieces of linen instead of their official head-dresses. The Janissaries began abusing my men because they were Christians; for the Turks not only consider themselves at liberty to call Christians by opprobrious names and otherwise insult them but actually think that to do so is an act of piety: because they may be induced through shame at the insults heaped upon them to change for a better one a religion which exposes them to such abuse. Being thus provoked my men retaliated, and hurled their insults back; and finally blows succeeded words, the Italians whom I have mentioned siding with my men. The result of the fight was that the head-wrapper of one of the Janissaries was, somehow or other, lost.

The Janissaries proceeded to their commander and having noticed which way my men went, denounced them for the injury which they had caused. This officer ordered them to summon my interpreter, who had been present at the scuffle. They seized him as he was sitting in front of the door, while I was actually watching from the balcony above. I was most indignant that one of my men should be carried off without my consent to a place from which it was certain that he would not return without having received a flogging (for by this time I had discovered what was the matter) seeing that he was a Turk by nationality. I hurried down and, laying my hand upon him, ordered them to let him go. They did so, but made all the more

pressing complaints to their commanding officer. He interrupted them with orders that they should take more men with them and bring before him the renegade Italians whom I have mentioned; he warned them at the same time not to use any force against me or the house in which I was lodging...at last a cavasse who was then in my service, an old man with one foot in the grave, in great alarm, without my knowledge handed them out some pieces of gold as the price of the lost linen wrapper; and so the dispute ended.

I have a special reason for telling you about this incident, because it provided me with the opportunity of learning from Roostem's own mouth the opinion which the Sultan entertains about the Janissaries. Hearing of the disturbance, he sent a man to me to warn me- I use his own words-' to avoid any pretext of quarrel with the rascals.' 'Surely,' he said, 'I was well aware that it was a time of war, during which they were masters to such an extent that not even Soleiman himself could control them and was actually afraid of personal harm at their hands.'...

While I was at the camp, Albert le Wyss, a distinguished man of wide education, joined me. He is a native, if I mistake not, of Amersfort. He brought several presents for the Sultan from the Emperor—a number of gilt cups and a clock of ingenious workmanship, which had the form of a tower mounted on an elephant's back—also some money to be divided amongst the Pashas. These presents Soleiman desired that I should present to him in the camp in the sight 'of the army, as a fresh testimony of the friendship which he wished his subjects to believe to exist between himself and the Emperor, and as a proof that no military operations were impending on the part of the Christians...

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 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 Turkish Easter.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, if the wife has a father of 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

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<sup>8</sup> Busbecq apparently is referring to the festival of Bairam, which follows Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting from sunup to sundown. He equated Ramadan with the Christian practice of Lent, so the identification of Bairam with Easter is logical but incorrect.

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. This privilege Roxelana, Suleiman's wife<sup>9</sup> turned to her own advantage, when she had borne him a son while still a slave. Having thus obtained her freedom, and become her own mistress, she refused to submit any longer to his will, unless, contrary to the custom of the Ottoman Sultans, she was made his lawful wife. 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 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, which is their Sabbath,<sup>10</sup> 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.

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<sup>9</sup> Roxelana ("the Russian") was a Russian slave girl named Khurrem who caught Suleiman's fancy in the 1520s. She bore him three children, including the future sultan, Selim II. A major influence on Suleiman, she also became deeply involved in political schemes to advance her sons' careers.

<sup>10</sup> Like Sundays in Christian lands, Fridays (actually beginning at sunset on Thursday) in the Muslim world were days of rest, given over to religious acts and rituals.