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ABSTRACT:

As early as the seventeenth century, women have been going from one corner of the world to the other recording their experiences and reasons for publishing. Exploring, working and residing in regions of the East considered ‘safe for dynamic men only’ (Smith 1887, *Through Cyprus*, Author of ‘Glimpses of Greek life and Scenery, etc’. London: Hurst and Blacket), western women interacted with the peoples of Ottoman society, enjoying their warm and generous hospitality. Their gender allowed them to study, learn and become experts in areas where men had no access: the Ottoman harems, women's daily life, social gatherings and celebrations. Western and eastern women discuss harem slavery, marriage, adultery, childbirth, abortion, divorce, religion and women's rights. In reconsulting primary sources and focusing on the writings of nineteenth-century British women in Asia Minor (Turkey), this article contributes additional evidence on women's alternative representations or less degrading gaze, while revealing a patriarchal system's domestic-social reality that was founded on the institution of slavery. In other words, it differs from other studies in spotlighting the accounts that are illustrative of the polyethnic synthesis of the Ottoman households, i.e. the discourse on the multiethnic harem slavery institution, which distinguished Ottoman society, so as to provide a bigger picture and inspire new discussions.

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