

Inquiry Activity: Florentine or Ottoman?

This lesson plan was modified by Kelsie Eckert for classroom use from a lesson plan by Louise Forsyth available online at <https://cmes.arizona.edu>. The following sources are about women of the 14th-16th centuries in either Italy or the expanding Ottoman Empire. Read the source, then guess, is it Florentine or Ottoman?

Source A: All women and girls, whether married or not, whether betrothed or not, of whatever age, rank, and condition...who wear - or wear in future - any gold, silver, pearls, precious stones, bells, ribbons of gold or silver, or cloth of silk brocade on their bodies or head for the ornamentation of the bodies...will be required to pay each year...the sum of 50 [coins] ...exceptions to this prohibition are that every married woman may wear on her hand or hands as many as two rings and every married woman or girl who is betrothed may wear a silver belt which does not exceed fourteen ounces in weight.

Guess: _____

Source B: After diligent examination and mature deliberation, the responsible officials [have] the great desire to restrain the barbarous and irrepressible bestiality of women who...with that reprobate [morally damned] and diabolical nature, force their men, with their honeyed poison, to submit to them. But it is not in accordance with nature for women to be burdened with so many expensive ornaments, and on account of these unbearable expenses, men are avoiding matrimony.

Guess: _____

Source C: The trumpet of the lord and the voice of the highest shall call out on the day of judgment: "You who are worthy; come; and you who are unworthy, o'accursed ones, go into the eternal fire."...Natural law has ordained that the human species should multiply and that man and woman be joined together by matrimony...nothing is more displeasing to God than its violation. There are many who have failed. As a result, divine providence is disturbed and has afflicted the world with evils of wars, disorders, epidemics and other calamities and troubles. A heavy penalty must be meted out to delinquents, especially those women who continue to sin.

Guess: _____

Source D: ...the women dress themselves very richly in silk. They wear cloaks down to the ground, lined just like those of the men. They wear closed-up boots but fitting tighter on the ankle and more arched than those of the men...They are fond of black hair, and if any women by nature does not possess it, she accuses it by artificial means...They decorate their hair with small bands of ribbon and leave them spread over their shoulders and falling over their dress. Covering their hair they have a colored strip of thin silk...On the head they also have a small round cap, neat and close fitting, embroidered with satin, damask, or silk and colored.

Guess: _____



Source E: [To her husband] she replied, "I have said and will repeat: I can not want anything except what you want, and in these children is nothing of mine but the birth pangs. You are my lord and theirs, use your right over your property, and do not seek my consent. From the moment I entered your house, as I laid aside my clothes, I laid aside my wishes and feelings, and put on yours; therefore, in anything, whatever you want, I too want."

Guess: _____

Source F: Night and day immoral individuals openly consume intoxicating beverages to an excessive degree and commit all kinds of transgressions against women.

Source G: A husband who is promised a dowry by his brother-in-law that is not paid can send his wife back to her brother's house and even deny her basic necessities.

Guess: _____

Source H: Rights must not be allowed to languish. If she [a wife] does not come [to the court] in person, the legal authority must obtain a proxy for her by ordering that one be appointed.

Guess: _____

Source I: Now as a bride receiving the rich casket from that husband whom she never saw, she feels much beloved when she is so richly rewarded and she creates a noble image of him who so nobly sent, and not seeing, his love.

Guess: _____

Source J: To achieve her desire of acquiring merit in God's sight...and in genuine and sincere dedication devoid of all hypocrisy and deceit, only with the purest of intentions, she ordered [the construction of] a great many magnificent edifices of charity.

Guess: _____

Source K: She built a school...for which let God grant her fame and benevolence. Oh God, take her into the eternal Paradise.

Guess: _____

Source L: In those matters no one can rule the wills of wives except their husbands to whom God wished females to be subordinate.

Guess: _____

Source M: Women are imperfect creatures, and consequently have less dignity than men, and that they are not capable of the virtues that men are capable of... Very learned



men have written that, since nature always intends and plans to make things most perfect, she would constantly bring forth men if she could; and that when a woman is born, it is a defect or mistake of nature, and contrary to what she would wish to do...Thus, a woman can be said to be a creature produced by chance and accident. Nevertheless, since these defects in women are the fault of nature that made them so, we ought not on that account to despise them, or fail to show them the respect which is their due. But to esteem them to be more than what they are seems a manifest error.

Guess: _____

Source N: The government beefed up the authority of the ... Office of Decorum to protect and recruit foreign prostitutes, in part to turn young men away from homosexuality.

Guess: _____

Questions for Analysis

1. Use the bibliography below to check your guesses. How did you do? What did you get right? What errors did you seem to make?

2. Based on these documents, which culture appears to afford women more liberties?

3. What assumptions about women's freedoms are you basing this analysis?

4. Does it appear that the Renaissance in Europe has improved the lives of women?



Bibliography:

- Source A: Florentine Brucker, Gene. *The Society of Renaissance Florence* Harper & Row: New York, 1971, 46-47.
- Source B: Ottoman "Regulation to restrain female ornaments and dress, [1413]." *Ibid.*
- Source C: Ottoman "from the deliberations of the officials of the curfew and the convents." *Ibid.*
- Source D: Ottoman Bassano da Zara, quoted in N. M. Penzer. *The Harem: an account of the institution as it existed in the Palace of the Turkish sultans with a history of the grand Seraglio from its foundation to modern times.* Spring Books: London, 1936, p. 163-165.
- Source E: Florentine Francis Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age [Rerum senilium Libri, I-VIII], Vol. II, translated by Aldo S. Bernardo, et al.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1992, p. 663.
- Source F: Ottoman Imperial order 1585, Ankara, cited in Madeline c. Zilfi, Ed. *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern. Women in the Early Modern Era.* Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. 185.
- Source G: Florentine Alessandro Strozzi, Florentine jurist, quoted in William J. Connell, Ed. *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence.* University of California Press: Berkley, 2002, p. 99-100.
- Source H: Ottoman Ebu Suud, 16th century, quoted in Lesley Pierne, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab.* University of California Press: Berkley, 2003, p. 153.
- Source I: Florentine Giovanni Domenici, Florentine friar, quoted in Connell, *op cit.*, p. 95.
- Source J: Ottoman Lucienne Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders: The Architectural Patronage of Hadice Turban Sultan,* Ashgate 2006, p. 85.
- Source K: Ottoman Inscription, referring to Kosem Sultan. *Ibid.*, p. 89
- Source L: Florentine Antonio Roselli of Arezzo, University of Florence, quoted in Connell, *op cit.*, p. 93.
- Source N: Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of the Courtier,* George Bull, translator. Penguin: Baltimore, 1967.

