Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) travelled to Istanbul in 1716 with her husband, Edward Wortley, and their infant son. Wortley had a tricky commission as ambassador to the Ottoman court, to try and broker a peace between the long-standing rival empires of Austria and Turkey. The family travelled via the courts of Hanover and Vienna, to Belgrade, Sophia, and Adrianople. In 1717 they arrived in the Ottoman capital.

During the second decade of the eighteenth century Lady Mary was at the height of her creative powers, which were clearly fostered by her encounters with the melting pot of eastern and western cultures in the Ottoman capital. She had experienced considerable success as a society hostess in London prior to her departure, a magnet for young political and literary minds (her circle included Alexander Pope, John Gay, and Baron John Hervey). Lady Mary’s letters and the journal she later destroyed, written during her travels abroad, provided the basis for the collection of ‘Embassy Letters’ she prepared on her return to Britain in 1718. They are thus a document prepared for circulation, if not
publication. She was to give the two-volume manuscript, accompanied by a preface from the celebrated feminist Mary Astell and an anonymous prefatory poem, to a Presbyterian minister, Benjamin Sowden, in 1761 as she passed through Rotterdam en route to England, aware that her death from cancer was not far off. He returned them to her daughter Lady Mary Bute after her mother’s death on 21 August 1762. This manuscript was published by Becket and De Hont on 7 May 1763 and the letters were an immediate hit, resulting in a rapid second edition and a piracy in the same year with a second volume containing five alleged extra letters (in fact imitations).

Apparently Montagu wrote up her travel experiences between 1719 and 1724 from her journal records. She chose fourteen addressees, disguising them with initials (though most are identified today), only ten of whom did she actually write to from Turkey. She excluded many she had written to, including her father, William Congreve, and Frances Hewet. These letters no longer survive with the exception of one to Frances Hewet where the content is quite different from the letters she prepared for publication, being more homely and domestic. She shared out her material, avoiding duplication and tailoring letters to each addressee: her sister Lady Mar gets descriptions of costume, Alexander Pope literary discussions, the savant Enlightenment priest, Abbé de Conti, accounts of the Ottoman administration and classical learning. The ‘letters’ prove to be a cover for a travel treatise which challenges and rewrites those that have gone before, especially Paul Rycaut’s *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1668), Jean Dumont’s *A New Voyage to the Levant* (1696), and Aaron Hill’s *A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1709).

The text given here is that of the first edition of the published text rather than the letters transcribed and edited by her into the two volumes she passed on to Sowden and which are available in the second of Robert Halsband’s three-volume edition of *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–7). Halsband dates this letter as May 1718, written from Lady Mary’s residence outside Istanbul in Pera to the countess of Bristol,
From Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

i.e. Elizabeth Felton, second wife of John Hervey, and close friend of Lady Mary.

Lady Mary had fallen victim to the smallpox in the British winter of 1715 at considerable cost to her celebrated beauty, and in March 1718, while her husband was away, Lady Mary had her young son inoculated against smallpox with a live vaccine following the Turkish practice. The smallpox matter was taken from a sufferer with a mild strain and administered by an old nurse in Istanbul. She chose at that point not to have her recently born daughter inoculated since the child’s Armenian nurse did not have immunity. After her return, however, when a smallpox epidemic swept England in April 1721, she enlisted the help of the surgeon Charles Maitland and had the virus ‘ingrafted’ into her daughter. She and Princess Caroline became the leading advocates of the practice of inoculation in their circle to great effect. Lady Mary was widely acknowledged as the importer of the practice of inoculation into English society and accordingly fêted or vilified (some claimed that inoculation caused rather than prevented deaths). Her one identified contribution to the print war, ‘A Plain Account of the Innoculating of the Small Pox by a Turkey Merchant’ (Flying Post, 13 September 1722), was an attack on doctors who either refused to administer the smallpox or applying it in such large quantities on gashes cut in the skin (rather than the needle pinprick observed in Turkey) as to risk the lives of their patients. Mary Wortley Montagu advocated its administration by lay operatives, even women, and sensible domestic nursing care rather than excessive bleedings and treatments. In the matter of inoculation, Lady Mary champions folk knowledge and all-female circuits of information and action. The same principles guide many of her ‘Turkish Embassy Letters’ written by a woman to other women, providing inset narratives which illustrate her sense of the agency and authority women could secretly command in a culture habitually represented as only oppressive to women.

Lady Mary was fascinated throughout her life with stories. She was an avid novel reader, and a particular enthusiast for the oriental tale, producing her own manuscript variants such as the charming ‘Sultan’s Tale’ (available in Lady Mary
Travels and History

Wortley Montagu: Romance Writings, ed. Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). As with inoculation, she saw the absorption of elements of matter from the ‘other’ as a means of protecting and indeed strengthening the European body politic, and especially the place of women within it. In this letter, the inset story of a Catholic European lady who chooses marriage to her abductor-rapist over incarceration in a convent after her defloration, is a means of articulating her passionate commitment to a Whiggish concept of ‘liberty’ (freedom to self-determination within the political contingencies of the moment) and of attacking Catholic absolutism in Europe. Equally, she uses customs among the different populations living in and around Istanbul to challenge some of the securities and pieties of Eurocentrism. For example, she presents the practice of adoption among Turks, Greeks, and Armenians, as a more sure way of passing on one’s estate than the systems of entailment in England that see distant and unknown relatives succeed to unearned wealth. This comment challenges the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commonplace that oriental absolutism was a disincentive to a profitable economy. In 1603, Richard Knolles is one of the earliest of the many commentators who complained that ‘the Great Sultan is so absolute a Lord of all things within the compass of his Empire, that all his Subjects and People, be they never so great, so call themselves his Slaves and not his Subjects; neither hath any man power over himself, much less is he Lord of the House wherein he dwelleth, or of the Land which he tilleth . . . ’ (The Turkish History (1687; first pub. 1603), 982). However, Lady Mary is not free from all prejudice. Her republicanism was strictly autocratic and she reveals in this letter, as elsewhere, contempt for the labouring and urban working classes in Turkey, confirming prejudices about their propensity to lie and cheat.

For biographical information about Lady Mary’s long and colourful life, see Isobel Grundy, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). There has been vigorous and prolific discussion of the relationship of Lady Mary’s writings to what Edward Said terms ‘Orientalism’, the systematic privileging of West over East. For this debate and some of the most
From Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu


LETTER 42

To the Countess of—

I am now preparing to leave Constantinople, and perhaps you will accuse me of hypocrisy, when I tell you, ’tis with regret; but as I am used to the air, and have learnt the language, I am easy here; and as much as I love travelling, I tremble at the inconveniencies attending so great a journey, with a numerous family, and a little infant hanging at the breast. ¹ However, I endeavour, upon this occasion, to do as

¹ Lady Mary gave birth to a daughter, also called Mary, in January 1718. She was to become her mother’s major correspondent during Lady Mary’s long absence living and travelling in Europe between 1739 and 1762. The younger Mary married against her father’s wishes, but enjoyed a much happier union than the obviously strained and difficult relationship between her parents. She married John Stuart, 3rd earl of Bute (1713–92), an impoverished Scottish aristocrat, in August 1736; his close friendship with the prince of Wales led to his elevation to the post of Prime Minister under George III in 1762. Lady Mary’s son, Edward (1713–76), proved a constant trial to his parents despite sharing
I have hitherto done in all the odd turns of my life; turn them, if I can, to my diversion. In order to do this, I ramble every day, wrapped up in my *Ferige* and *Asmak*, about Constantinople, and amuse myself with seeing all that is curious in it. I know you will expect that this declaration should be followed with some account of what I have seen. But I am in no humour to copy what has been writ so often over. To what purpose should I tell you, that Constantinople is the antient Bizantium? that ’tis at present the conquest of a race of people, supposed Scythians? that there are five or six thousand mosques in it? that *Sancta Sophia* was founded by Justinian? &c. I’ll assure you ’tis not for want of learning, that I forbear writing all these bright things. I could also, with very little trouble, turn over Knolles and Sir Paul Rycaut, to give you a list of Turkish Emperors; but I will not tell you his mother’s enthusiasm for things oriental (his collection of oriental tales were acquired by William Beckford); he constantly petitioned his parents for money, was forced to live abroad for long periods as a result of financial indiscretions, married unsuitably, was cut out of his father’s will, and, after a chequered career in the army, converted to Islam.

2 The name Byzantium appears to derive from the name of the Greek leader Byzas who, according to legend, captured the peninsula from pastoral Thracian tribes and built the city about 657 BC. In AD 196, having razed the town for opposing him in a civil war, the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus rebuilt it, naming it Augusta Antonina in honour of his son. In 330, when Constantine the Great dedicated the city as his capital, he called it New Rome.

3 The Scythians were a nomadic people originally of Iranian stock who migrated from Central Asia to southern Russia in the 8th and 7th c. BC. The Scythians founded a powerful empire centred on the region now known as the Crimea and which at its height stretched from west Persia through Syria and Judaea to the borders of Egypt. They were eventually destroyed by the Sarmatians in the 2nd c. BC. In fact the term Ottoman, for the race which conquered Constantinople in 1453, is a dynastic appellation derived from Osman, the nomadic Turkman chief who founded both the dynasty and the empire. Both the Scythians and the Ottomans were originally nomadic tribes, admired for their horsemanship and military aggression. The confusion for a literary mind such as Lady Mary’s may stem from the reference to Timur, another nomadic empire-builder but in fact a member of a Turkicized Barlas tribe, a Mongol sub-group that had settled in Transoxania (now roughly corresponding to Uzbekistan), as a Scythian in Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* (1590). Timur fought with and subdued the Ottoman Emperor Bayazid I in the mid-14th c.

4 *Sancta Sophia*: Hagia Sophia, the cathedral built at Constantinople under the direction of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. The structure, a domed basilica, was completed in AD 537. The architects were Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus.

5 Richard Knolles’s *General Historie of the Turks* appeared in 1603, consisting of detailed accounts of the lives of the Ottoman emperors. Paul Rycaut produced a continuation, *The History of the Turkish Empire from the Year 1623 to the Year 1677* in 1680, and a final volume written by Rycaut entitled *The History of the Turks beginning with the Year 1679* appeared in 1700. Rycaut was a career diplomat attached to the Levant company who served as ambassador to Smyrna.
what you may find in every author that has writ of this country. I am more inclined, out of a true female spirit of contradiction, to tell you the falsehood of a great part of what you find in authors; as for example, in the admirable Mr. Hill, who so gravely asserts, that he saw in Sancta Sophia, a sweating pilar, very balsamic for disordered heads. There is not the least tradition of any such matter; and I suppose it was revealed to him in vision, during his wonderful stay in the Egyptian Catacombs; for I am sure he never heard of any such miracle here. 6 ’Tis also very pleasant to observe how tenderly he and all his brethren voyage-writers, lament the miserable confinement of the Turkish ladies, 7 who are perhaps more free than any ladies in the universe, and are the only women in the world, that lead a life of uninterrupted pleasure, exempt from cares, their whole time being spent in visiting, bathing, or the agreeable amusement of spending money and inventing new fashions. A husband would be thought mad that exacted any degree of oeconomy from his wife, whose expences are no way limited but by her fancy. ’Tis his business to get money, and hers to spend it; and this noble prerogative extends itself to the very meanest of the sex. Here is a fellow that carries embroidered handkerchiefs upon his back to sell. And as miserable a figure as you may suppose such a mean dealer; yet I’ll assure you, his wife scorns to wear any thing less than cloth of gold; has her ermine furs, and a very handsome set of jewels for her head. ’Tis true, they have no places but the bagnios, and these can only be seen by their own sex; however, that is a diversion they take great pleasure in.

6 Aaron Hill, A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire (1709). Hill had travelled as a teenager with the embassy of Heneage Finch to Istanbul and his is an apprentice work. Lady Mary may have disliked him also as the leader of a circle of largely Tory wits named the Hillarians. He writes of the sweating column (138) and the Egyptian catacombs (263–71). Hill tends to collect his insights from rumour and his reading rather than empirical evidence.

7 In ch. 14, ‘Of the Turkish Women in General’, in his Full and Just Account, Aaron Hill concludes his account of the confinement of Turkish women as follows: ‘’TIS an awfull Fear and Duty, that obliges them contentedly to live at Home, without the smallest Power in Domestick matters, shut up together in a long Appartment, divided like our Hospitals for several Beds, where free from Envy, Pride or Jealousy, they Eat, Drink, and Work together, Guarded by the Watchful Observation of Industrious Eunuchs, and excluded from the Society of Men, above Ten Years Old, never Stirring from their Houses, nor making Visits to their Neighbours, but all entirely bent to please by turns the Wandring will of their Respected Husband’ (109–10). Hill’s description is typical of accounts of Turkey by European men.
I was, three days ago, at one of the finest in the town, and had the opportunity of seeing a Turkish bride received there, and all the ceremony used on that occasion, which made me recollect the Epithalamium of Helen, by Theocritus; and it seems to me, that the same customs have continued ever since. All the she friends, relations and acquaintance of the two families, newly allied, meet at the bagnio; several others go, out of curiosity, and I believe there were that day two hundred women. Those that were, or had been married, placed themselves about the rooms, on the marble sofas; but the virgins very hastily threw off their cloaths, and appeared without other ornament or covering, than their own long hair braided with pearl or ribbon. Two of them met the bride at the door, conducted by her mother and another grave relation. She was a beautiful maid of about seventeen, very richly dressed, and shining with jewels, but was presently reduced to the state of nature. Two others filled silver gilt pots with perfume, and began the procession, the rest following in pairs, to the number of thirty. The leaders sung an Epithalamium, answered by the others in chorus, and the two last led the fair bride, her eyes fixed on the ground, with a charming affectation of modesty. In this order they marched round the three large rooms of the Bagnio. 'Tis not easy to represent to you the beauty of this sight, most of them being well proportioned and white skin’d; all of them perfectly smooth, and polished by the frequent use of bathing. After having made their tour, the bride was again led to every matron round the rooms, who saluted her with a compliment and a present, some of jewels, others of pieces of stuff, handkerchiefs, or little gallantries of that nature, which she thanked them for, by kissing their hands. I was very well pleased with having seen this ceremony; and you may believe me, that the Turkish ladies have, at least, as much wit and civility, nay liberty, as among us. 'Tis true, the same customs that give them so many opportunities of gratifying their evil inclinations (if they have any) also put it very fully in the power of their husbands to revenge themselves, if they are discovered; and I do not doubt but they suffer sometimes for their indiscretions in a very severe manner. About two months ago, there

8 An epithalamium is a poem written to celebrate a wedding. Here the reference is to Theocritus' (fl. c.270 BC) Idylls.
was found at day-break, not very far from my house, the bleeding body of a young woman, naked, only wrapp’d in a coarse sheet, with two wounds of a knife, one in her side, and another in her breast. She was not quite cold, and was so surprisingly beautiful, that there were very few men in Pera, that did not go to look upon her; but it was not possible for any body to know her, no woman’s face being known. She was supposed to have been brought, in the dead of night, from the Constantinople side, and laid there. Very little inquiry was made about the murderer, and the corpse was privately buried without noise. Murder is never pursued by the King’s officers, as with us. ’Tis the business of the next relations to revenge the dead person; and if they like better to compound the matter for money (as they generally do) there is no more said of it. One would imagine this defect in their government, should make such tragedies very frequent, yet they are extremely rare; which is enough to prove the people not naturally cruel. Neither do I think, in many other particulars, they deserve the barbarous character we give them. I am well acquainted with a Christian woman of quality, who made it her choice to live with a Turkish husband, and is a very agreeable sensible lady. Her story is so extraordinary, I cannot forbear relating it; but I promise you it shall be in as few words as I can possibly express it.

She is a Spaniard, and was at Naples with her family, when that kingdom was part of the Spanish dominion. Coming from thence in a Feloucca, accompanied by her brother, they were attacked by the Turkish Admiral, boarded and taken. —And now how shall I modestly tell you the rest of her adventure? The same accident happened to her, that happen’d to the fair Lucretia so many years

9 Istanbul is a walled sea-bordered city. Across the Golden Horn lies the region of Galata. From the 10th c. onward, Galata was an enclave for foreign traders. After the Ottomans took the city in 1453, all foreigners who were not citizens of the empire were restricted to this quarter, which housed embassies, schools, churches, and hospitals for the various nationalities. Eventually Galata became too crowded, and extended into the area of Pera. This is where Lady Mary’s family resided during their stay at the Ottoman capital.

10 The Spanish Habsburgs governed Naples from 1503 to 1704. It was conquered by Austria in 1707 and in 1734 became, under the Spanish Bourbons, the capital of an independent kingdom of Sicily.

11 Halsband speculates that this is Ibrahim Pasha, Lord Admiral from 1706 to 1709 and again from February 1717 to February 1718. He was succeeded by Suleyman Kodja, who held office until 1721.
before her. But she was too good a Christian to kill herself, as that Heathenish Roman did. The Admiral was so much charmed with the beauty, and long-suffering of the fair captive, that, as his first compliment, he gave immediate liberty to her brother and attendants, who made haste to Spain, and in a few months sent the sum of four thousand pound sterling, as a ransom for his sister. The Turk took the money, which he presented to her, and told her she was at liberty. But the lady very discreetly weighed the different treatment she was likely to find in her native country. Her relations (as the kindest thing they could do for her in her present circumstances) would certainly confine her to a nunnery for the rest of her days. —Her Infidel lover was very handsome, very tender, very fond of her, and lavished at her feet all the Turkish magnificence. She answered him very resolutely, that her liberty was not so precious to her as her honour, that he could no way restore that but by marrying her, and she therefore desired him to accept the ransom as her portion, and give her the satisfaction of knowing that no man could boast of her favours without being her husband. The admiral was transported at this kind offer, and sent back the money to her relations, saying he was too happy in her possession. He married her, and never took any other wife, and (as she says herself) she never had reason to repent the choice she made. He left her some years after, one of the richest widows in Constantinople. But there is no remaining honourably a single woman, and that consideration has obliged her to marry the present Capitan Bassa (i.e. Admiral) his successor. —I am afraid that you will think my friend fell in love with her ravisher; but I am willing to take her word for it, that she acted wholly on principles of honour, tho’ I think

12 In the Roman tradition, Lucretia, wife of the nobleman Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, was raped in 509 BC by Sextus Tarquinius, son of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the tyrannical Etruscan king of Rome. After exacting an oath of vengeance against the Tarquins from her father and her husband, she stabbed herself to death. Lucius Junius Brutus then led a rebellion that drove the Tarquins from Rome and founded the Republic.

13 Paul Rycaut comments that ‘the Turks of themselves, though they have the liberty of Polygame, and freer use of divers Women allowed them by the Law, than the severity of the Christian Religion doth permit, are yet observed to be less fruitful in Children, than those who confine themselves to the chaste embraces of one Wife’ (The Present State of the Ottoman Empire (1668), 81). Muslim men are entitled to take up to four wives and any number of concubines.
she might be reasonably touched at his generosity, which is often found amongst the Turks of rank.

'Tis a degree of generosity to tell the truth, and 'tis very rare that any Turk will assert a solemn falsehood. I don’t speak of the lowest sort; for as there is a great deal of ignorance, there is very little virtue amongst them; and false witnesses are cheaper than in Christendom, those wretches not being punished (even when they are publicly detected) with the rigour they ought to be.

Now I am speaking of their law, I don’t know, whether I have ever mentioned to you one custom peculiar to their country, I mean, adoption, very common among the Turks, and yet more amongst the Greeks and Armenians. Not having it in their power to give their estates to a friend or distant relation, to avoid its falling into the Grand Signior’s treasury, when they are not likely to have any children of their own, they chuse some pretty child of either sex, amongst the meanest people, and carry the child and its parents before the Cadi, and there declare they receive it for the heir. The parents, at the same time, renounce all future claim to it; a writing is drawn and witnessed, and a child thus adopted, cannot be disinherited. Yet I have seen some common beggars, that have refused to part with their children in this manner, to some of the richest among the Greeks; (so powerful is the instinctive affection that is natural to parents!) though the adopting fathers are generally very tender to these children of their souls, as they call them. I own this custom pleases me much better than our absurd one of following our name. Methinks ’tis much more reasonable to make happy and rich, an infant whom I educate after my own manner, brought up (in the Turkish phrase) upon my knees, and who has learnt to look upon me with a filial respect, than to give an estate to a creature without other merit or relation to me than that of a few letters. Yet this is an absurdity we see frequently practised. —Now I have mentioned the Armenians, perhaps it will be agreeable to tell you something of that nation, with which I am sure you are utterly unacquainted. I will not trouble you with the geographical account of the situation of their country, which you may see in the maps; or a relation of their antient greatness, which you may read in the Roman History. They were, as they say, converted to the Christian religion by St. Gregory, and are perhaps the devoutest Christians in the whole
The chief precepts of their priests enjoin the strict keeping of their Lents, which are, at least, seven months in every year, and are not to be dispensed with on the most emergent necessity; no occasion whatever can excuse them if they touch any thing more than mere herbs or roots (without oil) and plain dry bread. That is their constant diet. —Mr. W[ortle]y has one of his interpreters of this nation, and the poor fellow was brought so low by the severity of his fasts, that his life was despaired of. Yet neither his master’s commands, nor the doctors entreaties (who declared nothing else could save his life) were powerful enough to prevail with him to take two or three spoonfuls of broth. Excepting this, which may rather be called a custom, than an article of faith, I see very little in their religion different from ours. ’Tis true, they seem to incline very much to Mr. Whiston’s doctrine; neither do I think the Greek church very distant from it, since ’tis certain, the Holy Spirit’s proceeding only from the Father, is making a plain subordination in the Son. —But the Armenians have no notion of Transubstantiation, whatever account Sir Paul Rycaut gives of them (which account I am apt to believe was designed to compliment our court in 1679) and they have a great horror for those amongst them that change to the Roman religion. What is most extraordinary in their customs, is their matrimony; a ceremony, I believe, unparallel’d all over the world. They are always promised very young; but the espoused never see one another, till three days after their marriage. The bride is carried to church with a cap on her head, in the fashion of a large trencher, and over it a red silken veil, which covers her all over to her feet. The priest asks the bridegroom whether he is contented to marry that woman, be she deaf, be she blind? These are the

14 Gregory (240–332) converted the Armenian King Tiridates around AD 300. Armenia lost its autonomy in the 14th c. and its territories fell under Ottoman or Persian rule. Armenians were a significant Indo-European minority in Istanbul with a thriving independent community.

15 William Whiston supported the Arian doctrine that denied that Christ’s body was not of the same essence or substance as that of God.

16 Paul Rycaut paralleled Armenians and Catholics in their belief in transubstantiation in an account of the Armenian and Greek Churches written at the command of Charles II (The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches (1670), 433). Lady Mary interprets Rycaut as ‘complimenting’ the diplomatic shunning of public Catholicism on the part of Charles II in the midst of anxiety about Catholic conspiracy in England in the late 1670s which led to the Exclusion Crisis of 1681, an attempt to exclude Charles’s Catholic brother, James duke of York, from the succession.
literal words; to which having answered yes, she is led home to his house, accompanied with all the friends and relations on both sides, singing and dancing, and is placed on a cushion in the corner of the sofa; but her veil is never lifted up, not even by her husband. There is something so odd and monstrous in these ways, that I could not believe them till I had inquired of several Armenians myself, who all assured me of the truth of them, particularly one young fellow who wept when he spoke of it, being promised by his mother to a girl that he must marry in this manner, tho’ he protested to me, he had rather die than submit to this slavery, having already figured his bride to himself, with all the deformities in nature. —I fancy, I see you bless yourself at this terrible relation. I cannot conclude my letter with a more surprising story, yet ’tis as rigorously true, as that I am,

Dear sister,¹⁷

Yours, &c. &c.

¹⁷ Two lines scored out in the manuscript version of this letter (and hence not appearing in print) make it clear that Lady Mary’s sister, Lady Frances Mar (1690–1761), was not the addressee of this letter when drafted. However, Lady Mary seems to have decided to make her the addressee in scoring out the sentences addressed to ‘Your Ladyship’. This may be an oblique reference to her sister’s own unhappy marital situation. In apparent reaction to Mary’s elopement with Edward Wortley in the summer of 1713, her father married off her sister in July 1714 to an ageing Jacobite peer (John Erskine, earl of Mar); Frances lived much of her life abroad with him in exile in great unhappiness over their union. This letter is full of discussion of customs of marriage among the different populations in the Ottoman capital and Lady Mary no doubt saw parallels between Armenian marriages and her sister’s unhappy fate. In any case, the drift is to suggest that Turkish Muslim marriage arrangements afford women more liberty and autonomy than those offered in Catholic Christian cultures.