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Usbek to Zelis

I pity Soliman all the more that the harm is irremediable, and that all his son-in-law has done is make use of the liberty of the law. [1] I find that law very harsh thus to expose a family's honor to the whims of a madman. It is futile to say that we have reliable indices for ascertaining the truth : that is an old error which in our society we no longer believe in, and our physicians give invincible reasons for the uncertainty of those proofs. [2] Even the Christians regard them as imaginary, although they are clearly established by their sacred books, and their ancient legislator [3] made the innocence or condemnation of all virgins subject to it.

I am pleased to learn of the care you take for the education of yours. God grant her husband will find her as lovely and as pure as Fatima [4] ; that she have ten eunuchs to guard her ; that she will be the honor and ornament of the seraglio for which she is destined ; that she will have nothing over her head but gilded panels and walk only on elegant rugs. And my greatest wish of all, may my eyes see her in all her glory !

Paris this 5th day of the moon of Chalval 1714

[1] An elliptical formula for "the liberty which the law allows."

[2] In cases of defamation, an inquiry could be conducted to verify the virginity of the future wife. It was performed by matrons who examined the genitals of the suspected person. Since the end of the sixteenth century such "visits" were the object of an intense polemic. Certain physicians, as Usbek suggests, but also some jurists, contested the reliability of such an examination and argued for its abolition. Such practices were deplored also because they offended feminine modesty.

[3] Moses, the presumed author of the Pentateuch : see Deuteronomy 22:13-21.

[4] On Fatima's purity, see letter 1.