

Turkish baths and their functions as represented in the memoirs of Westerners

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Abstract

When the social lives and leisure activities of Turkish women are observed, Western travel writers generally share examples of the amusements that occurred in Turkish baths. There is a chapter about amusements in most of the memoirs written by travel writers who came to the Turkish territory during the time of the Ottoman Empire. In this chapter, there is a lot of information about Turkish baths including the lifestyles of Turkish women. The Turkish bath should not be considered a place where people –men and women- just go and take baths. It is a place where Turkish women spend most of their time with their friends and neighbours. Women also use baths as meeting places similar to cafes and restaurants. Thus, foreign writers convey the importance of baths for Turkish women in their works, and sometimes with exaggerated examples. Within this context travel writers such as Lady Montagu, Vahan Cardashian, Lucy M. J. Garnett, and Miss Pardoe either wrote a chapter on baths or shared information about these places in their writings. This study will, therefore, focus on the significance of Turkish baths in Turkish culture based on the works of Western writers and reveal how Turkish women amuse themselves in these places.

Keywords: Turkish women, Turkish bath, memoir, travel writers, Ottoman Empire

Batılıların anılarında temsil edildiği üzere Türk hamamları ve hamamların fonksiyonları

Öz

Türk kadınlarının sosyal yaşamları ve boş zaman etkinlikleri söz konusu olduğunda, Batılı seyahat yazarları genellikle Türk hamamlarında meydana gelen eğlencelerin örneklerini paylaşırlar. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu döneminde Türk topraklarına gelen seyahat yazarlarının yazdığı anıların çoğunda eğlenceler hakkında bir bölüm vardır. Bu bölümde Türk kadınlarının yaşam tarzları da dâhil olmak üzere Türk hamamları hakkında pek çok bilgi bulunmaktadır. Türk hamamı insanların -kadın ve erkek- sadece gidip banyo yaptıkları bir yer olarak düşünülmemelidir. Burası Türk kadınlarının zamanlarının çoğunu arkadaşları ve komşularıyla geçirdiği bir yerdir. Ayrıca kadınlar hamamları kafe, restoran gibi buluşma yerleri olarak kullanırlar. Bu nedenle yabancı yazarlar çalışmalarında ve bazen abartılı örneklerle hamamların Türk kadınları için önemini aktarmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Lady Montagu, Vahan Cardashian, Lucy M. J. Garnett ve Miss Pardoe gibi seyahat yazarları ya hamamlar konusunda bir bölüm yazmışlar ya da yazılarında bu yerler hakkında bilgi paylaşımında bulunmuşlardır. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, Batılı yazarların çalışmalarına dayanarak, Türk hamamlarının Türk kültüründeki önemi üzerinde duracak ve Türk kadınlarının bu yerlerde kendilerini nasıl eğlendirdiklerini ortaya çıkaracaktır.

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Anahtar kelimeler: Türk kadınları, Türk hamamı, anı, seyahat yazarları, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu

Introduction

Turkish bath tradition dates back to ancient times in the lands dominated by the Ottoman Empire. What lies behind this can be called commitment to tradition and religious beliefs. This is why the Turkish bath culture still preserves its existence and has a worldwide reputation. In Turkish, the word *hamam* is used for the word *bath*, which is derived from the Arabic word *ḥammām*. Briefly speaking, the bath is a place for washing and healing. Other than cleansing, Turkish baths have a very important place in Turkish people's lives especially in Turkish women's lives in terms of social events. These events generally include birth ceremonies, pre-marriage meetings, and religious festival preparations.

Baths are not only places for cleansing but also centres for social and cultural activities. Traditionally speaking, Turkish bath is an essential place for the body's relaxation and purification. The Turkish bath helps the body get rid of dead skin and opens the pores with the effect of hot air and steam. It is a place that can be used for amusement purposes, as well. Moreover, hot Turkish baths are "very famous for their medicinal virtues" (Montagu: Letter XXV). All around the country, some baths are used as spa centres. According to the water used, it is possible to classify Turkish baths into baths that operate with natural hot water and that operate with artificial heating systems.²

The amusements of Turkish women are *few* and *simple* but "bathing is one of the greatest luxuries" (Hawley, 1918: 54). Visiting baths is a great activity, especially for women. Such information has always been included in the works of travel writers, who came to the Ottoman territories (Montagu, 1763; Pardoe, 1838; Schneider, 1846; Garnett, 1890; Jenkins, 1911). Since there is no other place where women are very active, baths are places of stress relief. Women have the chance of spending their day "lounging on the divan, listening to the music . . . playing with the birds ... eating sweetmeats, and drinking water" (Pardoe, 1838: 126).

Going to the bath on Thursday evenings, and the night before holidays, especially before religious holidays, is a traditional thing because "public Turkish baths are quite national institutions, and often afford so many amusing and interesting scenes of real-life that no foreigner should omit to visit them" (Harvey, 1871: 71). Many foreigners took Harvey's suggestion into account and visited baths, especially women travellers did so. In time, baths have become the places where some special days have been celebrated. For women such special days are called *the bride bath* and *the maternity bath*; and for men, there is *the groom bath*³, and for the boys, there is *the circumcision bath*⁴.

As stated in the memoirs the number of baths is moderately numerous. Lucy M. J. Garnett in her book *Turkey of the Ottomans* utters that there are several baths in large towns, and in big cities the number increases, especially in the capital there are numerous baths (1911: 167-168). According to Mary Mills

² Turkish Baths are divided into three types according to their functional purposes; a) Public Baths (Social Baths): They meet the needs of each person who will take a shower. They are built separately for men and women or when there is a single bath, separate days are determined for men and women. b) Private Baths (Luxurious Baths): These are the baths in palaces, or in big mansions. c) Spas (Hot Springs): They are built near hot healing waters. See: Düriye Bozok (2005). Türk Hamamı Ve Geleneklerinin Turizmde Uygulanışı. *Bahkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 8 (13), 62-86.

³ In the works of travel writers, there is a lot of information about women and the activities they do in baths. However, there are not many chapters about men. We have found only a piece of information about Turkish men concerning baths. It is in James Ellsworth De Kay's work. One day he had the chance to see a bridegroom coming from the bath. For the details see; James Ellsworth De Kay (1833). *Sketches of Turkey in 1831 and 1832. By an American*. New-York: J. & J. Harper, 429.

⁴ For more information see: (Blunt, 1878: 13).

Patrick, even small towns have public baths (1929: 45), but “[t]he public baths are for those who [do] not possess a private one (Ferriman, 1911: 308). It is important that Islam attaches great importance to cleanliness. The high number of baths is definitely related to cleaning first. It is evident that in a city, especially if it is a big one, a public bath is built right next to a mosque or a complex building.⁵ Based on the memoir books, this study focuses on the activities that took place in baths in Ottoman Turkey. Therefore, there are four main sub-titles of the study; I) the place of baths and their styles, II) amusements and baths, III) baths as social gathering places, and IV) baths and their religious background.

The place of baths and their styles

Baths, which have great importance in terms of architecture, are also important in terms of cultural history. Baths are built in such shapes that “[a]ny view of Constantinople⁶ from a height shows the small yellow domes of these baths, which are scattered all over the city. They are built of stones in the shape of a dome, with no windows except in the roof, which gives sufficient light” (Jenkins, 1911: 111). They resemble a mosque with their domes and some other architectural features. These places are very simple in terms of interior design and architecture, but what they provide is magnificent regarding facilities and health care. The important internal parts of baths, which have a special architectural style, generally consist of sections called dressing places, bathing places, and resting places. However, in some baths:

[t]here [are] five of these domes joined together, the outmost being less than the rest, and serving only as a hall, where the portress [stands] at the door. . . The next room is a very large one paved with marble, and all round it are two raised sofas of marble, one above another. There [are] four fountains of cold water in this room, falling first into marble basins. . . , and then running on the floor in little channels made for that purpose, which [carries] the streams into the next room, something less than this, with the same sort of marble sofas, but so hot with steams of sulphur proceeding from the baths joining to it, [it is] impossible to stay there with one's [clothes] on. The two other domes [are] the hot baths, one of which [has] cocks of cold water turning into it, to temper it to what degree of warmth the bathers [please] to have. (Montagu: Letter XXVI)

To see good examples of Turkish baths in terms of architecture, it is necessary to visit the mineral hot springs in Bursa⁷ and the older baths in İstanbul. Baths are visited by all Muslim classes and by all races of the country. They are affordable places for all classes. For the use of poor people, there are several small baths attached to the mosques, where they can perform their ablutions. Baths always create a popular meeting place for Turkish women and men. They are a kind of meeting points⁸ where news and

⁵ Garnett calls it *minor baths*. For more information see; Lucy M. J. Garnett (1909b). *The Turkish People: Their Social Life, Religious Beliefs and Institutions and Domestic Life*. London: Methuen & Co, p. 13. Some inns also had baths attached to them. For more information see; Grace Ellison, (1915). *An English Woman in a Turkish Harem*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, p. 142. William Martin Leake further says that even near ancient sites one can easily see baths. For more information see; William Martin Leake, (1814). *Journal of a Tour in Asia Minor, With Comparative Remarks on the Ancient and Modern Geography of that Country*. London: John Murray, 108.

⁶ In Constantinople, there are “numerous and magnificent baths”. To get some more information about baths and learn the bath experience see; James E. P. Boulden, (1855). *An American among the Orientals: Including an Audience with the Sultan, And a Visit to the Interior of a Turkish Harem*. Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 107. For more information see also; De Kay, 1833: 440.

⁷ Grace Ellison is the only Englishwoman who had been in Angora since the Nationalist Movement began. Ellison believes that “the Baths of [Bursa] might be promoted into a gold mine”. For more information, see; Grace Ellison, (1923). *An English Woman in Angora*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 274.

⁸ We know that baths are meeting places for women. However, they are also meeting places for men. To find more information see Lucy M. J. Garnett (1904). *Turkish Life in Town and Country*. G. P. Putnam's Sons. New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 57.

gossip⁹ could be heard and shared (Garnett, 1911: 168). Therefore, baths are also considered as coffee-houses.

Julia Pardoe utters that even if they are small, the baths have three sections. In the first part, there are toiletries and this part is called the outer hall. The second part is a comfortable area with pillows and those who come to the bath need some time to relax. The third part is the hot section with the bath itself. It is sometimes difficult to breathe in this section with full of sulphur vapour. Inside the bath is a very bright place with white marbles all around (1838: 13-14).¹⁰ The marbles used in the bath, especially the white marbles, contribute to the brighter appearance of the bath. At the same time, these marbles allow people to stay there for a long time and create a spacious environment.

Turkish baths have been built both for men and women. However, Mary Mills Patrick, who goes to the bath when it is time for the women, exaggerates the scenes she sees. According to her, the probability of survival of a person entering Turkish baths reduces. Still, she says no one could see someone dead in hot baths. For her having a bath means the person is very clean and is relaxed after some rest with a Turkish coffee. She also adds that the baths are very cheap (1929: 69). Here is an extract from Patrick:

In huge rooms with marble walls and floors, hot and cold water flowed without stopping. There were also small places where half privacy was found. Employees were disclosing their duties while maintaining their seriousness. Immediately upon arrival, someone took off your clothes, wrapped in a long Turkish towel, then took them to the waiting room for a cup of Turkish coffee. Finally, the victims were invited to enter the baths. The central bathroom was heated to such a degree that it was difficult to withstand. Also, the sound of the flowing water flowed so loudly that it would not be heard even if you scream very loudly. Therefore, the officer applied all his own ideas for an effective bathroom. From the moment he started pouring hot water on the head of the person he washed, neither a sharp scream, some sort of drowning, or similar signs could stop him pouring the burning water and washing the person found there. (1929: 68-69)

It was again the woman's day when Grace Ellison went to the bath. She went there to see Turkish women spending their time in the steamy heat. These women stayed in the bath all day. Thus, they took their food with them to spend the day with their children and grand-children in the bath. Old women, especially if they were fat, mostly would sit in the corners in "gaudy-colored tunics" (1915: 146). They would just sit there and sing happily. Young ones wandered around on the hot marble floor with their clogs (1915: 146). The women did not spend most of the time they devoted to themselves in any place other than the bath.

Although baths do not look very majestic and gaudy from the outside, they are all covered with marbles inside. Public baths have a relatively simple appearance; however, the palace baths are much more polished and much more magnificent.¹¹ Imperial baths are the most elegant and expensive baths in the

⁹ When gossip is concerned among women, baths come to mind. Because, the gossip done in the bath gives Turkish women happiness (Harvey, 1871: 11).

¹⁰ Walter A. Hawley in his book called *Asia Minor* supports Pardoe: "Every important bathing house consists of three apartments: the outer room where the bathers undress, an adjoining room where they become accustomed to greater degrees of heat and are sometimes rubbed and prepared for the bath, and the inner room containing the central bathing pool, which not infrequently is surrounded by numerous alcoves to be used as resting places. In the larger and more elegant establishments these rooms are of marble, elaborately carved" (Hawley, 1918: 54).

¹¹ Mary Mills Patrick explains: "The sultan's bath was made of the whitest marble, sculptured delicately with hanging flowers and pendants in imitation of trickling water, and ornaments so fragile that one almost feared to touch them. Rich carpets covered the floor of all the apartments in the palace, and carvings of great value decorated the walls. The large mirrors, made to correspond with the size of the halls, and the candelabra were especially characteristic of the taste of that period" (Patrick, 1929: 75-76).

city. However, they can only be seen by the permission of the Sultan himself (Pardoe, 1838: 14). Miss Pardoe clarifies that the Imperial bath is definitely worth seeing:

Passing a crimson door, surmounted by a crescent-shaped cornice of rich gilding, the visitor enters a small hall, in which stands a basin of fine white marble, occupied by two swans, wrought in the same material, and appearing to sport in the limpid water; which, escaping from this charming fountain, falls through concealed pipes into the basins destined to supply the bathers. The cooling-room, opening from this dim apartment. . . is hung with draperies of silk, richly embroidered; and the large mirror which occupies the wall at the lower end of the divan, is set in a frame-work of gold and enamel, surmounted by the Ottoman arms, skilfully executed; while the divan itself, formed of gay-coloured satin, is wrought in silks until it resembles a flower-bed; and the cushions which are scattered over it are of the same beautiful and costly description. The bath is a vast hall, of the most elegant proportions, lined, and roofed, and paved with marble. (1838: 14)

Imperial baths are worth seeing and attractive but even public baths are enjoyable. They are large and circular structures. The first room has an arched ceiling with a skylight in the middle. The gallery is furnished with cushions at suitable distances from each other for a siesta enjoyment after bathing (Boulden, 1855: 108-109). Some of the public baths are supplied with mineral water that comes directly from the mountains. The water is so hot that it requires some additional cold water to render it usable for bathing purposes (Schneider, 1846: 38). Schneider describes the hot springs especially in Bursa as such:

The largest room is sixty feet square. The large marble basin in the centre is from twenty-five to thirty feet in diameter and six feet deep. It is daily filled for use with the clear mineral water and regularly drained off at night. This bath is appropriated to the use of all classes to males two days in the week and the five remaining, to females. The wealthy; however, prefer a more private one. (1846: 39)

Hot springs have kept their primacies among users, but public baths have lost their attraction. Since hot springs distribute healing, they have become one of the first places to be visited, especially during the holidays.

Amusements and baths

Jenkins voices that Turkish women's pastime activities are not so many and these women are happy in simple pleasures. Jenkins also states that Turkish women spend a lot of time doing shopping, like other women in other countries. They never go to the market; sometimes their husbands do the shopping, but most of the time their servants help them with the shopping.¹² Although women do not visit markets, they like to go to the great bazaars and shops in İstanbul for their own pleasure (Jenkins, 1911: 109-110). To Jenkins shopping is a great pleasure for Turkish women. Moreover, they take delight in having a dress or two just for indoor use (Vaka, 1914: 186), which means simple desires and wishes. There are lots of amusements; however, the biggest luxury among these activities is the time spent in the bath (Pardoe, 1838: 126). Although baths are important in Turkish women's lives, the leisure activities of these women are determined by certain factors. The place and period they live in, the person they live with and the money they have are among these factors. When foreign visitors talk about the activities of Turkish women, the objectivity of their writing is often questioned. For example, while Jenkins has very negative attitudes and depictions about Turkish women (1911: 21), her contemporary Garnett, on the other hand, lists the beautiful activities of Turkish women in her work (1909b: 75).

¹² To Jenkins, Turkish women "never go to the markets". It is obvious that she talks about upper-class women. Social-class or lower-class women help the labour in the house.

In the Ottoman Empire, women did not have an active social life as men. However, this allowed them to create a different amusement environment. Therefore, to Garnett the main sources of amusement for Ottoman women were visiting the neighbouring harems, attending wedding festivities, going to the famous promenade areas, going for a drive, going shopping and going to the baths (1911: 213). The activities of the upper-class Ottoman women, who spent most of their time at home, were generally limited to these. On the other hand, women living in rural areas took a more active role in the fields, vineyards and gardens and helped their husbands.

If someone is looking for a paradise for the eastern woman, this is nothing but a bath, because they turn these places into a paradise of their own. Baths are like meeting places where all kinds of topics are discussed. Women come here “to discuss every subject of interest and amusement, whether politics, scandal, or news; to arrange marriages, and prevent them; to ask and to offer advice, to display their domestic supremacy, and to impart their domestic grievances...” (Pardoe, 1838: 15). Nevertheless, most importantly, the bath offers women something that harem does not offer. In baths there is a lot of noise, there is always the rush and the excitement and women gather for all these things (Pardoe, 1838: 15). Upper-class Turkish women often preferred baths if they were going outside the harem and spent time there.

Baths as social gathering places

For the Turkish women, baths are not only a place for cleaning, but also a place for purification, renewal and joy. The wealthiest Ottoman women go to public baths once a week, even if they have private baths in their homes. For Turkish women living *Behind Turkish Lattices*¹³, the bath is, perhaps, the only place for socializing and having fun.¹⁴ Therefore, there are many reasons to go to the baths for women. Bridal bath for girls who would get married, maternity bath for women who had babies are some examples of these gatherings. Turkish women gather in the baths in groups every week. Preparation for the bath is a complete ritual. Carefully prepared meals such as meatballs and pastries, fruit such as watermelons and grapes are all carried with them. Here is an excerpt from Garnett that tells every detail of this ritual:

Going to the hamman, as the Turkish bath is called, has always been made by Osmanli women the occasion of great festivity and ceremony, and forms part of the customary ritual attending weddings and similar family events. On these occasions a complete outfit of garments for each lady is carried by a slave, tied up in a square boktcha, or wrapper the primitive and universal portmanteau made without of silk, and often richly embroidered, these garments being donned after the bath together with their possessors' most handsome jewellery, for the admiration and perhaps envy of the acquaintances they may meet at this favourite rendezvous. Other slaves carry, in addition to fruits and refreshments of all kinds, a variety of rugs, bath wraps, brass basins, and the multitude of to the uninitiated mysterious articles considered necessary to the due performance of this important ablutionary rite. And for the best part of the day the [women], with their children and attendants, remain at the hamman, eating and drinking, singing, frolicking, and gossiping in the intervals of the oft-repeated soapings, rinsings and rubbings, the application to the hair of crushed laurel berries to make it glossy, and to the finger and toe nails of henna, and other toilet details impossible to enumerate. (1911: 214)

Wealthy Turkish women spend their time in baths with their friends, children, and slaves. They stay there all day and chat. There are two venues for the women to gather, one is their home and the other is

¹³ This is the name of the book by Hester Donaldson Jenkins. There are many misconceptions about Turkish people mainly Turkish women.

¹⁴ For more information see: Garnett, 1904: 96-97.

baths. Baths are perhaps the only place that serves like a coffee-house for women. Montagu is the first travel writer to mention the bath meeting:

There were “so many¹⁵ fine women naked¹⁶, in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions, while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty fancies. In short, 'tis the women's coffee-house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented, &c. They generally take this diversion once a-week (sic), and stay there at least four or five hours, without getting cold by immediate coming out of the hot bath into the cold room, which was very surprising to me. (Montagu: Letter XXVI)

Lady Mary Montagu came to the Ottoman lands in the early 17th century. Montagu visited Turkish baths and described what she saw in these baths in her letters, which brought her fame. Baths are not just meeting places for women, but places for choosing a bride. Namely, the time spent in the bath is not just a fun time. If a woman goes to the bath, and if she has a son, she has ulterior intentions. Cardashian states that: “a women’s gathering or a public bath” are two important places in terms of finding a bride (1914: 29). While women spent time in the baths, they also looked for bride candidates for their sons.

Baths and their religious background

Cleanliness is a part of the Islamic faith; truly it is half the faith of Islam. However, this cleaning should not be perceived as just external cleaning. There is also a person's internal cleaning which, when the belief is concerned, comes before external cleaning. One may clean the house, wash the clothes, and wash the dishes every day; nevertheless, body cleaning is the primary premise of the religion of Islam. Therefore, baths are built to emphasize the importance of cleansing in terms of Islamic religion (Garnett, 1904: 57).

The importance of hygiene cannot be ignored by any society. Islam places great emphasis on cleanliness, therefore: cleanliness is next to godliness in the Moslem religion (Ellison, 1915: 25). “Among Moslems at least, personal cleanliness certainly comes next to godliness”. Especially before the prayers, there are “regular and careful ablutions requisite for the maintenance of the condition of legal purity”. Moreover, this saves “the Turks from many of the ailments” (Garnett, 1911: 167-168). This understanding of cleaning, which comes from the predominant religion of Ottoman people, Islam, has found its place in their tradition. The most common form of cleaning takes place in baths. This bath culture varies within the society. Most of the time, bathing takes place before and after special events such as weddings, parturitions, and ceremonies of all kinds.

The bridal bath

In the past, weddings would take more than five days, whether it took place in the city or in a village. It would start on a Monday and continue on Tuesday with the bath ceremony (Garnett, 1909a: 242-243; Ferriman, 1911: 214-215). The bride is taken to the bath with a great ceremony, where her hands and feet are applied henna, and her friends who help the bride for this process accompany her (Garnett, 1911: 199; Ferriman, 1911: 214-215). Before leaving the bath, the bride is directed three times around the

¹⁵ The number sometimes rose up to one hundred or even more. “There were upwards of a hundred women in the bath, the bathers seated in groups of two or three by each little stream of hot water. Each woman was attended by one or two slaves, who were assiduously rubbing their mistress with perfumed soap, or pouring the steaming bowls of boiling water over her” (Harvey, 1871: 76).

¹⁶ Being naked or walking around with the clogs naked in the bath was once the usual situation among women. This led to many painters and male travellers, who could not have any chance to see these women naked in the bath, to produce other imaginative works.

platform in the centre; she walks around, kisses the hands of elders there, and then goes out to get dressed. In that case, the clothes she wears should not belong to her. They must be borrowed for this occasion. The bridegroom covers all these costs (Garnett, 1909a: 242-243; Blunt, 1878: 92-93; Ferriman, 1911: 214-215). In the past, in rich families, both the child and the mother were taken to the bath after the child was born. Various gifts were given to the mother and special attention was paid to the child.

The maternity bath

On the eighth day following the birth, the new mother visits the local bath for a cleaning event. She is there with her family members, friends, and helpers who serve all traditional and essential things like towels, new clothes. Before the mother comes into the bath, the midwife spends time there for some religious rituals, which is a kind of blessing. Only then does she accept the new mother (Jenkins, 1911: 4). In the class of underprivileged, it is usual that the cleansing ritual lasts three days after the baby is born but with the rich, approximately it takes place eight days after the birth (Garnett, 1890: 476; Blunt, 1878: 6; Ferriman, 1911: 227-228).

When this ritual takes place in the house, the midwife and some friends come to visit the mother and the baby. Different types of meals and some beverages are served. When they meet in the bath, first they gather at the [mother's] home then they go to the bath. The midwife carries the baby in front of them. The mother and the baby are washed in the inner bath, first the baby then the mother. Drinks are offered during the intervals of the ritual (Garnett, 1890: 476; Ferriman, 1911: 227-228). Visitors bring carpets and the bathing linen full of embroidery and pearls. There is the traditional thing the midwife does. She throws some keys into the basin, utters some religious prayers, and then blows three times into the water. (Garnett, 1890: 476; Blunt, 1878: 7; Ferriman, 1911: 228). When the mother is in the inner bath,

[a] mixture of honey, spices, and aromatics, forming a brownish mess, is thickly besmeared all over her body, and allowed to remain about an hour. Her friends surround her during this tedious process, and amuse her with songs and lively conversation, every now and then transferring some of this composition from her body to their mouths with their fingers. (Blunt, 1878: 8)

After the bath, the mother “holds a reception in the cooling-room, kisses the hands of all the [elder] ladies present, and the time is passed in chatting, drinking coffee, and eating sweets” (Ferriman, 1911: 227-228).

These are the statements that apply to the upper-class women living in the city. This is not the case for those who live in the village. For example, Kaçmaz states that: “[g]oing to the public bath with relatives and servants [is] also not a common practice for lower-class women. Actually, lower-class women [do] not have [any] servants” (2014: 125). Since the events described in most of the memoirs take place in big cities such as Istanbul, it would not be correct to say that Turkish women in the whole country do the same things. Ramsay, furthermore, confirms: “[w]hen a woman [a woman from a village] has a very young baby, perched on her back, she takes it with her to the fields” (1897a: 123). It has been mentioned in some sources that Turkish women stay at home and do nothing and spend most of their time in baths. These women are the wives of pashas living in the city. However, Turkish women living in rural areas help their husbands while working in the field, in vineyards or in the garden (Kurnaz, 1997: 12-13; Ramsay, 1897b: 43).

The circumcision bath

Muslims have circumcision ceremonies for boys, because of their religious beliefs, when they reach primary school age. This ceremony is a very important day for both the family and the child. The child to be circumcised wears a circumcision suit, and he spends time with his best friends. To Fanny Janet Blunt the circumcision ceremony starts on a Monday and it lasts a week. The ages of those who are circumcised range from four to ten. The young boys are sent to the bathroom, where some of their hair remain above their heads, knitted with gold threads. The lead candidate of the group wears a suit richly embellished with gold and the chest part adorned with jewels. The fez he wears is covered with jewels (1878: 13-14; Garnett, 1909a: 234).

Garnett, on the other hand, supports Fanny Janet Blunt. According to her, the circumcision ceremony takes place when the boy reaches the age of nine or ten. This is a very big celebration.¹⁷ It is always held on a Friday. On the previous Monday, young children are taken to the baths and they invite their friends to the wedding in the afternoon. In the bath, boys have their hair cut for the first time. Among those who adhere to the old traditions, some leave a pinch of hair, which is knitted with gold or silver thread at the top of the head. The clothes they wear, both rich and poor, are decorated quite richly. If the poor cannot buy, they borrow the clothes and still celebrate this party (Garnett, 1909a: 234). This is still a very big celebration for the rich; however, for the poor although it is not a big celebration, it is a big event for the whole family. Of course, they are as happy and proud as the rich are, since they see that their son is growing up.

Conclusion

Travellers who visited the Ottoman Empire and Istanbul took notes about Turkish women in their writings, many of which consisted of positive impressions. They devoted a few chapters to women in their works. Women travellers found opportunities to talk to Turkish women and entered their harem. The answer they were looking for was whether the woman was free in the Ottoman society or not. Therefore, they sometimes conveyed what they saw, and sometimes they sought answers by spending time in the harem of the pashas of the period. The bath culture was something they never wanted to miss.

The Turkish bath culture, which gained a reputation with Lady Montagu's letters, was discussed in the books written by the travel writers who came to Ottoman Turkey after her, and new sections related to the bath culture were added. Most of these sections are made up of memories that Turkish women experienced. The Turkish bath appears as a good leisure activity place in most memoirs. It has been emphasized that baths have an important place in the lives of people in general, and women in particular. The memoirs and letters of writers such as Lady Montagu, Miss Pardoe and Lucy M. J. Garnett are full of bath visits and bath banquets.

There were also baths where women and men could go on different days. These public baths are now called city baths. They were the meeting places where women talked and had fun with slaves and friends. It is a fact that in all cities and even big towns, there are baths and are still in operation. As understood

¹⁷ It is a kind of unaffordable affair for the middle-class. Because of this, the festival takes just one day. For the "people of rank" it is "exceedingly expensive". For more information see: Garnett, 1904: 156.

from the written documents, baths have always taken parts in Turkish culture, and it is obvious that they will exist in the future.

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