The Equestrian Connection: 
Horse-Trading Between Britain and the Ottoman and Arab Worlds

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1. Late 17th-century Londoners bought a dark, hot, bitter brew called coffee when they spent their penny at a coffee house, but they also bought forms of sociability that were explicitly, if eclectically, modelled on those of the coffee houses of Smyrna, Aleppo, Cairo and Constantinople. ‘The Ottoman Origins of Modernity’ might make Habermas swallow hard, but, follow his arguments about the London coffee house, and that’s one place they lead.


2. There is no Creature so gentle as a Turkish Horse; nor more respectful to his Master, or the Groom that dresses him. The reason is, because they treat their Horses with great Lenity. I my self saw when I was in Pontus, passing through a part of Bithynia, called Axilos, towards Cappadocia, how indulgent the Country-men were to young Colts, and how kindly they used them soon after they were foled; they would stroke them, bring them into their Parlours, and almost to their Tables, and use them even like Children. . . . [A]nd the Grooms, that are to dress them, are as indulgent as their Masters; they frequently sleek them down with their Hands, and never use any Cudgel to bang their Sides, but in case of great Necessity. This makes their Horses great Lovers of Mankind; and they are so far from kicking, wincing, or growing untractable by this gentle usage, that you shall hardly find a masterless Horse among them.

But, alas! our Christian Grooms treat Horses at quite another rate; they never think them rightly curried, till they thunder at them with their Voice, and let their Club or Horse-whip, dwell, as it were, on their Sides. This makes some Horses even to tremble when their Keepers come into the Stable, so that they hate and fear them too: But the Turks love to have their Horses very gentle, that, at a word of Command, they may fall down on their Knees, and in this Posture receive their Riders.

Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Travels into Turkey: Containing the most accurate Account of the Turks, and Neighbouring Nations, Their Manners, Customs, Religion, Superstition, Policy, Riches, Coins, &c. The whole being a series of remarkable observations and events, interspers’d with great variety of entertaining incidents, never before printed. Translated from the Original Latin of the Learned A. G. Busbequius. With Memoirs of the Life of the Illustrious Author (London: Printed for J. Robinson; and W. Payne, 1744), 131-32. See also Edward Seymour Forster, ed., The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554-1562, Newly Translated

3.

... & with my Eyes never did I behold so delicate a Creature as was one of them, of somewhat a bright bay, two white feete, a blaze; such an head, [Eye,] eares, neck, breast, belly, buttock, Gaskins, legs, pastems, & feete in all reguards beautifull & proportion’d to admiration, spiritous & proud, nimble, making halt, turning with that sweiftnesse & in so small a compase as was incomparable, with all this so gentle & tractable, as called to mind what I remember Busbequius speaks of them; to the reproch of our Groomes in Europ who bring them up so churlishly, as makes our horse most of them to retaine so many ill habits &c: They trotted like Does, as if they did not feelete the Ground; for this first Creature was demanded 500 Ginnies, for the 2d 300, which was of a brighter bay, for the 3d 200 pound, which was browne,all of them choicely shaped, but not altogether so perfect as the first. In a word, it was judg’d by the Spectators, (among whom was the King, Prince of Denmark, the Duke of Yorke, and severall of the Court Noble persons skilled in Horses, especially Monsieur Faubert & his sonn & Prevost, Masters of the Accademie and esteemed of the best in Europe), that there were never seene any horses in these parts, to be compared with them...  


4.

Ottoman policy was consistently to install a form of discriminatory toleration based on the aman system of safe conduct; this permitted Jews and Christians of any and all denominations to continue practicing their own religions and trades so long as they accepted the authority of the Sultan, paid their taxes, obeyed local regulations, and did not cause trouble. ... Sultans viewed themselves as rulers of the whole world, not simply a limited region, and they consequently recognised no other leaders as their equals: reciprocity was not an option, submission was.

Gerald MacLean, ‘Courting the Porte’, paper delivered at University of York, 15 November 2006, and Nottingham Trent University, 5 December 2006; citing Palmira Brummett [see below], and A. Nuri Yurdusev, ed., ‘The Ottoman Attitude toward Diplomacy’, Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or Unconventional? (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 5-35; see esp. 15-20.

5.

on the practice of el öpmek (paying homage, kissing the Sultan’s hand)

Kiss, n. 1) a drink; 2) a blow
Kiss, v. 1) to flatter; Cf. kiss up
   2) to strike (esp. a baseball) hard; to wallop
Kiss goodbye: to resign oneself to the loss of . . . usually used sarcastically
Kiss off, v.
   1) a. to reject, spurn, dismiss
      b. to murder
      c. to dispose of casually, slight, disregard, ignore
   2) to go away and stop giving annoyance; depart -- usually used imperatively
Kiss up, v. to curry favour, ingratiate oneself

There is, of course, an intimate connection between affection and submission, as these examples of American slang indicate. . .  
[T]he association of the kiss with acts of submission, ingratiation, self-promotion, and dismissal is unmistakeable. Our own use of the word suggests an enduring connection between the kisses of the twenty-first century and the ritual acts and iconography of the Early Modern era. . .

There was never a full expectation of obedience, and the parameters . . . could be modified by factors such as the degree of intimacy (or affection) between the parties, the potential rewards of insubordination, and the calculations of the level of violence that each party could and could not mobilize or tolerate.