



حبر أبيض
WHITE INK



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A precious historical testimony from inside the Sultan's Palace

“The diary of Khairuddin Agha”

This is a series of memories of "Khairuddin Agha", the chief of the aghas in the palace of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, which can be considered as his private diary with his observations. The number of its pages does not exceed approximately fifty pages. In it, he dealt with situations from the life he lived during his long journey with slavery until he reached the rank of eunuchs' chief in the Royal Palace, and mentioned his observations inside other Royal Palaces. This diary is one of the rarest that deals with what is beyond the high walls of the Haremlik.

In fact, the diary, with its three chapters, caught my attention, in which the agha discussed his suffering and the suffering of hundreds of aghas and concubines inside the palace. He showed the reader perceptions and forms of shattering the human spirit and the violation of the rights of those slaves within the department of the harem, in addition to giving many examples of what was going on in the mysterious world of the Haremlik.

There is no doubt that it is a dark and obscure world for any historian, as most of the historians who spoke about this matter couldn't go into more detail about that closed world. This is a reason for the lack of adequate and satisfactory information because the strictness and severity imposed in dealing with the inhabitants of Haremlik had a great effect. On the other hand, there was another reason, which was secrecy, privacy, and not revealing to any creature what was going on behind those walls. Whoever violates this will be subject to flogging and severe punishment that may inevitably lead to death.

In his diary, Khairuddin agha talked about the reality of the harem department "The Haremlik" during the period he witnessed in the reign of Sultan Abdul Aziz and Sultan Abdul Hamid II. He conveyed to us some secrets that no one can know from outside the wall of the palace. For example, the great suffering that new slaves faced when they violated palace protocols in the harem department in particular, which could lead to death under the lashes of executioners mercilessly and humanely, and how young aghas were not allowed to leave the palace until they reached a prominent position in the ranks of the aghas. They were like prisoners inside the palace.

The Agha spoke of his personal experience within the Haremlik. He described how the chief of servants, upon receiving his duties, asked him to be like a deaf, dumb, and blind person. She told him that if he heard something, he should ignore it, so that if speech entered from one ear, it would come out from the other. She told him that he had to be dumb of what he hears and blind of what he sees, and he must abide by the main rules followed with all seriousness and strictness in the Haremlik, and that he must swear by the Holy Qur'an to do that.

The Agha showed the division of the ranks related to the women of the palace, starting with the wives and daughters of the Sultan. He enumerated the category of maidservants and concubines; whose number is very large. He mentioned the "Kalfa" category who are the chiefs of the Haremlik. He also mentioned the "Iqbal" category. This category is carefully selected and they are chosen from among the beautiful women of the palace, in order to be nominated to be the Sultan's beloved. The task of these women is to amuse the sultan and the inhabitants of the palace with their conversations, fun and intrigues. As for the last category, it is "Gözde" which means the one seen by the Sultan and their role is to create types of luxury and comfort for the Sultan and to entrap him in their love. If they obtain this title, they move to the ranks of the legitimate wives, especially after they give birth to children of the Sultan.

The parties that were held in the famous Ciragan Palace "Çırağan Sarayı" in honor of Sultan Abdul Aziz were among the most important observations of the Agha inside the palace, which he expressed as a manifestation of extravagance and wasting. Preparations for these parties lasted for more than a week, and many female Armenian and Roman singers, musicians and dancers were invited to them. He told us that what was happening in those parties and nights was considered as immorality and promiscuity.

In his diary, the Agha also recounted his personal experience of serving Sultan Abdul Aziz's concubine "Feriha Khanum". The Sultan loved her madly, to the point that he exiled her first lover, the officer Hasan Bey. He drove him away from the capital and sent him to Yemen. He told what he witnessed of the intrigues that were arranged against her by the women of the palace in the Haremlik. Worst of all are the shower parties that Sultan Abdul Aziz held in his palace, attended by the "Gözde" and her maidservants, who numbered more than twenty. The female musicians were playing music for the Sultan while he was bathing, and the maidservants participated through dancing and bathing in a manner similar to the legend of One Thousand and One Nights!