

<http://montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article3417>



- Persian Letters - Letters -

Date de mise en ligne : mercredi 15 avril 2020

Copyright © Montesquieu - Tous droits réservés

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Letter 76 | Letter 78 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|

The Great Eunuch to Usbek in Paris

Yesterday some Armenians brought to the seraglio a young Circassian slave whom they wanted to sell. [1] I had her brought into the secret apartments ; I disrobed her, examined her with the gaze of a judge ; and the more I examined her, the more charms I found in her. A virginal sense of shame seemed to want to hide them from my sight ; I saw how discomforting it was to her to obey : she blushed at being naked even in front of me, who, exempt of passions that can alarm modesty, am inanimate under the power of that sex, and who, the minister of modesty in the freest of acts, look only with chaste eyes and can inspire only innocence.

As soon as I had judged her worthy of you, I lowered my eyes ; I threw a scarlet cloak over her ; I put a gold ring on her finger ; I prostrated myself at her feet ; I worshipped her as the queen of your heart ; I payed the Armenians. I concealed her from all eyes. O fortunate Usbek, you possess more beauties than are contained in all the palaces of the Orient. What a pleasure for you to find upon your return all that is most ravishing in Persia, and to see charms reborn in your seraglio while time and possession work to destroy them !

The Fatmé seraglio this 1st day of the moon of Rebiab I, 1715

[1] The beauty of Circassian girls was legendary. Chardin relates a sale of slaves on the shores of the Black Sea, including Mingrelian and Circassian women (II, 14-15) ; cf. letter 93, note 4.