

# Unveiling Orientalism: Ambiguity in c18 British Discourse on Travel

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## Travel writing as medium of Differentiation

British Empire	↔	Ottoman Empire
Occident		Orient
Enlightenment		Despotism
Modernity		Tradition
Self		Other

## Travel writing and Ambiguity

ambiguous people, places and practices  
transgression, mimicry and transculturation

### Genres and Media

Travelogues,  
diaries and letters  
Oriental tales and plays  
maps, illustrations and portraits

### Observations

Eunuchs  
Castrati  
Hermaphrodites  
Hijra

## Ambiguity and Gender

**“I will not tell you what you may find  
in every author that has writ of this  
country”**

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy  
Letters* (1777)

**“They usually grow to a great  
Stature, and they have an Effeminate  
Voice, and never have any Hair grow  
on their Faces”**

Joseph Pitts, *A true and faithful Account of the Religion &  
Manners of the Mahometans* (1719)



Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in Turkish dress (n.d.)  
S. Hollyer after J. B. Wandesforde, Bildarchiv Austria



Francis Smith, Kisler Aga,  
Chief of the Black Eunuchs  
and First Keeper of the  
Serraglio  
(1763-1779)  
Yale Center for British Art

## Ambiguity and Religion

**“These people [...] declare that they  
are utterly unable to judge which  
religion is best; but to be certain of  
not entirely rejecting the Truth, they  
very prudently follow both, and go to  
the Mosque on Fridays and the  
Church on Sundays”**

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy  
Letters* (1777)