Re-Presenting the Harem: Orientalist Female Artists and the 19th Century Ottoman Empire

Megan McDaniel
RE-PRESENTING THE HAREM:
ORIENTALIST FEMALE ARTISTS AND THE 19TH CENTURY OTTOMAN EMPIRE

BY

MEGAN MCDANIEL

A Thesis submitted to the
Department of Middle Eastern Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with
Honors in the Major

Degree Awarded:
Spring, 2014
The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Megan McDaniel defended on April 9, 2014.

______________________________
Dr. Will Hanley
Thesis Director

______________________________
Dr. Peter Garretson
Outside Committee Member

______________________________
Dr. Zeina Schlenoff
Committee Member

______________________________
Dr. Lynn Jones
Committee Member
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 3
2. BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES 11
3. THE ORIENT BY PEN 19
4. CANVASES BEHIND THE HAREM CURTAIN 31
5. CONCLUSION 48

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Théodore Chassériau, Scène de Harem, Femme Mauresque à sa toilette, 1854, pp. 6.
Figure 2. Georges Rochegrosse, The Slave and the Lion, n.d. p. 7.
Figure 3. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres’s Grande Odalisque, 1814, p. 8.
Figure 4. Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann, The Odalisque, n.d. p. 32.
Figure 5. Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann, The Princess Nazili Hanum, 1875, p. 36.
Figure 6. Henriette Browne, Une Joueuse de flute (intérieur de harem, Constantinople, 1860), 1861, p. 40.
Figure 7. Henriette Browne, Une Visite (intérieur de harem, Constantinople, 1860) 1861, p. 41.
Figure 8. Mary Adelaide Walker, untitled illustration for Constantinople During the Crimean War, page 244, 1863, p. 44.
Figure 9. Mary Adelaide Walker, untitled illustration for Constantinople During the Crimean War, page 321, 1863, p. 46.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The eighteenth and nineteenth century West was filled with politicians, scholars, and artisans envisaging ‘The East’ in its exotic splendor. At this time, the Ottoman Empire controlled vast swaths of territory in the East and maintained a strong presence in the minds of Orientalist Westerners. Orientalism is a term employed by Edward Said, the late scholar of post-colonialism, as: “A way of coming to terms with the Orient [described here as North Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and India] that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience.”1 As argued by John McKenzie in his book Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts, the first phase of Orientalist art history can be described as ‘the imagined Orient’.2 This phase of representation consisted of “imagined images of orientals created in the eighteenth century by those who had seldom, if ever, seen the real thing.” Christine Peltre’s Orientalism in Art shows the turning point of Orientalist art as beginning with “the Egyptian expedition launched by Bonaparte in 1789,” where published drawings of Alexandria, completed by Dominique-Vivant Denon, contained “accurate renderings of sites and people… [and] quickly captured the attention of all Europe.”3 At the time the East became saturated with European artists attempting to paint first-hand the area so titillating to the European imagination.4 Although the scramble to travel to the East and paint the Orient began with Denon’s attempt to record Egypt accurately, over time artists lost interest in visually documenting the Orient as restraint in portrayals of the Oriental backdrop too closely reflected European scenery.5 Thereafter, from Beethoven’s The Ruin of Athens (1811), to

---

4 Ibid. 23.
5 Ibid, 141.
Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *The Snake Charmer* (1870), to Eugène Delacroix's *The Death of Sardanapalus*, to Lord Byron’s four ‘Turkish tales’ (1813-16), artists in all media produced their interpretations of the Orient and the Oriental, each conforming to the prevailing patterns of artistic ‘documentation’ and ‘distance’ that made up the Orientalist confliction.

Male practitioners predominated artistry in Nineteenth century Europe; however, females were not entirely excluded from the ‘lure of the East’. The female perception of the Ottoman Empire gained particular relevance, as women were able to access the most exclusive Ottoman social institution— the harem. The *Encyclopedia of Islam* defines the harem as “a term applied to those parts of the household to which access is forbidden, and hence more particularly the women’s quarters.” A more comprehensive definition of the harem can be presented as “the wives, concubines, female relatives, and servants [including eunuchs] occupying a usually secluded house or part of a house allotted to women in a Muslim household.”

Given the nature of the harem as a secluded area for females, male artists were completely unwelcome, leaving the permeation of the harem as a task only suitable for women. Prior to the production of female created, eyewitness accounts of harem life, a hyperbole of the harem’s sexual exoticism was the conventional image, revealing: “The ubiquitous odalisque, oriental 'sex slave' and object of sexual fantasy, [which] became an icon of Orientalist art.”

The standard of Orientalist harem scenes focused on sexual exploitation and brutality; Figure 1, Théodore Chassériau’s *Scène de Harem, Femme Mauresque à sa toilette* (1852); Figure 2, Georges Rochegrosse’s *The Slave and the Lion*, (1888); and Figure 3, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres’s *Grande Odalisque* (1814) are strong

---


examples of the Western inclination to overtly sexualize harem depictions. Common tropes in the imagined harem paintings of male Orientalist artists are female nakedness, frailty and sexual availability; luxury and decadence; and total Eastern exoticism. The female advantage in visually witnessing the Ottoman harem is that they were able to deviate from the embellished tropes of the male imagination and artistically incorporate broader complexities of Ottoman social realities.

Female Orientalist presentations of the Ottoman harem follow two main forms, which I will call collective Orientalism and individual Orientalism. Collective Orientalism is composed of ideals that the majority of artists acknowledge; for instance, most Orientalist artists make reference to the lavishness of Ottoman harem spaces. The female collective of Orientalism is distinct from the general collective of Orientalism in that it incorporates certain subdued realities of Ottoman society. To reuse the previous example, the general Orientalist collective presents lavishness as an integral component of Ottoman harem life. As I will show, the female Orientalist collective also highlights lavishness within Ottoman society, but then further references the Ottoman tendency to blend the lavish with the tawdry. This female collective of Orientalist perception ventures beyond mere imagination of the harem, since the women within its composition witnessed the intimate realities of this Ottoman social space.

To acknowledge the female collective does not entail presenting it as a monolithic body. Even within the composed set of perceptions shared by Orientalist female artists there are divergences. Expressions of Orientalist individualism were shaped by a multitude of
Figure 1:

Théodore Chassériau (French, 1856)

Femme Mauresque à sa toilette (Moorish Dame in Bath), 1854.
Oil on canvas, 67 x 54 cm.
Figure 2:

Georges Antoine Rochegrosse (French, 1938)

_L’esclave et le lion (The Slave an the Lion)_ (n.d.)
Oil on Canvas, dimensions unknown.
Figure 3:

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (French, 1867)

La Grande Odalisque (The Grand Odalisque), 1814,
Oil on canvas, 91 x 162 cm.
influences, each converging within an artistic ‘re-presentation’ of the Ottoman women’s quarters. I glean the concept of ‘re-presentation’ from a discussion in Timothy Mitchell’s *Colonising Egypt* of an Edward Said quotation concerning the Orient within Western delineation: “The Orient is put together as this ‘re-presentation’, and what is represented is not a real place but a ‘set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of text, or a citation from someone’s work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these.’” ⁸ These artists witnessed Ottoman harems directly, yet they encountered various societal influences mixed with their enduring personal conceptions of Seraglio livelihood, ensuring that although they were true harem voyeurs their artistic renderings ‘re-presented’ rather than documented the Ottoman institution. Each harem painting, illustration or diary entry created by Orientalist females is a confluence of the Orientalist paintings of Delacroix, the melodies of Mozart’s *Abduction of the Seraglio*, the pages of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the accounts of Lady Montague’s letters, personal experiences within the Orient, and the like. Each female artist drew from these various inspirations and experiences that then made their way into their harem portrayals. These influences, be they societal, artistic, or historical, ensured that even Western women subscribing to the general ideals within the Orientalist female collective will still diverge on certain aspects of their harem portrayals. The conclusion that can be reached from the prevailing individualism of Western female artistry amongst a general collective of ideology is: there is no single canon of Orientalism. Although the term is most commonly employed to describe a general perspective, Orientalism is internalized and re-expressed on an individual level, where the canonical archetype of ‘Orientalism’ begins to break down.

Five female artists will be discussed within this essay, each from varying styles of training, cultural backgrounds, and social classes, and each approaching the documentation of the harem in a different manner: Mary Adelaide Walker (British, d. 1911), Henriette Browne (French, d. 1901), Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (Danish, d. 1881), and Ella Ferris Pell (American, d. 1922) along with her younger sister Evie A. Todd. In order to demonstrate collectivity within Orientalism, I will first examine travel literature amongst this set of female artists to determine prevailing patterns of Orientalist thought concerning the Ottoman harem; namely, Orientalist contemplations of the ‘Eastern’ and European blend of Ottoman society, the perceived Ottoman mix of luxury and gaudiness, along with Ottoman barbarism and savagery particularly in connection to Islam. I will then analyze paintings and illustrations from the same set of artists looking for subtle details and discrepancies to demonstrate the complexity of influences that forms each artist’s ‘re-presentation’. The final chapter is an examination of these female artists that reveals differences within their social circumstances, details that prove significant to the discrepancies in their harem depictions. Financial security and recognition/acceptance in the artists’ country of residence are strong determinants of whether the artists conform to prevailing Western fantasy.
CHAPTER 2: BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

It is important first to acknowledge that the presentation of female artists within this essay is non-exhaustive. Other female artists who created depictions in both literature and artwork include: Lady Montague (British writer, 1762), Margaret Murray Cookesley (British painter, 1927), and Sophie Gengembre Anderson (French painter, 1903) to name a few. Although oil paintings and illustrations are the sole focus of this thesis, harem spaces were also depicted in other media such as photography, the focus of Malek Alloula’s *The Colonial Harem*. I chose the five women of my essay first beginning with Elisabeth Baumann and Mary Walker as they created both artwork and travel literature, giving me a larger analytical point of reference. I then incorporated Henriette Browne who witnessed the same harem as Mary Walker, their portrayals forming an interesting point of comparison. Lastly, I wanted to include the travel writings of the sisters Evie Todd and Ella Pell, as although they did not create harem paintings, the harem observations within their travel diaries are strongly applicable to this subject matter and, as I will show, have never been analyzed in this manner. I will begin with concise summaries of each artist’s personal life and career, presented in chronological order of their travels to the East.

Mary Adelaide Curtis was born in London in 1820 as the eldest of nine children. She changed her last name to Walker after marrying Robert Walker in 1862, at the Crimean Church in Constantinople, and the couple presumably never conceived. In her youth, she specialized in portrait and landscape painting, while receiving artistic training in Paris. Her brother, Charles George Curtis, was offered a Missionary Chaplaincy in Constantinople in

---

1856, and Mary accompanied him to the Ottoman Empire, where she authored and illustrated a series of books concerning her travels: *Through Macedonia to the Albanian Lakes* (1864), *Eastern Life and Scenery, with Excursions into Asia Minor, Mytilene, Crete, and Roumania* (1886), *Untrodden Paths in Roumania* (1888), and *Old Tracks and New Landmarks* (1897).\(^\text{11}\) Along with her books, she also wrote in the British journals *Temple Bar, Good Word, London Society,* and *The Morning Post,* as well as a French publication.\(^\text{12}\) Shortly after arriving in Constantinople, Walker was invited to paint Adile Hanim, the second wife of Mustafa Reshid Pasha, six-time appointee of “Grand Vizier, Minister of Foreign Affairs and twice appointed Ottoman ambassador to Paris and London.”\(^\text{13}\) After completing the project, Walker received a second commission to paint Sultan Abdülmecid’s daughter, Fatma Sultan, the wife of Mustafa Reshid Pasha’s son.\(^\text{14}\) Walker travelled to the Sultan’s palace at Baltalimani, and completed the portrait of Fatma, after several repaintings at the subject’s request; however, none of those paintings survive.\(^\text{15}\) In 1870, Walker was appointed a professor at *Dersaadet Darülmuallimat,* the first vocational school for girls.\(^\text{16}\) She left the school after two years, and began teaching again in 1880, “giving drawing lessons at the ‘Ladies Classes’ at the British Mechanics Institute in Istanbul.”\(^\text{17}\) In addition to teaching at these institutions, she gave personal lessons to the wife of the British ambassador, among

---

\(^\text{11}\) Ibid, 200.  
\(^\text{12}\) Ibid, 200.  
\(^\text{13}\) Ibid, 202.  
\(^\text{16}\) Ibid, 204.  
\(^\text{17}\) Ibid, 204
other affluent women in Constantinople. Although she spent over three decades of her life in Constantinople, Walker was in Britain when she fell ill and perished in 1904.

In her many years in Constantinople, Mary Adelaide Walker witnessed “Very few foreign ladies succeed in obtaining admittance as simple visitors into one of these [Ottoman] serais.” Walker had close connections to inner harem circles due to her lengthy tenure in Anatolia, allowing her to introduce to the Ottoman seraglio, a French woman with the assumed name of Henriette Browne. Born as Sophie Bouteiller in Paris on June 16th, 1829, Browne began training as an artist at the age of twenty. After a series of mundane sketch courses, she studied under Charles Chaplain, a prominent English artist who taught women-only classes, which proved to be a setting of study that “would compromise neither her femininity nor her gentility.” Browne married diplomat Jules de Saux in 1853, the same year that she changed her name to Henriette, and the pair never had children. The decision to marry a diplomat played prominently in Browne’s early career and likely “led to her initial choice of religious genre, [as] a category of painting that appealed to official taste.” However, her choice of religious painting could also reflect the French stress “on women’s maternal role as moral educators… [henceforth] women were encouraged to express their femininity by painting morally uplifting or religious subjects.” Her interest in religious pieces remained rooted in illustrations of nuns and convents, and her most famous piece, The Sisters of Charity, was purchased for an amazing 12,000 francs. The nature of her marriage

18 Ibid, 205.
19 Ibid, 206.
23 Gaze, Dictionary of Women Artists, 327.
24 Lewis, Gendering Orientalism, 59.
25 Gaze, Dictionary of Women Artists, 327.
to a diplomat involved travel, and in 1865, Browne travelled to Constantinople along with other parts of the East and Maghreb. During her travels, she created Orientalist pieces that gained attention at the Salon of 1861— particularly *Une Visite* (1860), a painting concerning an Ottoman harem interior. By 1879, Browne no longer exhibited having enjoyed a full and successful career, wherein she died eleven years later in Paris.

A European Orientalist artist known as the stylistic opposite to Henriette Brown, Elisabeth Anna Maria Baumann was born near Warsaw, Poland on November 27th, 1819.\(^{26}\) She first received training in artistic expression in Berlin, and in the late 1830’s, she relocated to the Düsseldorf Academy of Art where she studied for approximately 5 years.\(^ {27}\) After completing her studies at the Düsseldorf Academy, Baumann moved to Rome where she met and later married the Danish sculptor Jens Adolf Jerichau.\(^ {28}\) The couple moved to Copenhagen, Denmark where she lived for the remainder of her life. Baumann had nine children causing her severe economic constraints, and to alleviate some of the financial pressure, she “travelled widely across Europe in order to find affluent sitters and clients for her scenes.”\(^ {29}\) For a particular sitting, Baumann did a portrait on the family of King Christian IX, where she met Princess Alexandra and gained a most valuable friendship.\(^ {30}\) Princess Alexandra traveled through the Ottoman Empire with her husband “on their grand tour in early 1869,” where she was entertained by Mustafa Fazil Paşa, a member of the Egyptian royal family, exiled to Istanbul by his brother Khedive Ismail.\(^ {31}\) It is a letter of introduction from Princess Alexandra that enabled Baumann to gain intimate access to the harem of

\(^{26}\) Ibid, 737.


\(^{29}\) Gaze, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, 738.


\(^{31}\) Roberts, Mary. *Intimate Outsiders*, 113.
Mustafa Fazil Paşa, particularly to his daughter Princess Nazili Hanum; the girl that quickly became the muse of Baumann’s Orientalist collection— the inspiration for her “exotic harem fantasy,” as will be discussed in the next chapter. In addition to painting, Baumann authored two book in Danish: *Ungdomserindringer* (Youthful Memories) (1874), and *Brogede Rejsebilleder* (Motley Images of Travel) (1881), along with poems composed in various languages, and an unpublished five-act play. Between 1849 and 1882, nearly 200 of Baumann’s paintings were displayed at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm, along with exhibitions at the Royal Academy of London and salons within Copenhagen.

Although never truly accepted by the general Danish populace due to her German artistic training, Baumann did receive a first-class academy medal in Copenhagen, and was also a member of the Academia di Raffaello, before her death in Copenhagen in 1881.

I positioned the biographies of the first three women together as they have been presented in previous literature concerning the topic of Orientalist females and the Ottoman harem. Mary Roberts and Reina Lewis are two scholars that have received academic acclaim for their research on this topic and have grappled with this subject in particularly effective ways. Mary Roberts’ *Intimate Outsiders: the Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* and Reina Lewis’ *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation* discuss the European women featured within this thesis. Although their analyses of these figures are diligent, they are not exhaustive and there is still significant room for reevaluation concerning their interpretations of the lives and artwork of these Orientalist figures. Mary Roberts presents an analysis on the cross-cultural exchange within

---

32 Ibid, 129.
33 Gaze, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, 739.
34 Ibid, 739.
the extended interactions of the Princess Nazili Hanum and Elisabeth Baumann, along with exploration into the ‘gender politics’ surrounding Mary Walker’s tenure of portrait painting for affluent Ottoman families. She also briefly mentions Henriette Browne in relation to being Mary Walker’s visitor within a harem interior. Reina Lewis in Gendering Orientalism discusses Henriette Browne at length, primarily pointing to her subdued feminine style that seemingly allowed her to penetrate an area of painting known for its sexual assertiveness. Lewis also analyzes how Browne, a ‘gendered subject’, could rise to a dominant position within Western Orientalist dialogue. Roberts and Lewis efficiently approach discussion of each artist on an individualistic scale; however, I am aiming towards a comparative analysis of the three ladies most prominently discussed within the existing literature, along with the addition of two entirely new figures to the dialogue of Orientalist harem depiction— Ella F. Pell and Evie A. Todd.

The last two women within this biographical presentation have not been extensively included in previous discussions of Orientalist artistry as the content of their travel literature has not been published; however, certain descriptive passages within their travel writings effectively assimilate them into the club of their European counterparts. Ella Ferris Pell was born on January 18\(^{th}\), 1846 in St. Louis, Missouri.\(^{37}\) Capable in painting, sculpture, and illustrations, she studied with William Rimmer at the Design School for Women at Cooper Union in New York. Little is conclusively known about her family history; yet, the late Senator Clairborne Pell of Rhode Island presumed her to be the great niece of William Ferris Pell,\(^{38}\) former owner of the Fort Ticonderoga Garrison Grounds.\(^{39}\) After graduating from the

Design School for Women in 1870, Pell traveled extensively on a five-and-a-half-year voyage to Europe, the Maghreb, and parts of the Near East with her sister Evie A. Todd, and brother Charles. After returning to the states, Pell exhibited several paintings at the National Academy of Design, New York including “La Annunziata” and “Water Vendor, Cairo, Egypt.” The whereabouts of these paintings are unknown. In the 1880’s, Pell studied at “the Académie des Beaux- Arts des Champs- Élysées with Jeal-Paul Laurens, Jacques-Fernand Humbert, and Gatson Casimir Saint-Pierre.” Pell also illustrated Paul Tyner’s love story Through the Invisible, published in 1897. Later on in her career, the Paris Salon accepted three of Pell’s paintings from 1889-90, The Angel Making Adam See the Consequences of his Sin, Salome, and Portrait of Mme. T. Ella Pell perished in 1922, in New York where she is buried next to her sister in an unmarked grave.

Very little is known about Evie A. Todd, Ella Pell’s sister and travel companion. Evie was born sometime after 1846, as this is the year of birth for Ella, the eldest sibling of her family. Evie’s assumed last name of Todd indicates a marriage; however, there are no suggestions within her travel diaries as to her marital status at the time of the Pell siblings’ travels to the Orient. Evie’s occupation is unknown; yet, she too was an artist according to her description of sketching scenes of the Golden Horn that an Ottoman guard attempted to confiscate. Both Ella and Evie kept travel diaries of their trip to Constantinople in which they made similar comments and observations concerning the Ottoman capital. Ella primarily focused on scenery and landscapes, while Evie focused more on historical and social

---

41 Ibid, 433.
42 Ibid, 433.
43 Ibid, 433.
44 Diary of Evie Pell, Fort Ticonderoga Thompson-Pell Research Center, p. 235, May 18th, 1875.
observations, so the sisters’ diaries prove to be useful compliments. For that reason, I will present Ella and Evie as a unit— the Pell sisters.

As aforementioned, the Pell sisters’ travel diaries are unpublished thus affording limited research on the topic. Ella’s diaries have been mentioned solely in six pages in a compilation book of American Orientalist artists, and a thesis on Pell’s art and spirituality. The compilation book entitled *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930*, edited by Holly Edwards, discusses Ella Pell as a female Orientalist. After detailing Ella’s biographical history and travels predominately within Cairo, Edwards briefly notes that Pell “may have had an easier time finding models because of her gender.” Ella is included within the compilation for being female, and is emphatically labeled within the chapter heading as ‘A Woman Orientalist’; however, Edwards does not make an effort to distinguish Ella from her male contemporaries based on her gender. Upon returning from her travels, Ella presented *Water Vendor, Cairo* (whereabouts unknown), her only painting exhibited of an Eastern subject. Ella as a woman artist in the East travelled to an inactive Ottoman Seraglio Palace, and made judgments concerning the imprisonment of harem women, yet she did not actively seek out female models to depict artistically. Given her gender, why did Ella not attempt to set herself apart from male contemporaries by depicting subjects who could only be seen by female eyes? Why is it that unlike Baumann, Browne, and Walker, Ella did not personally witness an Ottoman harem? These are important questions concerning Ella’s gender and artistry that cannot be relegated to a single sentence determining her probable ‘ease’ in finding models, especially when Pell did not create many

---

45 Thesis: Kelly L. White, *Ella Ferris Pell (1846-1922): An Exploration of Art and Spirituality*, (The Savannah College of Art & Design, 2002); although I have not been able to find the text of this thesis.

pieces with Oriental models, female or otherwise. As Ella has not been examined thoroughly as a female Orientalist, I will place the Pell sisters in counterpoint to the more widely discussed European women to answer some of the gender questions left open within previous analyses.
CHAPTER3: THE ORIENT BY PEN

Western travellers in the 19th century often wrote diaries during their voyages. Some travel writers intended to publish their journals while others merely wanted a personal reference. Either way, travel literature is an effective source of gleaning descriptive passages of Orientalist perceptions that, when aligned side-by-side with the literature of other travellers, can reveal the commonalities of Orientalist thought that I define as the Orientalist collective. In this chapter, I will present observations within the travel literature of Ella Pell and her sister Evie A. Todd, Mary Walker, and Elisabeth Baumann. Henriette Browne did not author travel literature, and will not be included in this chapter. I will initially focus on the diaries of Ella Pell and Evie Todd, as they present an account of a particular Ottoman palace’s history including the Sultan’s calculated murder of a sibling along with an act of harem rebellion. These details cannot be historically confirmed nor denied and are significant in demonstrating the concept of artistic ‘re-presentation’. After presenting and analyzing Ella and Evie’s diary content concerning Constantinople, I will incorporate the writings of Baumann and Walker that reflect similar patterns of Orientalist thinking; namely, reflections on the Ottoman contrast between luxury and tawdriness, the predominant European influences within the Ottoman Empire, and lastly, Ottoman savagery and inferiority stemming from the empire’s principal religion—Islam.

Ella Pell travelled to Turkey by ship, arriving at Constantinople in mid-May of 1875 with her brother, Charles, and her sister, Evie A. Todd. The Pell siblings’ travels to Constantinople accompanied a multi-year tour of Europe and other places in the East, including Greece, Jerusalem, and Cairo. The first observation of Constantinople that Ella makes within her diary concerns the ‘deck Harem’ on the ship, which “disclosed a degree of
filth & mustiness passing belief— this portion proved (?) to the servants of the ladies who were imprisoned below in one of the staterooms, & not allowed to show themselves.”

From the offset, Ella revealed her strong conceptions about the treatment of women within a harem, evident by her assumption that the harem women were ‘imprisoned’— a sentiment Ella and her sister echo throughout their tenure in the empire. Within the streets of Constantinople, Ella’s sister, Evie, described seeing Ottoman women “in brilliant costumes with thin faces covered with the thin muslin, which did not hide, but only added to their beauty, for many of them were really beautiful…Their hands and feet (the dress is worn very short) are large and clumsy & they walk badly… poor creatures, what real slaves they are!”

The unexpected component of Evie’s description surrounds the muslin veils that she claims add to the beauty of the Ottoman women; her presumption that the women were slaves might more appropriately connote the veil as a symbol of Eastern oppression. Also, within her description Evie employs the term ‘creature’ to label the Ottoman women, a term generally serving to dehumanize the subject and reveal the perception of Eastern inferiority often found in Orientalist literature.

The siblings stayed in Pera, modern day Beyoğlu, which at the time served as the European quarters predominated by non-Muslim residents and visitors. The Pells made several tours of ‘old Constantinople’ on the southern side of the Golden Horn, in which they “descended [from Pera] to Galata, [and] crossed the ‘bridge of boats’.” The ‘bridge of boats’ likely refers to the Galata Bridge (Galata Köprüsü) over the Golden Horn in which a

---

47 Ella Pell’s Diary, 272.
48 Khol was originally used as a medical paste but evolved into a cosmetic applied to the eyes and the eyebrows. Ian Grierson, *The Eye book: Eyes and Eye Problems Explained*, (Liverpool University Press, 2000) 158.
49 Ella Pell’s Diary, 228.
49 Evie Pell’s Diary, 230.
McDaniel 23

“temporary structure was put in place in 1453, when boats lined up side by side, forming a long, makeshift walkway... [where] travelers could hop from boat to boat.” 50 Although a permanent Galata Bridge was erected in 1845, it was destroyed and rebuilt on numerous occasions, 51 likely necessitating the continued usage of the ‘bridge of boats’ into the 1870’s. During a sightseeing excursion on Sunday, May 16th, 1875, Ella travelled with Evie and Charles to the “Seraglio” of an inactive Ottoman palace. The day before travelling to the Seraglio, Evie mentions Charles’ efforts “to get the necessary 'firman' to visit the Seraglio, mosque of the St. Sophia,” 52 and also described visiting the ‘Hipodrome’ Stadium and the Obelisk of Thesodius which were “close to the Mosque of the St. Sophia.” 53 The ‘St. Sophia’ mentioned in the Pell sisters’ diaries likely refers to the Hagia Sophia, a cathedral built by Roman Emperor Constantine, later converted into a mosque in the fifteenth century. The Pells’ tour of Constantinople on Sunday the 16th began with the Hagia Sophia, which the Pells’ detailed as “an old Christian church, then turned into a mosque, & now used as an armory & museum of antiquities.” The siblings then travelled to complex of the Topkapı Palace whose primary entrance was in close proximity to the back of Hagia Sophia. 54 The Pell’s went to a the Seraglio quarters in the Topkapı Palace which they describe as “a little summer palace, very pretty, but no longer used, its late occupant (the brother of the present Sultan) having been ‘disposed of’.” 55 According to Evie’s description, “the Palace of

51 Ibid, 102.
52 Ella Pell’s Diary, 228
A firman is a type of grant or degree issued by a ruler.
53 Evie Pell’s Diary, 231.
55 Eve Pell’s Diary, 231.
the Seraglio was burnt in 1865 by the women, because the Sultan would not allow them more liberty, and they now live in the Sultans [sic] Palace ... & enjoy greater freedom.” Ella’s account is less descriptive, saying, “The harem building was more extensive but the women burnt it down to escape from their prison.” The Pell sisters described two details concerning the Ottoman palace that may or may not be partially or wholly fabricated— the planned murder of the Sultan’s brother, and the harem women’s responsibility for the palace destruction. I could not locate exact references to these events within historical texts; yet, details of general Ottoman history point to their potential plausibility.

The first questionable detail surrounding Evie and Ella’s Seraglio palace description concerns their account that the Sultan murdered his brother for ‘being in the way’, thus leaving the palace unoccupied. Nineteenth century accounts of the palace describe it as housing ‘widows of deceased Sultans’ and made no mention to a male sibling of the Sultan, who at the time of the Pell siblings’ travels was Abdulaziz I (1830-1876). The story cannot be proven a total fabrication since fratricide was historically employed within Ottoman succession; however, this practice was largely abandoned towards the seventeenth century as succession moved to the oldest male. Beginning with ascension of Sultan Selim I (1512-1520), “in the race of open succession… fratricide was a legitimate rule of the game, [yet] in the eighteenth century… upon the death of a sultan, the eldest male member of the Ottoman family was seated on the throne.” The stability of succession in eighteenth century Ottoman politics makes the Pell sisters’ account of the Sultan’s murdered brother historically unlikely,
yet the Pells’ account maintains an appropriate place amongst romanticized visions of the violent and oppressive Orient.

The second questionable detail of the Pell sisters’ account rested upon the destruction of the Seraglio Palace by the harem women as a method of acquiring increased freedoms. Due to a multitude of factors, namely narrow streets, condensed houses composed of wood, and a lack of water, Constantinople witnessed a devastating pattern of fire destruction from the ‘first period fires’ of the sixteenth century well towards the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1920’s.61 In 1865, Constantinople experienced astounding destruction from fires particularly in the areas surrounding the Hagia Sophia and Topkapı Palace. The Istanbul Fire Brigade estimates that in 1865, 1007 buildings were destroyed in the Constantinople district of Hoçapaşa, with another 1903 buildings devastated in the district of Kumkapı; however, the Fire Brigade’s documentation of historical fires in Constantinople makes no mention of a fire damaging the Topkapı Palace in 1865.62 The only instance resembling the 1865 Seraglio fire accounts of Ella and Evie are that of Hürrem Sultan, known in the West as Rolexana. Hürrem was a Polish woman born as Alexandra Lisowska, who was kidnapped by a group of Tartars and eventually became part of the Sultan Süleyman’s harem in the sixteenth century.63 Hürrem married Süleyman in 1543; however, the couple did not live in the same palace until Hürrem’s residence, the Old Palace, burned down. The destruction of the Old Palace necessitated Hürrem’s relocation to the Topkapi Palace, where Süleyman resided. There is some speculation surrounding this incident positing that Hürrem intentionally destroyed the

---

62 Ibid.
Mary Walker makes a note on page 61 of her book Eastern Life and Scenery (1886), referencing “the ‘burnt quarter,’ destroyed by the great fire, which, in 1865, swept all before it, from the water-edge of the Golden Horn, right through the city, to the water-edge of the Sea of Marmora, on the other side.”
Old Palace in order to place herself closer to the Sultan, a better political position to insert her influence over Ottoman bureaucracy and to ensure her son’s succession as Sultan. The Pell sisters potentially had access to the speculatory literature surrounding Rolexana’s tenure as Sultana, for instance Richard Knolles’ *Generall Historie of the Turks* (1603), which labeled her “a witch and an unscrupulous social climber.”\(^{64}\) Although certain accounts of Rolexana identified her as the responsible party in a palace’s destruction, this potential incident occurred in the sixteenth not nineteenth century, and the speculated motive was Hürrem’s political motivation rather than a cleave for increased freedom. The details within the Pell sisters’ description of the seraglio palace history are likely gleaned from variety of sources: general Western conceptions of oppressive Ottoman hegemony and female imprisonment, along with dates or facts learned within tours of Constantinople, that when combined ‘re-present’ an incident within Ottoman history that better represents the account with more ‘genuine’ Ottoman authenticity.

I will show that along with their historical re-presentation of Ottoman history, Ella and Evie also make observations of Ottoman livelihood that effectively assimilated their writings into the Orientalist collective of their European contemporaries. The day before their visit to the Hagia Sophia and Topkapı Palace, the Pell siblings travelled to the Sultan’s Palace, by riding “through paved, tolerably wide, modern looking streets… [similar to] some of the common streets of London, & as most of the people wore European costumes the effect was not incongruous.”\(^{65}\) In this way, Ella viewed a trend commented on by many artists that directly witnessed the Orient—the increased ‘Londonization’ of the Ottoman scenery and people, who were trading in their ‘Orientalness’ to don European costumes.

---

\(^{65}\) Ella Pell’s Diary, 273.
Although not in Constantinople, Baumann made a similar observation of Ottoman Egypt, specifically in the city of “Cairo, the Khedive’s place of residence, and the metropolis of Egypt, [which] looked entirely European apart from the dark people and the occasional orient-style house… One could think for a moment one was in London.”66 The European influences within Constantinople and Cairo arose from distinct circumstances in social planning. Within Cairo in the 1870’s, the Khedive Ismail was intent on modernizing the European quarter of Cairo based on a Parisian model; something he accomplished by leaving the “old city intact, adding straight streets, parks, gas lighting and piped water to a new district near the Nile.”67 By the late 1860’s, Cairo had two contrasting sections, the ‘old city’ or ‘real Cairo’, left to its original Eastern ‘authenticity’, and the ‘European Cairo’, complete with the makings of a European capital. Europeanization came a bit more organically to Constantinople, the city that necessarily ‘rose from the ashes’ of great fires with, as Evie Pell describes, “very little of the oriental character, even in the oldest part, for it has been burnt down & rebuilt so often, that now the streets are broad & the homes are quite European in character.”68 The European character of the homes within Constantinople appeared in response to the highly flammable character of wood, the primary building material of homes built before the mid-19th century. After the great fires of 1865, the usage of wood in building the neighborhoods of Constantinople was supplanted with that of stone in an effort to fireproof the areas previously plagued by fires of massive scope.69 The new stone buildings

68 Evie Pell’s Diary, 236.
of Constantinople strongly mirrored those of London, a city that had replaced wooden structures with brick and stone buildings following the Great Fire of London in 1556.\(^{70}\)

Beyond the Europeanization of Ottoman townscapes, Ottoman citizens also conformed to the trend of increasing Westernization, especially in styles of dress, which each artist notes in their travel literature. Before departing Constantinople, Ella describes general observations concerning Ottoman society, noting that the brilliantly colored costumes seen on the Ottoman women with muslin veils were “rapidly giving place to the stiff European dress.”\(^{71}\) The shift of Ottoman women preferring European dress over their native costumes caused great frustrations for many European artists that wanted their subjects to model garments of the exotic ‘other’, rather than present familiarity that would potentially upset the East-West divide. Mary Walker had great frustrations as her Oriental models preferred to wear European clothing for their sittings, for which Walker believed “the ease, the grace, the dazzling magnificence of the East [was] lost and dimmed by a painful striving after Western fashions.”\(^{72}\) Walker described an instance in which she was to paint the portrait of ‘the Sultana’— a female member of the Sultan’s family, usually in reference to a wife, and was dismayed with what the Sultana chose to wear in the piece:

> The costume chosen for the important occasion was deplorable; no line of Oriental grace, or even of splendour, in the dress. She had robes stiff with gems, draperies of fairy tissue, yet she stood for her portrait in a dress of the poorest French silk, because it was "moda" 'a la franca." It was a dead unlovely white, the upper part made like a European lady's ball-dress, while from the waist downwards it was fashioned into the orthodox antary and schalwars. The jewels were splendid, but their effect was utterly destroyed by the hard white, on which it was simply impossible to make the diamonds sparkle; for there were diamonds also, enough to purchase a principality.\(^{73}\)


\(^{71}\) Evie Pell’s Diary, 236.

\(^{72}\) Walker, *Eastern Life and Scenery*, 16.

The dress worn by the Sultana strongly exemplified the Eastern and Western influences within the Ottoman harems of the 19th century, with the top half of the dress resembling a European ball gown, and the bottom half resembling Eastern garments: the antary (waistcoat or overdress made close to the shape), as well as the shalwar (loose, drawstring waist pants). Walker's frustration is strongly emblematic of the Orientalist approach to art—wanting subjects to appear in a way that matches the engrained perceptions of Eastern 'authenticity'; authenticity that should remain wholly isolationist as to maintain the 'dazzling magnificence' of this area so unlike the West.

Apart from the mixture of Eastern and Western styles, Walker expressed another frustration with an aspect of the Sultana’s dress— the presence of precious jewels on the ‘poorest French silk’. Along the same lines of Walker’s observation towards this mixture of cheapness and extravagance, the Pell sisters made similar comments within their diary entries on the Seraglio Palace. Upon first seeing the harem of the Topkapi Palace, Ella described the harem quarters “[as] divided up into courts & pretty gardens, but the buildings are a miserable mixture of cheap stucco & rare marbles!” Evie presented a very similar description of the harem quarters, which she said contained “numerous little buildings…[that] were all common white washed looking affairs, as indeed, almost everything Turkish is- a strange mixture of real elegance & imitation.” These accounts of the Ottoman harem, including the European/Ottoman hybridity of dress and the mixture of luxury and cheapness

Fanny Davis, The Ottoman Lady: A Social History from 1718 to 1918, (Praeger, 1986) 193.
Elisabeth Baumann’s primary model, the Princess Nazili Hanum, modeled a very similar outfit to the one of the Sultana, consisting of “a black dress in silk grenadine, embroidered with colored silk flowers that only just hid the wide harem pantaloons that had apparently modified the Paris cut of her dress.” Mary Roberts, Intimate Outsiders, 131.
75 Ella Pell’s Diary, 280.
76 Evie Pell’s Diary, 232.
set these female artists apart from the general Orientalist collective. The nineteenth century norm of Orientalist harem art detailed superseding luxury without acknowledgment towards more tawdry aspects of harem space, as well portrayed the more superficially ‘Oriental’ characteristics of the harem without the inclusion of Western influences clearly present in historical accounts.

Although the female Orientalist collective is set apart by the nature of their internal harem voyeurism, there is a strong commonality between the female witnesses of the harem along with their male contemporaries in the prevailing disdain towards Islam. Even after witnessing first-hand the realities of the harem—a social institution composed of Muslim women that is existent upon a marital allowance within Sharia law—each of these artists continued to hold the same perceptions of Islam as a primitive, barbaric, and inferior religion. After a lengthy period in Constantinople, Walker observed “all ‘civilised’ Oriental families taking kindly to our Western customs… but even the most Europeanised amongst them return, during the month of Ramazan, to the primitive habits of their ancestors, which they regard as more orthodox.”

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is the holiest time of the year in which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, and often engage in increased forms of Islamic worship: extra prayers, increased Qur’an reading/recitation, further charitable donations, etc. Walker feels these displays of Islamic religiosity are enough to eradicate the civilization of Western customs amongst Muslims reverting back to Islamic primitivism.

Much like Walker’s comment, Evie Pell in her final observations of Constantinople evinces Islamic inferiority by describing, “The location is superb, & it is astonishing that the Turks have been permitted to keep possession of it so long— but then, christian protestant

---

77 Walker, Eastern Life and Scenery, 257.
England sustains this miserable Mahommitan power!"⁷⁸ Constantinople was initially founded by Constantine as the capital of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, where the city remained Christian until falling to the Turkish Sultan Mehmed II in the fifteenth century. Evie contemplated why the ‘Mahomittan’ (Islamic) power was able to maintain control of Constantinople against Christian England, but she ultimately qualified England as having indirect control of the Ottoman city. In the eighteenth century, the Ottoman bureaucracy was borrowing large sums of money from European powers, and by 1875, “the nominal public debt reached £200 million.”⁷⁹ Even though Constantinople was physically controlled by the Muslim Ottomans, it was ‘sustained’ by Christian Europeans, which Evie demonstrated is a further source of Western superiority and domination over the East.

The last of the accounts concerning the Ottoman Empire and its Islamic persuasion is a statement by Elisabeth Baumann in her book Brogede Rejsebilleder, in which she posited, “In Turkey, barbarism sticks out its head amidst colourful, golden decorations. The adventures of A Thousand and One Nights emerge from lanes and streets, hid behind the harem gates, in the sacred spaces of the mosques.”⁸⁰ This quotation strongly exemplifies Orientalist thinking about the East: where savagery is masked by the ‘golden decorations’ comprising the superseding Eastern luxury; where Orientals conform to the accounts in One Thousand and One Nights that fuel Orientalist perceptions; where the mosques and harems serve as shelters for Muslim barbarians. It seems the religious nature of the Ottoman Empire, more than any other characteristic, fueled Orientalist perceptions of the East. An Ottoman

---

⁷⁸ Evie Pell’s Diary, 236.
woman wearing European clothing was still Muslim, a characteristic ensuring her primitivism over any potential ‘civilized’ Western qualities.

The aforementioned analyses of travel literature demonstrate the Orientalist tendency to ‘re-present’ Ottoman history, along with the overlapping views concerning Ottoman society in the Orientalist female collective. Although the women of the Orientalist collective present similar perspectives of Ottoman society in their travel literature, specific details in their artwork diverge which prove the complexities of Orientalist representation, as I will show in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: CANVASES BEHIND THE HAREM CURTAIN

The Orientalist perception of the East inserted itself in much of nineteenth century Western art, particularly in harem depictions. Although Orientalist thought had collective theories concerning the Orient, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, no two Orientalists depicted the harem in exactly the same terms. The discrepancies of these harem portrayals highlight the second aspect of Orientalism— the Orientalist individuality. The non-monolithic nature of harem-related Orientalist expression is revealed in the paintings and illustrations of the female artists highlighted within this essay, all of whom, excluding the Pell sisters, created artwork concerning Ottoman harems. Within this chapter, I will present two paintings each from Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann, Henriette Browne, and Mary Walker. I will focus mainly on three components of each painting: people, objects/decorations, and the general space, analyzing details of each piece in order to discern discrepancies of each portrait in comparison: a) to the Western vision of the Orient, b) the more historically ‘accurate’ Ottoman space, and c) the paintings and illustrations of the other female artists. The discrepancies will demonstrate the independence in Orientalist depiction in all ranges of detailing both bold and minute.

Elisabeth Baumann created two overtly Orientalist paintings upon returning from her travels to the East. The date of creation for Baumann’s first portrait *The Odalisque* (Figure 4) is unknown; yet, given the subject matter, comfortable assumption dates the painting sometime in the 1870’s. *The Odalisque* portrays a young woman with prominent facial features, draped from the waist down in patterned fabric. Her hair falls down her bare breasts in tight braids as she gazes at herself in a mirror with a soft smile. The inlaid table to the right of the Odalisque holds several pieces of jewelry, a small box of matches, and a cigarette in a
Figure 4:

Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (Polish, 1881)

*The Odalisque*, n.d.
Oil on canvas, 99 x 74.2 cm.
holder lying on an ashtray. This painting of an odalisque figure is largely reflective of the Orientalist paintings done by eighteenth century males in that the woman is nearly nude, apart from fabric draping on her lap and around her shoulders. Unlike other odalisque portrayals however, the woman’s features are strong and defined, with her shoulders and arms very broad, almost masculine, unlike those of her male contemporaries that presented Eastern women as frail and feeble. This odalisque representation is also unlike those of her male contemporaries in that the woman is looking into a mirror, almost connoting her beauty to be for herself and not for the male eyes, as seen in Rochegrosse’s *The Slave and the Lion*.

The second of Baumann’s harem pieces features a young Ottoman princess who so captivated Baumann that artist called the princess “the start of my Oriental Dreams.” Elisabeth Baumann met the Princess Nazili Hanum when she was fifteen years old and unmarried. Baumann was “completely enchanted by the young Egyptian princess and immediately resolved to paint her portrait.” During her travels in Egypt and Istanbul, Baumann had visited other harems, yet no woman had captured the artist’s attention quite like Princess Nazili. Much to her dismay, Baumann was observing the Ottoman harem at a time of increased Westernization when harem women were becoming drawn to Western fashion. This was a point of frustration for harem painters like Baumann and Mary Walker who wanted to depict the harem in its most authentic ‘costume’. Princess Nazili spoke English and French and had a European education, yet her grandest appeal was that her “European upbringing, was however not enough to utterly overshadow the Turkish side of

the girl… so pure and at the same time so fervent… [although] brought up in a harem.”

In total, Princess Nazili sat for three paintings between 1869-1870: one painting with Nazili in a mix of European and Oriental fashions, another with Nazili’s “hair let down, her eyes turned up just like an angel” and lastly with the princess in more ‘appropriate’ Ottoman dress. The East-West hybrid portrait was given to the Princess of Wales (although Baumann would later acquire the portrait), and the angelic piece was presented to Princess Nazili. The perhaps superficially Ottoman portrait was kept by Jerichau-Baumann, later to be the foundation for her fantasy harem piece.

The Egyptian princess made a captivating sitter since she was a strong blend of Oriental and European characteristics, trapped in an inescapable circumstance, which Baumann described as, “a genuine pearl hidden between the hard, tightly closed leaves of the maternal shell.” This maternal shell caused endless frustrations for Orientalist female harem painters, since the artists initially had to gain the harem’s trust— a difficult feat in and of itself. The pieces produced from such infiltration could then only be viewed by the harem women, “hidden from the gaze even of the men who perform the rough work of the house.”

Despite the constrictions against public exposure for women in the Ottoman harem, Baumann took two portraits of the Egyptian princess back to Europe, where she displayed them at the New Bond Street Gallery in 1871, unbeknownst to Nazili and her devout Muslim family. Baumann’s exposition of such closely guarded artwork presented a moral quandary since “the portraits were presented as private gifts to Nazili’s two friends… rather than as

---

83 Ibid, 52.
84 The whereabouts of these portraits are unknown. Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 136.
86 Ibid, 51.
objects intended for public presentation.” As Nazili Hanum’s guest in the Ottoman Empire, Baumann was clearly involved in the life of the young princess, detailing much of the girl’s complexities in her Ottoman identity and European upbringing; yet, once in Europe, Baumann distanced herself from her artistic inspiration, a distance that led Baumann to depict Nazili as a hyperbole of the odalisque figure, a princess perfectly fitting into the Orientalist fantasy of harem women.

In the mid-1870’s, Elisabeth Baumann displayed a painting after her return to Europe that would further solidify the distance between the artist and her former sitter. The Princess (Figure 5) Nazili Hanum was exhibited in 1875, and this portrait was a far step away from those done of Nazili just five years earlier. In this overt fantasy harem piece, Nazili is lying down in an open and alluring position with transparent cloth clinging to her visible breasts. She lounges while petting a monkey, “a traditional sex symbol,” and also one that represents the exoticism of the Orient. The pet monkey also has a gold bracelet on its arm, serving to highlight the licentiousness of the harem in which even animals wear special ornaments. A servant is poised in the background, holding long stemmed flowers in a casual hand. Two small cups and a coffee pitcher lie on a gold tray to her right and she is delicately holding a cigarette with an outstretched arm. These details give the appearance that she is in the presence of another individual. There are two coffee cups instead of one, rather bizarre if she is drinking the coffee alone. She is also holding the cigarette with the embers facing inward, as if holding it for an individual just outside of the frame, while a second cigarette rests on the side of the coffee tray.

---

88 Beaulieu and Roberts. Orientalism's Interlocutors. 137.
89 Keuhn, “Exotic Harem Paintings,” 52.
Figure 5:

Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (Polish, 1881)

*The Princess Nazili Hanum*, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 132 x 158 cm.
Certain elements of the painting reflect Baumann’s real-life encounters with Nazili and her residence, while other elements contain strong Orientalist insertions. The lavishness of the surroundings within *The Princess Nazili Hanum* seems to compare to Nazili’s harem quarters: “The entire second story was dedicated to her use… She had fifteen female slaves at her command and regularly entertained in her vast suite of rooms… appointed in a European style with crystal chandeliers, [and] carved chairs.”90 Upon first entering Nazili’s quarters, Baumann observed, “a low, richly-inlaid table, [where there] stood one of the most valuable Sèvres vases [she had] ever seen — again a blend of Oriental and Parisian luxury.91 Within *The Princess Nazili Hanum*, a vase rests on a low, inlaid table; yet, this vase reflects Ottoman rather than Parisian style. Items of European influence within Nazili’s quarters were removed from the painting and replaced with those of Ottoman design.

*The Princess Nazili Hanum* depicts the East-West hybridity of the Egyptian princess, similar to one of Baumann’s earlier paintings, yet in a much more sexualized manner. A light glows on Nazili’s fair skin, a deep contrast to the elements surrounding her: the black cloth that drapes the room and the dark-skinned servant, which emphasize the princess’s ‘whiteness’.92 Her general exotic and sexual essence exudes that of a typical Oriental odalisque, yet she has white skin that “she shares with her Western spectators… whose voyeuristic gaze she clearly does not mind.”93 Nazili shares the skin color of her European viewers; yet, Baumann, within the portrait, altered various characteristics of Nazili in order to Ottomanize the young princess. Upon her first visit to the harem of Mustafa Fazil Paşa, Baumann described Nazili’s “almond-shaped, black-lashed eyes [that] were light blue…”

91 Ibid, 131.
93 Ibid, 53.
[and] beautifully cared-for hazelnut-blonde hair;” however, *The Princess Nazili Hanum* features Nazili with dark brown hair and jet black eyes.\textsuperscript{94} Although Nazili had blue eyes, and blond hair, characteristics generally associated with Europeans, Baumann neglected to include them within her visual portrayal of Nazili, in order to appeal to the Orientalist sentiment of her European audience. Along with her Western appearance, Nazili dressed in such a way that “the influence of Parisian fashion was clearly traced.”\textsuperscript{95} Baumann vividly described Nazili’s attire upon their first meeting, in which Nazili wore “a black dress in silk grenadine, embroidered with coloured silk flowers that only just hid the wide harem pantaloons… Her tasteful, light turban, was ornamented with three yellow feathers and her long, black, silk gauze veil was sewn through with gold and multi-coloured silks.”\textsuperscript{96} Within Baumann’s written description, Nazili donned a turban and veil, both of which are accessories strongly engrained in Islamic and Ottoman tradition. Nazili also wore harem pants nearly covered by a long dress, maintaining the standard of modesty expected amongst harem women. In the painting; however, Baumann replaced the aforementioned components of Nazili’s dress with more sexualized articles. The long dress became a colorful robe, fully open in the front. A decorated headband replaced the head coverings with Islamic significance. The black, silk gauze previously veiling Nazili’s face was morphed into white gauze translucently veiling Nazili’s breasts. The harem pants remained in the painting while Nazili’s other garments ensured her total exposure. Nazili was a clear Ottoman-European hybrid; yet, within *The Princess Nazili Hanum*, Baumann supplanted Nazili’s European possessions, clothing, and physical features, with those more appropriate for the maintained European perception concerning the Ottoman harem. In this way, Baumann converted Nazili

\textsuperscript{94} Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 131.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid, 131.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid, 131.
from a modest, well-educated harem woman strongly exposed to Westernization, into a sexualized young girl trapped by the savagery of polygyny. This conversion effectively maintained the established voyeurism of the Western eyes looking towards an Eastern subject whose dress and surroundings hint towards an exotic, however trite, simplicity.

Perhaps the most reliable comparison of harem artwork comes from that of Mary Walker and Henriette Browne, since these women sat side-by-side and witnessed the same harem interior. Henriette Browne’s *Une Joueuse de Flute* (Figure 6) is an oil painting featuring young women congregated in what would “have been the dance and music classrooms.” Browne picked this subject no doubt due to Walker’s influence, where Walker describes these “class-rooms, in which the girls were being trained in music and dancing, and where the most effective, because unconscious, ‘subjects’ were to be found.” As the girl in the center of the piece plays the flute, the other women sit idly by with bored expressions. The women of this harem are wearing long dresses and are posed in unalluring postures, either slouching, or with arms crossed over their chest. Two women sit fully veiled, even though they are safely within the harem quarters, a detail of that portrays the harem in an overly conservative manner. Veils were used to shield Ottoman women from the eyes of men, making them unnecessary within a harem interior. The walls are relatively bare except for a tapestry containing Arabic calligraphy and a curtain against the back wall. The color scheme of the portrait is unknown since the whereabouts of the painting cannot be traced.

The setting of Browne’s second harem painting, *Une Visite* (Figure 7), is a large harem space where women are socializing; with three recently arrived visitors indicated by the veils they continue to wear over their faces. Various women line the walls while seated

---

97 Ibid, 39.
98 *Mary Adelaide Walker, Eastern Life and Scenery*, 326.
Figure 6:

Henriette Browne (French, 1901)

Une Joueuse de flute (intérieur de harem, Constantinople, 1860), A Flute Player (Harem Interior; Constantinople, 1860), 1861.

Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.
Figure 7:

Henriette Browne (French, 1901)

Une Visite (intérieur de harem, Constantinople, 1860), A Visit (Harem Interior, Constantinople, 1860), 1861.
Oil on Canvas, 86 x 114cm.
on divan, where others choose to meet towards the center of the room. A young girl dressed in gold is clinging to the arm of her mother, a detail potentially meant to affirm the harem’s social function based in familial relations rather than operative in an entirely sexualized manner. This young girl is also the only figure within the painting that is looking directly at the artist, preventing the painting from being wholly voyeuristic. Interestingly, the woman to the far left of the composition stands holding a cigarette, with smoke billowing from her lips. A cigarette can be seen in both Browne’s Une Visite and Baumann’s The Princess Nazili Nanum, yet Browne intends the harem woman as the smoker rather than her holding the cigarette for another, most likely male, individual. Also corollary to Baumann’s The Princess Nazili Nanum, a small inlaid table to the right of the woman smoking holds an Ottoman coffee pitcher. Browne displays a contrast with the lightness of the center, where the majority of women are located, against the shadows of the periphery where there seems to be a mysterious presence gathering attention on the far right side of the representation.

Contrastive to Baumann’s paintings, the general harem space has a much larger emphasis within Browne’s harem depiction. The minimalist nature of the painting emphasizes the architectural details, which are out of place in the grand harem interior set in Constantinople. The arches on the far right are pointed horseshoe arches, “a characteristic element of Islamic architecture,” predominantly seen in mosques of Spain and North Africa. Horseshoe arches, even in mosques, were not widely used in Constantinople, and particularly not in the architecture of Ottoman harem quarters. Browne used artistic license and drew from her preferred perception of the harem space rather than Ottoman reality, a perception that is

---

perhaps overly Islamic, with her inclusion of fully veiled women and Islamic mosque architecture in harem quarters, where these components were unlikely to be found.

The desexualized natures of *Une Visite* and *Une Joueuse de Flute* brought domestic and humanistic qualities to harem life, focusing on the interactions of harem women, rather than portraying them as sexual objects of male desire. Although Browne created more subtle representations of the institution as opposed to perpetuating the widely accepted sexualized fantasy, Browne’s artwork does remain innately Orientalist. In keeping with the Orientalist trend, Browne maintains the sense of harem mystery in her artwork in two main ways. Firstly, both of Browne’s harem depictions contain women having just arrived from the outside, so they are fully veiled to preserve some Oriental exoticism within the subdued pieces. Secondly, although her portraits appear to be a simple gathering of chaste women, the viewer is denied an opportunity to peek behind the curtain of *Une Joueuse de Flute* or peer into the shadows of *Une Visite*. These barriers of cloth and darkness serve as reminders that although the Ottoman harem may appear mundane, it still possesses secrets that neither the audience, nor the artist herself are able to access. While Browne’s paintings are very unlike the odalisque figures of Baumann’s harem depictions, her work still maintains the Western assertions upon the Orient typical of travellers in the nineteenth century.

Mary Walker created numerous works concerning harem interiors during her tenure in Constantinople; however, as previously mentioned, one painting and various illustrations are all that is left of her collection. Lady Hornby’s book of memoirs, *Constantinople During the Crimean War*, contains two of Walker’s harem illustrations with some comparative and contrastive elements to those paintings mentioned by Henriette Browne and Elisabeth Baumann. The first of Walker’s illustrations in Lady Hornby’s book (Figure 8) features three
Figure 9:

Mary Adelaide Walker (British, 1904)

Illustration on page 244 from Emilia Hornby, *Constantinople During the Crimean War* (London: Richard Bentley, 1863).
servants are attending to three women that are preparing to leave the harem quarters. The women are the primary focus of the piece with only a single pair of Ottoman slippers and a staircase in the background, unlike Baumann’s harem depictions that include many objects, and Browne’s Une Visite which focuses more on the harem space. Corollary to Browne’s pieces, women within Walker’s illustration are fully veiled, as they intend to leave the harem evident by the woman ascending the staircase on the left side of the piece.

In Walker’s second illustration (Figure 9), three women are lounging in a harem interior overlooking Constantinople. The large windows incorporated within the illustration provide natural light that illuminates the entire painting, leaving no mysterious shadows as in Une Visite or the Princess Nazili Hanim. These windows also give the appearance of the harem remaining open to the outside world, in a way still secluded from the eyes of non-mahram (forbidden) individuals, much unlike the dark, dungeon-esque seclusive aspects of Baumann’s harem piece. Two women sit on divan, while a servant kneels by a large stone basin. It is difficult to tell precisely what instrument the servant is holding, as well as the exact contents of the basin; however, an inference can be made from comments within Lady Hornby and Walker’s memoirs towards the basin containing lit charcoal. Hornby speaks of witnessing raised fireplaces, “supplying charcoal to light the pipes,”\(^{101}\) and Walker observes a similar instance while visiting a harem, in which the harem women would “would group themselves round the mangal (the brazier), some on low cushions, others on the ground, warming their hands over the smouldering charcoal, smoking cigarettes, and talking.”\(^{102}\) Tobacco again plays a role in the harem painting; however, Walker includes a hookah, a

\(^{101}\) Mrs. Edmund Hornby, In and Around Stamboul, (Philedalphia: J Challen & son, 1858) 246.
\(^{102}\) Walker, Eastern life and Scenery, 103.
Figure 9:

Mary Adelaide Walker (British, 1904)

Illustration on page 321 from Emilia Hornby, *Constantinople During the Crimean War* (London: Richard Bentley, 1863).
water pipe originated within the Saffavid Empire and popular within the Ottoman Empire, as well as a çubuk, a long Ottoman pipe. Both of these smoking instruments are authentic to either Ottoman or Middle Eastern history/usage, as opposed to the more Westernized cigarettes included in the paintings of Browne and Baumann. Both Walker’s illustration and Browne’s painting maintain the guise of Islamic surroundings, not only through displaying veiled women, but also by incorporating strongly Islamic symbols in subtle ways. In Browne’s Une Joueuse de Flute, Islamic calligraphy hangs on the wall towards the far left corner, while Walker’s illustration reveals the dome and minaret of a mosque in the distant background. Islamic symbolism is left out of the more odalisque-oriented pieces of Baumann. Baumann also portrays the harem in more solitary terms, focusing on an individual woman, while Browne and Walker present harem women in groups to emphasize social interaction, over the more sexualized components of this Ottoman institution.

The different renderings of the three aforementioned artists relate to the general phenomena of Orientalism described by Timothy Mitchell: “The ‘East itself’ is not a place, despite the exhibition’s promise, but a further series of representations, each one reannouncing the reality of the Orient but doing no more than referring backwards and forwards to all the others.”¹⁰³ In this way, each presentation of the Orient is altered by a set of influences including previous Orientalist artistry, and as I will argue further, social situations in the form of class placement and societal acceptance that prove significant to each artists’ harem re-presentations.

¹⁰³ Timothy Mitchell, Colonising Egypt, 31.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

I presented examples of the overlapping observations of artists within the female Orientalist collective and details of how their Orientalist portrayals differ, but have not yet explained why there are so many variances of Orientalist conformity and non-conformity. The answer lies in an examination of these female artists’ social circumstances, which reveals two differences that prove significant to the artists’ Orientalist conformity—financial security and recognition in the artists’ country of residence. To elaborate on this point I will present in chronological order each artist’s biographical circumstances in relation to the degree of Orientalist conformity within their artistic expression.

Mary Walker lived in Constantinople for three decades making her Orientalist circumstance different from the other artists as she permanently resided in the East, whereas the others visited the East for short durations before returning back to their respective Western homes. Walker was well known for her documentary style of artistry, yet her location of residence gave her very little freedom of artist expression. Painting in an overtly Orientalist fashion may have caused disfavor amongst her Eastern audience and caused her to lose clientele. Had she been quite wealthy, losing clientele may not have been an issue; however, she was a self-employed woman who relied on painting and teaching as her main sources of income. Although Walker’s paintings largely drew from her observations of harem interiors, she wrote about her frustrations with the increasing Ottoman preference for Western fashions, a frustration perhaps caused by her inability to exhibit anything other than the Ottoman ‘nature’ her Eastern audience would have accepted.

Henriette Browne was born in Paris, yet she trained under a prominent Englishman
causing her artwork to display a mix of French and English artistry. Although she painted with a blend of French and English techniques, Browne was fully accepted by French society, where her pieces “had popular appeal, fetched high prices and attracted influential patrons.” Browne inherited societal prestige from her father, the Comte de Bouteiller, and also the political position of her diplomat husband, enabling her to enjoy acceptance from Parisian audiences that paid well for her portraits and did not reject her subdued and feminist style or English training. Her general acceptance in European circles enabled her to express non-sexualized depictions of the Ottoman harem even though such restraint was precarious since Europeans generally preferred more hyperbolized Orientalist pieces. Because Browne was financially well off and did not have children to support, she was not limited to creating artwork that would turn a profit, giving her more artistic freedom.

Elisabeth Baumann lived in Denmark for more than thirty years, but penetrating Danish society as a respectable artist constantly posed a challenge for the woman trained in a German tradition. During the German-Danish War of 1841-51, Baumann was called to affirm her Danish patriotism through her work and she did her best to create “a number of folkloristic genre paintings from rural Denmark,” yet she and her husband were better suited for the greater European, rather than innately Danish audiences. As a mother of nine, Baumann was constantly strained financially and admitted that she had to make artistic compromises in order to pander to buyers’ preferences. Her life struggles created a strong a desire to succeed, financially for the benefit of her children, and artistically to improve her mercurial reputation in a country that felt she was too European to ever be considered a true

104 Gaze, Dictionary of Women Artists, 326.
105 Ibid, 326.
106 Ibid, 737.
107 Ibid, 737.
108 Ibid, 737.
Danish artist. It was her need for money and her tentative reception in Denmark that led to her fantastical harem depictions that fit all too within the Orientalist stereotype of ‘The East’.

Unlike the other artists, there is no evidence that the Pell sisters witnessed an active harem, likely due to not receiving an invitation inside harem quarters. When speaking of Henriette Browne, Mary walker described her as “a lady whose social rank, if not her worldwide reputation as an artist, might have secured her an interview with the Sultana.” As Walker emphasized, two biographical components were important to the Sultana, the responsible party concerning whether or not to allow a female artist into the harem interior: social class and reputation. First, although the Pell family was once quite affluent generations earlier, the Pell sisters were average, middle-class Americans as revealed in their diaries. Second, Ella eventually had paintings exhibited at the National Academy of Design and Paris Salon, but these pieces were exhibited several years after her returning from her travels. Her and her sister’s reputations remained largely in obscurity for the duration of their lives.

Although the social circumstance of each artist differs, all belong to the Orientalist female collective with overarching perceptions of the Orient seen amongst them. Beyond the collective however, there are visible discrepancies in their artistic approaches that reveal that just as there is no Oriental there is no Orientalist. Orientalism is personal ideology, manipulated and expressed in different ways based on social conditions, artistic training, and personal experiences. Each woman’s harem portrayal serves to not only ‘re-present’ the harem, but to reveal the form of personal Orientalism the artist embraced, as they not only re-present the Orient but also represent themselves.

109 Keuhn, “Exotic Harem Paintings.” 47.
110 Walker, Eastern Life and Scenery, 10.


*Diary of Ella Pell*, Fort Ticonderoga Thompson-Pell Research Center, 1875.

*Diary of Evie Pell*, Fort Ticonderoga Thompson-Pell Research Center, 1875.


Hornby, Mrs. Edmund. *In and Around Stamboul*. Philadelphia: J Challen & Son, 1858.


