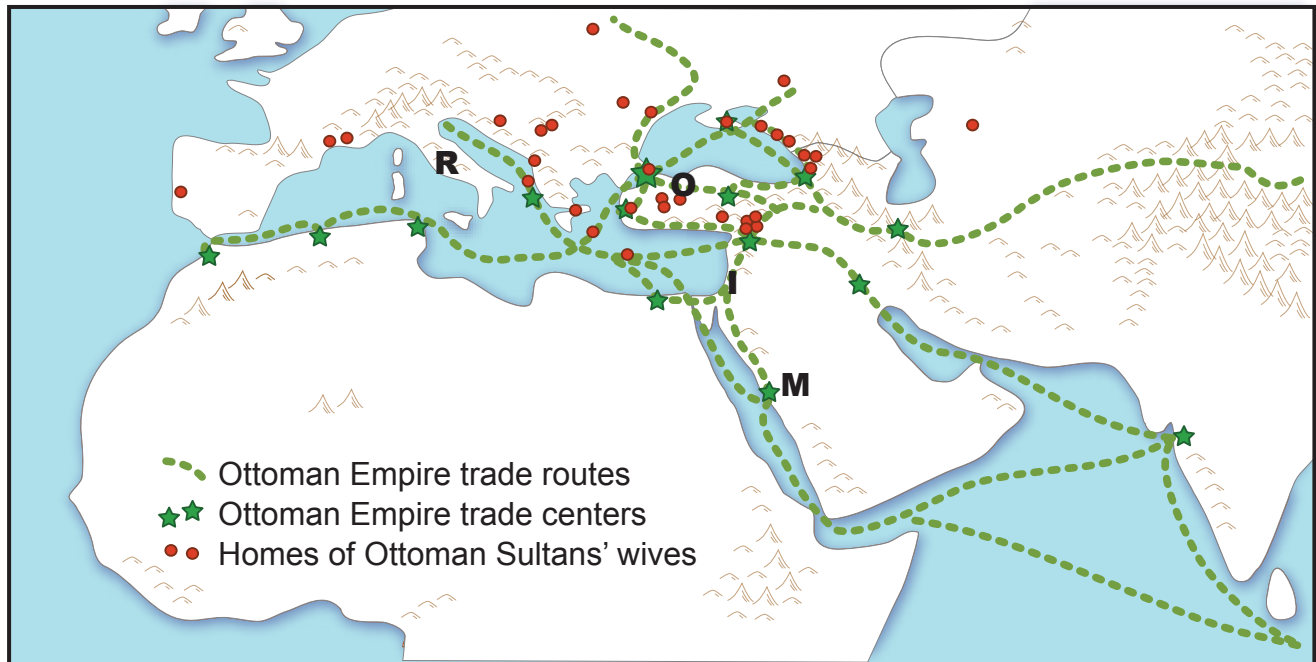


Ottoman Sultans and Their Harems



The Ottoman Empire started in Anatolia (modern Turkey), near the "O" on the map. It lasted more than 600 years, from 1299 CE to 1922 CE. In 1453, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror captured the city of Constantinople (formerly called Byzantium). Constantinople was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire; the Ottoman Turks made it their capital. It is still a major city, now known by a third name - Istanbul.

1. Put an X next to the best explanation of Constantinople's strategic importance.
 - It controls the only way to go from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.
 - It controls the best way to go from southeastern Europe to Anatolia.
 - It controls a key pass through a very long and high mountain range.(Note: We deliberately left these names off the map so that you concentrate on the strategic relationships described in these sentences.)
2. Put an X next to the best description of the trade networks at the time.
 - They were set up to carry African gold to Russia in exchange for furs.
 - They were set up to carry Chinese silk and Indian spices to the countries around the Mediterranean Sea, to be traded for gold and glass.
 - They were set up to aid the spread of Judaism, a religion that started in the tiny land of Israel (I) at the east end of the Mediterranean Sea.
3. The dots on the map show the birthplaces of 32 women who became the wives of the Ottoman sultans. Put an X next to the best description of the pattern.
 - They came from cities on the major trade routes to China.
 - They came from religious centers like Israel (I), Mecca (M), and Rome (R).
 - They came from countries the Ottomans wanted as allies or colonies.
4. In the Middle Ages, rulers often chose wives to seal alliances or trade deals. Why do you think the Ottoman rulers would choose wives from those places?

Teacher's Guide: **Ottoman sultans and their harems**

Overview: The Ottoman sultan's harem was a complicated social and political institution.

Students use maps and critical reading to explore the geographic pattern of birthplaces of Ottoman sultan's wives, and how this pattern is related to the trade networks and centers in the Ottoman Empire. They discover that the sultans often had diplomatic reasons for choosing wives from particular places

Grade: 7, 10

Related Discipline: History

GLCEs: 6G412, 7W413, 421

Time: 10-30 minutes

Background: REPEAT: The Ottoman sultan's harem was a very complicated social and political institution. It included the legal wife or Chief Consort (Haseki Sultan), other official wives (Kadinefendi), official consorts (Hanimefendi), sex slaves, other female slaves, and eunuchs (castrated men). The sultan claimed "ownership" of at least the last three groups on this simplified list. For example, he could sell these women and men, or give them to rulers or officials in other countries as part of military payments, diplomatic treaties, or trade deals.

Setup: Ask students whether they would like to be a slave, concubine, or eunuch in an Ottoman harem. On the one hand, you would eat well and enjoy many fine things. On the other, you were owned by the sultan. You could be sold or traded at any time and for practically any reason (depending on your position in a very complicated social hierarchy).

Procedure: The worksheet is self-explanatory. This activity can be used as a bridge between social studies and language arts, because it also addresses several critical-reading ELA objectives.

Answers: 1. Constantinople was located on the Bosphorus, a narrow strait that was the only way for ships to go from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Even more important, it was therefore the easiest way to go from Europe to Asia Minor (a.k.a. Anatolia, modern Turkey, and the Silk Road to China).

2. The Ottoman empire had a fortunate location as a kind of "go-between" on the trade routes that carried Chinese silk and porcelain and Indian spices and rare woods to Europe and Africa. This role brought a great deal of money into the Ottoman treasury.

3. The birthplaces of the Ottoman wives have an interesting geographic pattern. At first, they came from eastern Anatolia and the north shore of the Black Sea (parts of the Caucasian countries and Russia that are still important as summer homes of government officials and other notables). Later, after the Ottomans consolidated control over Asia Minor, the sultan's wives came from places across southern Europe, as far away as Spain and southern Poland.

4. The pattern clearly suggests that Ottoman sultans often chose wives for diplomatic reasons – they came from places to the north and west, not from the major trading centers to the south and east.

Debrief: Emphasize that rulers throughout history often chose wives or consorts for diplomatic or military reasons, to seal trade deals or claim dominance over other countries. This was especially true of the Ottoman harems, which were (as was noted earlier, but it does bear repeating) a very complicated social institution.

Vocabulary: concubine consort eunuch harem sultan social institution women's rights

Extension: Compare and contrast the Ottoman harem with its military institutions, such as the janissaries – soldiers also often came from other countries, both within and outside of the empire.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_consorts_of_the_Ottoman_sultans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuwanQyGKHw> short animation of Ottoman expansion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkEFO2T3M3Q> annotated animation of Ottoman expansion