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- Persian Letters - Letters -

Publication date: mercredi 15 avril 2020

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Usbek to Nessir [1] in Isfahan

We are now in Paris, the proud rival of the city of the sun. [2]

When I left Smyrna, I requested my friend Ibben to convey to you a casket in which there were several presents for you ; you will receive this letter by the same conduit. Although I am five or six hundred leagues from him, I send him news of me and receive his as easily as if he were in Isfahan and I in Com. I send my letters to Marseille, whence there are constantly ships departing for Smyrna ; from there he sends those that are for Persia with the caravans of Armenians that set out daily for Isfahan. [3]

Rica is enjoying perfect health ; the strength of his constitution, his youth, and his natural gaiety make him equal to any trial. [4]

I, however, am not doing well. My body and spirit are distressed, I spend time in reflections that become sadder by the day ; my health, which is declining, turns me toward my homeland, and makes this land more foreign to me.

But, dear Nessir, I beg of you, make sure that my wives are not aware of my present state. If they love me, I want to spare their tears ; and if they do not, I do not want to embolden them.

If my eunuchs thought I was in danger, if they could expect impunity for craven indulgence, they would soon cease to be deaf to the flattering voice of that sex that makes rocks pay attention and stirs inanimate things.

Adieu, Nessir, it pleases me to give you tokens of my confidence.

Paris this 5th day of the moon of Chahban 1712

[1] A friend of Usbek, already the recipient of letter 6.

[2] Isfahan [*author's note*]. Chardin notes that the lion is the emblem of the Persian monarch, adding that "he is represented beside a rising sun, of which three-quarters of the disk can be seen" (IX, 70).

[3] Despite Usbek's optimism, the time required for the transmission of letters between Paris and Isfahan will have its importance for the development of the plot (see letters 139-146). The Armenians were famed merchants not only in the middle-East but throughout Europe.

[4] These details establish a fairly meaningful differentiation between Usbek and Rica, even a distribution of roles, which will become more accentuated during their long stay in France : see especially letter 147.