

the sound of the gong, he will be severely punished upon the decision of the village assembly.

We have made copies of this ordinance to be posted at various places so that night-wanderers will be warned and thieves and rogues will not prevail.

Duly enacted.

## The Ottoman Social Order

*Ghiselin de Busbecq*

In 1555, Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522–90), a Flemish nobleman and diplomat, visited Istanbul on the instructions of his Habsburg ruler, Ferdinand I. Busbecq was much taken by what he saw and full of praise for the Ottoman Turks. The Ottomans had just taken over large parts of Hungary from the Habsburgs, and central Europeans were in awe of Ottoman military might. Busbecq arrived at the height of the rule of Suleiman I, a skilled administrator and champion of the arts, who was known as "Suleiman the Magnificent." In this excerpt, Busbecq describes the Ottoman social order, particularly at the Ottoman court of Suleiman I.

CONSIDER: How one acquired status and rank in Ottoman society; how Busbecq compared the rules for acquiring social rank in his own society with those of the Ottomans.

The Sultan's head-quarters were crowded by numerous attendants, including many high officials. All the cavalry of the guard were there . . . , and a large number of Janisaries. In all that great assembly no single man owed his dignity to anything but his personal merits and bravery; no one is distinguished from the rest by his birth, and honour is paid to each man according to the nature of

SOURCE: tr. by Edward Seymour Forster, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 96–97.

the duty and offices which he discharges. Thus there is no struggle for precedence, every man having his place assigned to him in virtue of the function which he performs. The Sultan himself assigns to all their duties and offices, and in doing so pays no attention to wealth or the empty claims of rank, and takes no account of any influence or popularity which a candidate may possess; he only considers merit and scrutinizes the character, natural ability, and disposition of each. Thus each man is rewarded according to his deserts, and offices are filled by men capable of performing them. In Turkey every man has it in his power to make what he will of the position into which he is born and of his fortune in life. Those who hold the highest posts under the Sultan are very often the sons of shepherds and herdsmen, and, so far from being ashamed of their birth, they make it a subject of boasting, and the less they owe to their forefathers and to the accident of birth, the greater is the pride which they feel. They do not consider that good qualities can be conferred by birth or handed down by inheritance, but regard them partly as the gift of heaven and partly as the product of good training and constant toil and zeal. Just as they consider that an aptitude for the arts, such as music or mathematics or geometry, is not transmitted to a son and heir, so they hold that character is not hereditary, and that a son does not necessarily resemble his father, but his qualities are divinely infused into his bodily frame. Thus, among the Turks, dignities, offices, and administrative posts are the rewards of ability and merit; those who were dishonest, lazy, and slothful never attain to distinction, but remain in obscurity and contempt. This is why the Turks succeed in all that they attempt and are a dominating race and daily extend the bounds of their rule. Our method is very different; there is no room for merit, but everything depends on birth; considerations of which alone open the way to high official position.

## VISUAL SOURCES

### Akbar Inspecting the Construction of Fatehpur-Sikri

*Tulsi the Elder, Bandi, and Madhu the Younger*

After witnessing the death of two previous male offspring, India's Mogul ruler Akbar had his most fervent wish fulfilled when, on August 30, 1569, a son and heir apparent was born. So inspired was he that a decision was made to build a grand edifice on the site of the birth just outside a town called Sikri. This magnificent structure, a classic example of Mogul architecture, became known as Fathabad, later Fatehpur

(City of Victory), and hence the name Fatehpur-Sikri. It became the Mogul capital. Construction took place from 1571–76 and consisted of palaces, pavilions for various rituals, grand mosques, bazaar areas, gardens, and courtyards.

Akbar was himself interested in architecture and had commissioned many great building projects. This scene, painted in 1590, shows Akbar personally directing the building of the city and conferring with the stone masons while workers go about their business all around him.

CONSIDER: How people of different rank are distinguished; the role such building projects might play in a civilization.