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- Persian Letters - Letters -

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The Principal Black Eunuque to Usbek

Ismaël, [1] one of your black eunuchs, has just died, magnificent lord, and I cannot do otherwise than replace him. As eunuchs are extremely rare at present, I had thought of calling on a black slave [2] whom you have in the country, but I have so far been unable to prevail on him to let us dedicate him to this employ. As I see that in the long run it is to his advantage, I tried the other day to be a little insistent, and in concert with the intendant of your gardens I ordered that despite him he should be made ready to render the services that most flatter your heart, and live as I do in these ominous halls which he dares not even see. But he started to scream as if we had tried to flay him, and managed to escape from our hands and evade the fatal knife. [3] I have just learned that he means to write to you to beg for mercy, maintaining that I conceived this design only out of an insatiable desire for vengeance over certain sharp satires he says he uttered about me. However I swear to you by the hundred thousand prophets that I have acted only for the good of your service, the only thing I value, and beside which I consider nothing. I prostrate myself at your feet.

From the Fatmé seraglio this 7th day of the moon of Maharram 1713

[1] Sole mention of this slave.

[2] The castration of blacks was a total amputation, not merely removal of the testicles ; the operation was considered very dangerous and often fatal ; see letter 2, note 1.

[3] This event, the message of which will be reinforced in letter 40, suggests that the author had heard of sordid cases in France in which the operation was not necessarily voluntary. Such was one of the crimes for which the infamous Deschauffours was executed in 1726 : see Maurice Lever, *Les Bûchers de Sodome* (Paris : Fayard, 1985), p. 356-360.