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Usbek to his friend Rustan in Isfahan

We stayed just a week at Tokat [1] ; after thirty-five days' march we have arrived in Smyrna. [2]

From Tokat to Smyrna not a single city is to be found that deserves mentioning. I have been surprised to see the weakness of the Osmanlin empire : this sick body is not maintained by a gentle, temperate regime, but with violent remedies which constantly drain and weaken it. [3]

The Bachas, [4] who acquire their positions only by paying, are broke when they enter the provinces, and pillage them like conquered lands. An insolent militia answers only to its own whims : the fortresses are dismantled, the cities deserted, the countryside ravaged, the farming of the land and commerce entirely abandoned.

Impunity reigns in this harsh government [5] : the Christians who farm the land and the Jews who raise the tributes are exposed to a thousand acts of violence. [6]

The ownership of the land is uncertain, and as a result the eagerness to exploit it repressed ; neither title nor possession can stand against the whim of those who govern.

These barbarians have so abandoned the arts that they have neglected even military art. While the nations of Europe become more refined every day, they remain in their former ignorance, and it does not occur to them to adopt their new inventions until they have used them a thousand times against them.

They have no experience on the sea, no skill at maneuvers. It is said that a handful of Christian natives of a rock [7] harass all the Ottomans, and weaken their empire.

Incapable of carrying on trade, they almost reluctantly suffer the Europeans, always hard-working and enterprising, to come do it for them : they think they are indulging these foreigners by allowing them to come get rich off of them.

In this whole vast land which I have crossed, I have found only Smyrna that can be considered a rich and powerful city : it is the Europeans who make it so, and if it were up to the Turks it would be like all the others.

There you have, dear Rustan, a fair notion of this empire which in less than two centuries will be the theatre of some conqueror's victories. [8]

Smyrna this 2nd day of the moon of Rahmazan 1711

[1] "Tokat, formerly Neocaesarea and Hadrianopolis, a city in Natolia in Asia. It is in Amasia, on the Casalmach, about 33 leagues to the east of the

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city of Amasie" (Moréri 1732).

[2] Usbek's last letter, written from Erzerum, was dated 20 August ; here it is 2 November. From Smyrna (today's Izmir) to Tokat, Tavernier indicates about 35 days by caravan (book I, ch. vii, vol. I, p. 95).

[3] Numerous voyagers contributed to this general perception of the decline of the Ottoman empire (which, implicitly, does not apply to Persia).

[4] The word *bachas* (in the form *bassa*) is defined in *L'Espion turc* as an "honorific title given to provincial governors and to the private counsellors of the Grand Signor" ("Table alphabetique de certains mots Turcs et Arabes" at the end of vol. I of Jean Paul Marana, *L'Espion dans les cours des princes chrétiens*).

[5] Turkey at the time passed for the very type of the despotic state.

[6] Jews and Christians were tolerated in Turkey as in other Muslim countries, but they had an inferior legal status and had to pay a capitation.

[7] These are apparently the Knights of Malta [*author's note*].

[8] In this letter Usbek exposes the natural causes of the defeat, which in letter 119 will be attributed to supernatural causes.