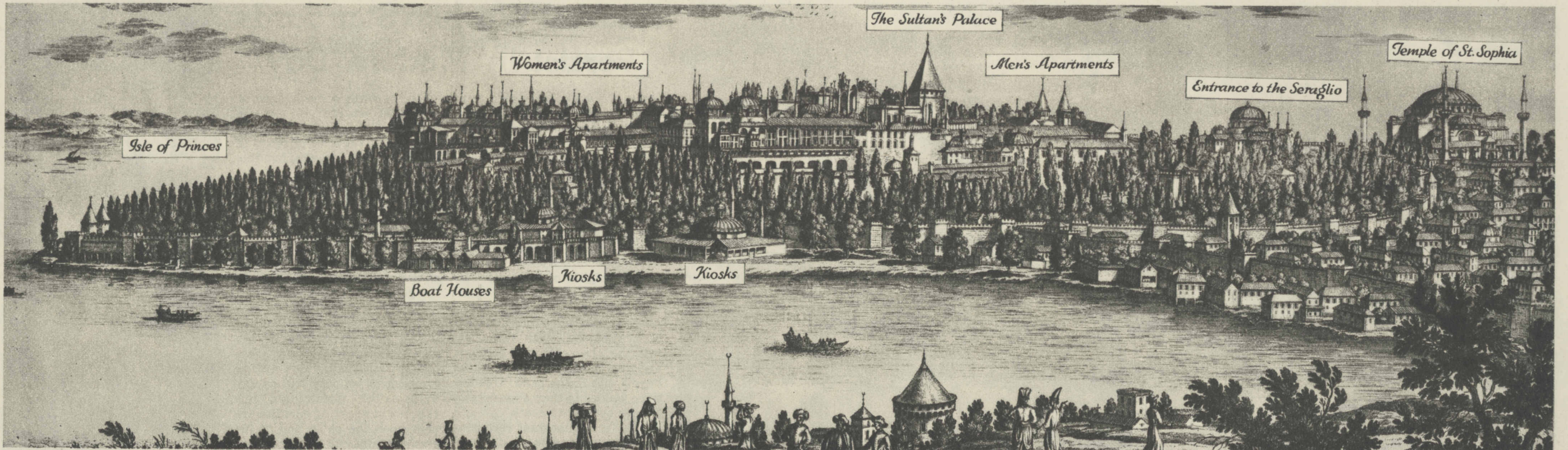


Real Ruler of Sultan's Harem a Woman



His Mother Exercised Supreme Authority

(Continued from page one.) unusual facilities, was permitted to enter this forbidden place. His investigation and research work continued for several years. When it was over he had a fascinating record of this strange institution that existed nowhere else and spanned but a few centuries in the turbulent history of Turkey.

Next Sunday the Graphic Section of The Tribune will begin printing Mr. Penzer's inside story of the harem. In this and succeeding instalments Mr. Penzer will lift the veil of secrecy and lay bare for the first time all the mystery, court intrigue, tradition, and magnificence of the imperial harem of Turkey.

It is a story that has never been completely told before. "Built in 1459-65 on one of the finest sites in the world, the harem of the sultans of Turkey in Constantinople, now known officially as Istanbul, gradually rose to be a dreaded and unapproachable place. So jealously have its secrets been guarded during the whole period of its existence that even after the sultans ceased to reside there the harem still remained as unknown as before."

Not only has Mr. Penzer inspected the whole palace from end to end during numerous visits in two consecutive years, but he has obtained photographs of certain parts that have resulted in the making of the most complete plan ever attempted. These pictorial records will be reproduced as the story unfolds.

The early Turkish rulers had no time for harem life, being too busy training and leading their armies and building cities. In fact, the real harem developed only after Turkish civiliza-

tion began to decline. It was symptomatic of security, leisure, and full treasures—suited only to the lasciviousness of a sovereign who had nothing to do from morn till night but seek relief from his boredom in constant self-indulgence.

But do not imagine that the harem was merely a luxurious storehouse of beautiful girls. It was much more than that. It was "a little world of its own, governed with the utmost deliberation and care, not by a man at all, but by a woman. Every member of it had her exact duties to perform and was forced to comply with all the rules and regulations, that in many respects were as strict and rigid as in a convent."

"No one knew the etiquette of the harem more than the sultan, and once it was respected all would be well. Even if that great lady, the sultan's mother, and the grand vizier were placated, he still had the janissaries (the sultan's armed guards) to reckon with. A sultan could go so far but no farther; deposition was certain and death probable."

An idea of the enormous activities of the palace as a whole, of which the harem was but a part, can be had by reflecting that it included among other things a great military school of state, more than a dozen mosques, ten double kitchens, two bakeries, a flour mill, two hospitals, a hall of circumcision, and various kinds of baths, storerooms, sports fields, museums, libraries, swimming pools, stables, waterworks, treasury rooms, etc. All this is called the seraglio (pronounced *serahlyo*), an Italian word meaning "a cage for wild animals" and adopted by the Turks because of its chance similarity to the Persian words *sara* and

An engraving of the grand seraglio which housed the sultan's harem, made in 1680 by Grelot. An idea of the enormous activities of the seraglio, of which the harem was just a part, can be had by reflecting that among other things it included a military school, more than a dozen mosques, several palaces, storehouses, stables, kitchens, sports fields, swimming pools, baths, museums, and libraries.



The famous Mosque of St. Sophia, built as a Christian cathedral by the Roman emperor Justinian, A. D. 531-538. The brick walls are lined on the inside with marble plundered from Greek temples. When the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 the temple was changed into a mosque and inclosed within the walls of the seraglio.

sarai, which originally meant "palace."

The word harem, of course, is borrowed from the Arabic *haram* and means "that which is unlawful, forbidden, or sacred," as opposed to *halal*, which means "that which is lawful or free to all." The Turks softened the word *haram* into harem (pronounced *hareem*), added the suffix *lik*, which means "place," and applied it to the part of a Mohammedan house occupied by the women, because it was their *haram* or sanctuary. Thus in Turkish the haremlik

is the women's quarters and the harem is the women themselves.

Something of an idea of what harem life meant a hundred years ago is suggested by the advice then given by a European diplomat, who had visited the sultan in his seraglio, to an English governess about to enter the sultan's employ as instructor to the young crown prince. Wrote the diplomat to the governess:

"I lament that any European lady should contemplate domiciling herself within the influence of the viceregal harem; for be assured that you will lack all the conveniences, much more than the *agréments*, of a European residence. . . . The peculiar diet of the 'caged birds' of the viceroy's Elysium is literally Arabian, which will be most unpalatable to your taste, even if it does not prove most injurious to your health. The nature of the climate renders it obligatory on Europeans to imbibe much greater quantities of stimulants—such as pale ale and wine—than they have been accustomed to partake of in their own colder climate. . . .

"Then, again, the entire atmosphere of the harem and its grounds must necessarily be impregnated with the fumes of tobacco, into which powerful narcotics are introduced, so that the air which you will breathe will prove injurious to your constitution; besides, the loose and uncleanly habits of the attendants, more particularly those of the Arab nurses, will disgust you; and the sad monotony of the daily life you will be called upon to lead will be of such a melancholy, conventlike nature that in my opinion it were far better that you had immured yourself within the cell of a jail than entered the precincts of a harem."

The secluded nature of harem

life was only too true in fact, as the governess soon found out. For with the exception of the dozen or so special favorites of the sultan, who were fairly regularly summoned to his bed and allowed spacious quarters during their terms of favor, the girls had little incident in their lives and had to content themselves with living in plain and crowded dormitories, sewing, washing, making coffee, or doing some other assigned duty during the daylight hours. They were ruled over by the sultan's mother, the *sultana valide*, who exercised her authority through a female superintendent, the *kyahya khatun*.

"She had also a large retinue of subordinate officials (*kalfas*), ranging downward from the 'lady of the treasury' to the 'mistress of the sherbets' and the 'chief coffee server.' Each of these officials had under her a number of pupil slaves (*alaises*), whom she trained to succeed her if need be and from whom the service was recruited. After the *sultana valide* ranked the mother of the heir apparent, called 'her excellency the chief lady.' Next came the ladies who had borne the younger children of the sultan, and after them the so-called odalisks, or odaliques (from *odah*, chamber). . . . Since all the harem women were legally slaves, the sultans, with practically no exceptions, never entered into legal marriage contracts."

This account of the official place of women in the seraglio fails to show the actual power that some of them exercised. That this was real on the part of the sultan's mother, of the heir apparent's mother, and sometimes others, is shown by the fact that the 300 years from Suleiman the Magnificent to Mahmoud II. is known in Turkish history as the "reign of



(From a painting by John Leon Gerome.) "Woman of Constantinople."

women." During this long period queen mothers and the higher women of the royal harem actually ruled Turkey, though generally by indirect influence—this in spite of the prevailing social subjection of women and the religious principle of a woman's "three obediences" (to her father, to her husband, and to her son).

It may help in understanding how this was possible to reflect that the mother of Genghis Khan was regent of one of the greatest empires on earth during her son's minority and was both chief justice in the market place trials and commander-in-chief of an army. And, to take another example, there stands in India the most beautiful memorial in the world—the Taj Mahal—an enduring tribute to the power and influence of a woman.

Of course, these women were exceptional, and the average female in Mohammedan countries was kept too ignorant in mind and menial in spirit to hope to rise to a position of power. Tradition was against her. The Koran (Mohammedan bible) declared her inferior. In the day of the prophet (early seventh century) women were mere chattels. Marriage was by capture, it being common practice to acquire one's women by raiding those tribes which were known to include a supply of good-looking daughters. And often, especially in large towns, girls were sold like camels, goats, or any other live stock, although there may have been some local laws forbidding this.

But it is true that women were entitled to a measure of protection by their men, who were

subject to punishment for failing in this regard, according to Mohammedan law. The prophet, in fact, decreed many *hadiths*, or rules concerning marriage; among them, that it is meritorious to marry more than one wife, that a man should not show greater preference for one wife than another, that wives must be Mohammedans (though concubines need not be believers in the faith), that it is not advisable for a man to marry a woman without her consent, though she must not withhold consent without good cause.

The rules applying to a multiplicity of wives were consulted only in rare cases, of course, for a man in a hundred was the Turk or Arab who could afford to keep more than one wife, even though the women themselves were most anxious that he do so in order that they might have a companion to relieve the boredom of their solitary confinement. The sultan's harem was a special case without parallel in history.

To sum up the general Mohammedan code for treatment of women one can do no better than quote Mohammed himself. His formula is clearly epitomized when he declares in the Koran: "Men stand superior to women in that Allah hath preferred the one over the other. . . . Those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bedchambers and beat them; but if they submit to you, do not seek a way against them."

● Mr. Penzer's story of the secrets of the harem will begin in the Graphic Section of next Sunday's Tribune.



Map showing Constantinople in the latter part of the fifteenth century, with Seraglio point and the old and new seraglios indicated.