

**Beyond Harem's Doors: A Glimpse into the Life of Princess Zaynab Hanim
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Abstract:

Based on archival sources and contemporary ones, this paper explores the various and rather multi-dimensional facets of women's lives inside the Harem institution in Nineteenth century Egypt. It offers new insights to understand women's real place and status within such institution. Through delving into the life of one of its inhabitants (Princess Zaynab Hanim daughter of Muhammad Ali Pasha), the paper shatters some of those wide-held misconceptions closely associated with the Harem institution. Equally important, it mirrors women's unflinching quest for their rights and fierce strife to have their own choices that spring out of their free will. It also reveals that Harem's women were still able to establish well-defined identities and to enjoy a high degree of financial autonomy and social activism.

The Harem myth:

It is meant by "Harem" the place allocated for women inside the palaces and mansions of the ruling elite and the notables in Oriental societies. The word itself derives from the Arabic word "Haram" which means a sacred protected place¹.

The word was originally used to designate Muslim sacred places in Mecca and Medina. However, it was later used to refer to women's quarter inside elite households likewise. This section of the house was regarded as women's "ḥaram" or sanctuary² where nobody could dare violate while certain things weren't permissible there. In the same manner, strangers were denied access to it which made of it a forbidden place. As such, the word was given to the place in order to convey the feeling of its sanctity. In short, it was a secular application for the word³ as Penzer rightly argues.

As time lapsed, the harem had mistakenly emerged as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression and segregation in Western collective mind. This led eventually to the rise of the so-called "Harem Literature"⁴ that fed mostly on Harem's stories even if they were distorted or fabricated ones. This kind of writings took advantage of "the appetite of a western readership curious about harem life"⁵. Consequently, it soon turned to be a lucrative business since "Harem sold books"⁶, attracted Western readers and brought enormous sums of money.

The harem was portrayed in such writings as an infested horrible place. It even became a synonym of female idleness and sexual indulgence^v while women who lived inside were depicted as prisoners locked up in a golden cage, largely marginalized and lagging behind as Lewis pointed:"--- the Western orientalist stereotype of harem women as isolated, uneducated, passive, sexualized and uniformly oppressed"[^]. Furthermore, they were vilified and partly accused of lacking moral discipline. This appears vividly in that arrogant allegation of the moral superiority of European women which was circulated by some women writers: "----I am fully satisfied that virtuous women are far more common in Christian Europe than in Oriental Hareems"[^] In the same vein, this negative outlook led also to the rise of the so-called "Harem Iconography"[^] where Western artists used some Oriental themes, motifs and minute details in their paintings to create the illusion that the image they depicted belonged exclusively to the exotic East. The deliberate use of visual props extracted from Oriental culture was meant to generate the "sense of being safely situated in the West"[^] which is far more civilized than the back warded Orient among their audience. Such Western artistic production that turned to be a cultural tradition largely contributed to attacking the "other" and widening the gap between the East and the West[^]. To be more precise, the harem representation in the West was a constituent part of a colonial agenda that created stereotypes of the "other" in an attempt to dehumanize Eastern people and to pave the way for their economic and cultural exploitation[^].

Indeed, few Western scholars had increasingly tried to refute such wide-held view of the harem in their writings like Norman Penzer who admitted that:" It would probably be impossible to think of any Eastern institution that is more familiar by name to the whole of the Western world but less understood in actual fact than the harem.....Thus all kinds of misunderstandings, exaggerations, distortions, and occasionally deliberate fabrications, have merely tended to add confusion to indifferent and scanty accounts of the harem already existing.[^]"

Nevertheless, those scholars had failed to sing a different tune or to change this common view. It comes as a little surprise that the aforementioned depictions aroused both pity and disgust for Eastern women among their Western counterparts who spoke about this institution with much contempt:" The Jewish ladies, who took their leave with us wanted us to visit at another house: but we happily had not time. I am thankful to have seen a hareem under favorable circumstances; and I earnestly hope I may never see another. I shall need no reminding of the most injured human beings I have ever seen, --- the most studiously depressed and corrupted women whose condition I have witnessed---"[^]

In contrast to such misleading representation of women who resided inside Oriental harems, the life of Princess Zaynab Hanem Effendi dispels those long -perpetuated negative stereotypes.

Who is Princess Zaynab?

According to the family tree of Muhammad Ali house published lately by one of its descendants, Princess Zaynab Hanim was the youngest daughter of Muhammad Ali Pasha from his wife Shama Nur¹¹ and was born in Cairo in 1825¹¹. In other words, she was born on bed of roses when her father was at the height of his power. She was raised in the harem like all her other sisters and was educated inside it by private tutors¹¹. Her early years were seemingly idyllic ones as she was loved and pampered by her parents.

As an enlightened father, Muhammad Ali was keen to well-educate his daughters and enhance their intellectual skills. No wonder, he always encouraged them to pursue their education. He was much concerned with Zaynab in particular as she proved to be a brilliant student who remarkably excelled with her study. He was very pleased to know that she was fond of reading and writing. He even asked her to send him some of her scripts to follow her up¹¹. Accordingly, he instructed her in one of his personal letters to her to keep the good consistent work, make progress in learning and always inform him of such progress¹¹.

No doubt, such early education which princess Zaynab received had a great impact in molding her mindset. She grew up to become an accomplished young woman of refined manners and cultural tastes. No wonder, Muhammad Ali sent her to Istanbul on the occasion of the wedding of the Sultan's sister¹¹ to nurture good relations with the Imperial court. This shows his great trust on her as he was positive that she would act as his unofficial roving ambassador there.

At the same time, Muhammad Ali sent Yusuf Kamil bey likewise to Istanbul on his behalf to take part in the celebration held there on the same occasion as well as to carry his presents to the Sultan. So pleased of Kamil bey, the Sultan conferred on him the title of pasha¹¹ which was a big honor that gave him a great deal of leverage with Imperial circles.

Kamil came originally from the town of Arabgir¹¹ located to the south east of Anatolia. After losing his father, he was raised by his uncle who provided him with the best education available then. When his uncle moved to Istanbul, he appointed him keeper of his seal or Muhurdar. Shortly after, Kamil made his way to the Imperial council where he got a secretarial work there¹¹. As a granddaughter of Khedive Ismail who heard a lot of family stories from her mother Princess Nimaat Mukhtar, Tugay illustrated in her monumental chronicle the successive stages of Kamil's career till he rose to the forefront.

Kamil had once a vision during his sleep that totally changed his path. He saw himself seated with Muhammad Ali on a green meadow and after a while Muhammad Ali went away but forgot his golden snuff box. On finding the box, Kamil rushed to Muhammad Ali's palace to return the box to him. Kamil's honesty had delighted Muhammad Ali who decided to reward him. When Kamil woke up in the morning, he was so taken by this dream that he went to consult a man who was well-versed in interpreting dreams and related his dream to him. This man advised him to go to Egypt because a promising career awaited him there.⁶⁴

Obsessed with his dream, the Young Kamil **made his way to Egypt in pursuit of** power, glory and self-assertion. He was determined to build up a brilliant career there and make his dream come true. Needless to say that Kamil's meeting with Muhammad Ali shortly after was a life-turning one.

Actually, his distinctive writing skills had much impressed Muhammad Ali who appointed him a secretary of the Egyptian treasury⁶⁵. It seems that the simple honesty and sincerity of his character⁶⁶ was his passport to the old ruler's heart and mind. It is not surprising that he soon gained Muhammad Ali's trust that's how he was promoted to become a sort of aide-de-Camp⁶⁷ and later his private secretary⁶⁸.

Muhammad Ali, who was a far-sighted man, knew well how to rightly judge people. To his credit, Kamil rose to Muhammad Ali's expectations and never failed him. Much believing in Kamil's potentials, Muhammad Ali had even arranged his marriage to his youngest daughter Zaynab. It seems that Muhammad Ali highly regarded Kamil and thought that he possessed every quality that could be desired to render his daughter perfectly happy.

This marriage didn't appeal to both Muhammad Ali's elder son Ibrahim pasha and grandson Abbas pasha. They believed that Kamil was no match for the daughter of Muhammad Ali. They soon opposed the marriage on the ground of incompatibility especially that Kamil came of a humble origin. It seems that Zaynab herself was influenced with such family opposition at the very beginning and expressed her objection to this marriage to her father⁶⁹. This furnishes ample proof that women who lived inside the harem were vocal.

They were able to say "no" and to decide for themselves.. However, the prudent father gave her sometime to get to know her groom at close range in order to fairly judge him away from the abovementioned family prejudice. Obviously, Muhammad Ali wasn't to force his daughter⁷⁰ or embitter her life ever after. Therefore, he had to delay the wedding⁷¹ in the hope that his daughter would have second thoughts and change her mind at the end.

Certainly, such unexpected delay must have been frustrating for Kamil but he had to wait. Sophia Lane-Poole⁷² referred to the delay of the wedding in one of her letters written during her stay in Egypt in January 1844. The delay had in fact interrupted Sophie's plans and aroused her worries that she might have

to depart to England before attending the wedding and thus miss the big ceremony. The reason of the delay remained obscure and she dared not to ask about it lest she might cause any kind of embarrassment. Nevertheless, she heard a piece of gossip that the family wasn't settled on the groom yet. She wrote in this regard: "I fear that I shall not soon receive my summons to the wedding in the Pasha's Harem. There seems to be some cause for delay which I do not know; and it is a subject respecting which I cannot consistently with politeness, ask any questions of those who are able to give me the desired information; but a cousin of the Sultan told me a few days ago, with the utmost gravity, in allusion to this affair, that there remained one point unsettled, namely the choice of a bridegroom"^{ετ}

In spite of such fierce family opposition to this marriage, it eventually took place by the end of 1845. It seems that the smart daughter came to the same conclusion which her wise father had come to earlier and finally approved to the marriage. One must take into account that Kamil pasha was a sensible, knowledgeable and highly cultivated man. This could be understood from his literary activities in a later stage of his life like translating Fénelon's famous novel "Les Aventures deTélémaque" from French to Turkish after adding some poems which he wrote to it^{οτ}. It is very likely that Kamil's eloquence and scholarly interests had worked into his favor. They had seemingly paved the way for him to win princess Zaynab's respect and admiration as she grew revering men of learning since an early age. Princess Zaynab was almost twenty years then. The preparations for the marriage lasted for long as Sophia Lane-Poole remarked. They had started in May^{ιτ} seven months earlier than the wedding which was celebrated only in December. Such preparations were carried on a splendid way^{ντ} as the British traveler Mrs. Romer confirmed in her account of her trip to Egypt. The total sum of money which Muhammad Ali spent on this wedding was estimated with half million sterling that the masses thought that Muhammad Ali had found hidden treasures^{ατ}.

A Fancy Wedding

The wedding of Zaynab Hanim was by all means a legendary one. As a result, the correspondent of the Times at Alexandria reported that the large city was nearly deserted since most of its population headed towards Cairo to attend the big celebration that was held "on a truly magnificent scale"^{ατ} and eyewitness such festivity.

Such pomp was probably meant to send an underlying message to the Porte. It is very likely that Muhammad Ali wanted to prove to the Porte that he was still at the peak of his power and that his daughter's wedding was no less than that of the Sultan's sister. Besides, it provides ample evidence that Zaynab was his very dear daughter whom he wished to please at any cost.

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The wedding celebrations lasted for eight days from 18th to 25th of December 1845^ʿ. In the course of this celebration, the entire road stretching from the citadel to Al- Azbakiyya neighborhood where the bride would descend down to reside in a lofty palace there, was decorated and illuminated with new glass lanterns. They were hung on ropes in an elegant manner extending across the streets of the neighborhood. Military bands, drummers, musicians, rope-dancers performed there to entertain the crowds while small golden and silver coins were thrown to them.^{١٤} Such out-door-amusement was accompanied with massive fireworks^{١٥}. 300 cooks were hired to prepare food for the poor at Al-Azbakiyyah palace^{١٦}. Inside the palace of the pasha at the citadel similar celebrations were held where grandees and eminent figures were invited to luxurious banquets. This included different select dinner parties on several days for consuls, European travelers and residents in Egypt, prominent Ulema^{١٧} and students of the pasha's college^{١٨}. Theatrical performances were presented to the attendees to entertain them^{١٩}. The bride herself appeared in the harem wearing a gorgeous dress covered with embroidery of gold and silver threads and adorned with diamonds. The heavy weight of her ornaments had seemingly impeded her movement thus she sustained them with much difficulty^{٢٠}. The good-looking groom in turn was elegantly dressed in fashionable "Constantinople style"^{٢١} of the day to prove to everyone that he perfectly fitted his bride. The valuable gifts which the bride received on this occasion were carried to her palace at Al-Azbakiyya uncovered which captured the attention of the masses who kept watching the procession from the windows and roofs of their houses with much enchantment^{٢٢}. At last, the bride on the eighth day moved to her new abode in a grand and rather unprecedented Zaffa parade which concluded the set period of festivities. This palace belonged originally to Muhammad Ali's late son- in- law Muhammad bey Al Defterdar who died in Sudan. So Muhammad Ali gifted it to the newly married couple after redecorating and refurnishing it^{٢٣} to befit them. Undoubtedly, the grandeur of the wedding celebration and the expensive presents showered on the bride by her father as well as those sent by the Ottoman Sultan^{٢٤} especially for her mirrored her standing and elevated status.

Unlike many expectations, the marriage proved to be a successful one and Muhammad Ali continued to hold Kamil in the highest esteem. No wonder, Kamil escorted his father-in-law in the course of his mysterious visit to Istanbul in 1846^{٢٥}. It was quite clear that Kamil was so close to him. To one's surprise, the once reluctant Ibrahim pasha found out that he misjudged Kamil pasha and changed his hostile attitude towards him.

On the contrary, Abbas who was seemingly hard to please by nature didn't change his mind. He disapproved to this marriage all along thus his opinion in Kamil pasha remained unchanged. This disharmony was even intensified

after Abbas rise to power as a serious schism worsened their already tensed relation. It seems that Abbas had always suspected Kamil's collaboration with that lobby formed against him in Istanbul from his family members who fled from Egypt because of his tough and hard-line policies with them. Such suspicion of Kamil's indulgence in their intrigues that targeted his reputation had much worried Abbas. Therefore, he gave Kamil the cold-shoulder.

According to Nubar pasha, Kamil pasha remained in Egypt and was appointed a daftardar. He knew for sure that he was under surveillance and that Abbas tried through all means to frame him out and entrap him.

Nevertheless, Kamil didn't leave lest he might be accused of abandoning or betraying the grandson of the man who bestowed favors on him. And as a true Muslim, he submitted to God's will[°].

To Kamil's chagrin, the French consul in Cairo paid a visit to him in his house. In the course of this visit, they spoke about Abbas administration and the growing feeling of resentment against him in Istanbul. Nubar informed Abbas of this meeting after receiving a report from the French consul and there was nothing in Kamal pasha's answers that might have convicted him. However, few days later, Nubar met Kamil while promenading at Al-Azbakkiyah gardens and had few words together. Kamil lamented that Abbas indicted him of plotting against his throne[°] and considered the French consul's visit sufficient to point an accusing finger at him.

In fact, Abbas had clashed with many of his relatives as well as some of the state's high officials who were in the service of his grandfather Muhammad Ali. Therefore Abbas ousted them and deported them from Egypt. Although Kamil pasha was Muhammad Ali son-in-law, he experienced the same ill-fate. Those deportees left to the seat of the caliphate (Istanbul) and most of them filled key posts there[°].

Feeling himself on the ropes, Abbas grew more and more suspicious. Kamil himself spoke of Abbas growing suspicions and found that his fears were justified ones[°].

In no time, tension between Abbas and Kamil had gravely escalated. He summoned Kamil afterwards to his palace at Helmeyya and they sit together at the salon. Suddenly, Kamil came out of the room looking pale and desperate while leaning on two of the guards. He was taken directly from the palace to a steamer that left to Aswan where he was exiled[°].

A Family Crisis:

At Abbas orders, Zaynab Hanim was detained in her palace likewise. Abbas was in fact exerting pressure on the married couple to get divorce but in vain. They both refused to submit to his will no matter the consequences. To her credit, Zaynab Hanim didn't give up. Her consuming concern then was to rescue her husband at any cost. As a loving faithful wife, she couldn't

abandon him amidst such hard time. Therefore, she cleverly conceived a plan to inform the Porte in Istanbul of her husband's unfair exile to Aswan and call for his help.

According to family chronicles, princess Zaynab wrote a grievance to the Porte and sent it to Istanbul with one of her elderly attendants whose name was Sebil Hanim. It seems that Sebil Hanim was an experienced shrewd woman who was well-versed in palaces life, realities and insecurities that's why Princess entrusted her with such a dangerous mission. It was quite clear that princess Zaynab didn't mind risk life and limb for the sake of her husband.

As a safety measure, Zaynab Hanim had the petition sewn in the soles of her attendant's shoes. Without waste of time, Sebil Hanim travelled to Istanbul and accomplished her mission there with great success as she handed the petition to the Grand Vizier Rasheed pasha in person¹⁰.

The news of Kamil's exile had aroused the resentment of the Porte that highly regarded him. Therefore, Abbas envoy to Istanbul Hassan pasha who also held the title of Kekhia was required to provide an immediate explanation for Abbas act¹⁰.

At last, Kamil was set free under the pressure of the Porte but was forced to depart from Egypt. To appease the Porte, Kamil was also offered a sum of money as compensation for his wife which he left in Egypt as well as for his land property on the condition of never returning back to Egypt¹¹.

Zaynab Hanim came to suffer a lot in the absence of her husband. Her deep sorrow for his departure as well as the boringness because of her confinement could have shattered her morals. Nevertheless, she stubbornly continued to hang on and didn't lose hope or leave herself to solitary grief

The Flight:

All attempts that were made to persuade Abbas to put an end to Zaynab Hanim's confinement were doomed to failure. He grew determined more than ever to strictly observe it to the extent that he didn't allow her to receive any visitors even her own brothers. He was in fact using his absolute power as a ruler to tighten the noose around the couple's neck so as to dictate his will and have them separated. Abbas had even made it very clear that the only way to release her was to get divorce from Kamil pasha.

This confirms that the confinement that was imposed on Zaynab Hanim to have her and her husband bow to Abbas' will was only an exceptional measure meant to crush their resistance rather than a common practice.

Originally, there were no restrictions on liberty of movement enforced on women who lived in the harem. In other words, women weren't behind bars inside the harem as erroneously thought.

Much worried about his wife's deplorable condition in her solitary confinement; Kamil decided to bend to the storm and sail under false colors. In answer to the call of reason, he reluctantly divorced her to enable her restore back her freedom. However, the divorce soon proved to be a mere maneuver meant to set her free as the couple would have never acquiesced to the fait accompli.

In Istanbul, Kamil strove to get back his ex-wife. He submitted a grievance to the Porte against Abbas pasha who forced him to divorce his wife^{١٦}. Kamil stressed in his complaint on the fact that Abbas pasha had no power whatsoever at Istanbul (in the presence of the Sultan) to have him divorce his wife against his will. Accordingly, he wished to claim his wife back.

Apparently, his grievance to the Porte had alarmed Abbas that he sent the head of his council to Istanbul together with his right-hand man Hassan pasha Al Ministerlli to settle this matter.

Undoubtedly, the separation period must have left an emotional scar upon princess Zaynab. Nevertheless, being a powerful woman who never surrendered herself to despair, she soon got over it. Moreover, she let her wits work to find a way out of this vicious circle.

Not before too long, princess Zaynab sought Abbas permission to perform pilgrimage. Abbas approved to her request and she departed from Egypt. However instead of heading towards Hijaz, she headed to Beirut and from Beirut to Istanbul. This was another gamble which she willingly took to join her ex-husband and save their marriage. In Beirut where Abbas had no power, Kamil pasha made all necessary arrangements to carry her to Istanbul away from Abbas' firm hold. In fact, they planned their reunion there after this forced break-up.

It was Shaykh al-Islam Arif Hikmet Bey who concluded their new marriage contract in the Imperial palace of Dolmabahçe while Sultan Abdul Majid attended the wedding himself. The new marriage contract which was a masterpiece in calligraphy is now on display at the museum of Turkish and Islamic arts in Istanbul^{١٧}.

No doubt, Zaynab's tremendous efforts to save her husband remain a lasting legacy that was deeply respected among her contemporaries. That's how their ordeal came to an end while she set an example for fidelity and devotion to her husband rarely equaled elsewhere. Certainly, she must have matured a lot from such painful experience which they passed through.

A Successful Entrepreneur:

Princess Zaynab had amassed riches since her early youth. On the occasion of her marriage, her father Muhammad Ali gifted to her a collection of diamonds that costed 280,000 Sterling at that time. For each item, top first diamonds merchants in London, Paris and Vienna were put in requisition^{١٨}.

These diamonds were used in adorning her wedding ornaments like the girdle, the necklace, the earring and bracelet^{٤٦} which she put on during the marriage celebrations. This had by all means reflected her enormous wealth that would be multiplied afterwards.

Having her own financial independence which was safely guarded by the sacred law of Islam, Princess Zaynab decided to invest her money in a lucrative business so as to secure more revenues to fill her coffers.

After the transfer of the school of languages (Alsun) to another place at Al Sayyeda Zaynab district on 1265 H. (1849)^{٤٧}, Princess Zaynab bought its buildings from her nephew Abbas pasha at a convenient price (One thousand and sixty one Rumi purse^{٤٨}). Actually, the school was adjacent to her magnificent palace at Al- Azbakiyyah^{٤٩} which her father had gifted to her on the occasion of her marriage to Kamil pasha and lavishly furnished with valuable French staff brought specifically from Paris^{٥٠}.

On realizing the growing influence of the British in Egypt as well as the flock of British passengers to Egypt on their way to India, she built a hotel in the place of this school at Al -Azbakiyyah for their accommodation. According to some historians this hotel was first called "Lokandet al Ingleez" or "The British Hotel"^{٥١} but its name was later changed. It seems that Abbas pasha took hold of this hotel after his clash with Kamil pasha and his aunt. He then gifted it to his friend Samuel Shephard who shared him his interest in hunting^{٥٢} and accompanied him in some of his hunting trips in the desert.

Thus Shephard took possession of the Hotel that would carry his name ever after. However, there is another assumption worthy of mentioning here.

According to a letter Shephard himself wrote in November 1849^{٥٣}, one might deduce that Shephard have been the original planner of the hotel who supervised its construction. He might have been hired by Princess Zaynab at Abbas recommendation and directed it for her but latter took possession of it after her flight to Istanbul. Indeed Shephard didn't refer to Princess Zaynab at all in this letter; yet this might have been intentional to boost his success and aggrandize his achievement by attributing it to himself solely. He might have also bought it from Princess Zaynab after she left or became her partner. Either way, Princess Zaynab was clearly one of those pioneer entrepreneurs who initiated such a new business in Egypt by the mid of the 19th century from which she drew big profits. This could be deduced from her waqfiyya deed in which she endowed the profits of this hotel as well as some other properties to her husband and her future children. She also endowed part of its profits to Al Azhar mosque and another part to the religious scholars who belonged to the Hanafi School of jurisprudence while the last part was endowed for the poor, the needy as well as her manumitted slaves^{٥٤}.

When Princess Zaynab first undertook this project, she demolished the old worn-out buildings of the school of language and accounting, removed the

debris away to clear the area and then built the aforementioned hotel. She hired a specialized staff which included architects, engineers, builders, workmen, and painters to accomplish this mission and provided them with the necessary construction materials like bricks, stones, timber, mud, gypsum, mortar and others^{٧٧}.

She spent on its construction (only 320 Rumi purse^{٤٧}) from her own money. This was a relatively low cost if compared with the costs of construction of other contemporary edifices built at the same period like the summer kiosk of Hassan Manasterlli pasha at Roda Island that reached 3000 purse^{٥٧}. This provides sufficient proof that she was an adept entrepreneur who knew well how to run her business and where to put her money.

Besides, she must have inherited a large fortune from her father Muhammad Ali. Indeed Abbas Pasha had denied Muhammad Ali's heirs their right to inherit his land property; they were compensated afterwards with a huge sum of money. Actually, they heavily attacked Abbas in Istanbul and sued him. At last, the verdict issued by Sheikh Al Islam in Istanbul came into their favor. It forced Abbas to settle the matter and pay them 380000 Purse of silver^{٧٧}.

Since each Ottoman purse used to contain 500 piaster^{٧٧}, the total sum of money which each heir eventually got was remarkably high. It amounted to almost half million Sterling^{٨٧} which was a real fortune at that time.

After Princess Zaynab's departure to Istanbul, she successfully resumed her financial activities there. She continued to invest her money in lucrative business. One get to know from her second waqfiyya deed which she compiled in Istanbul on 6th of August 1876 that she owned a small inn, a coffee house and seashore buildings which she rented as a custom house.

They were all located in the town of Izmit to the east of Istanbul. Besides, she owned a two-storey private pavilion on the Bosphorus as well as a waterfront residence which she hired likewise in addition to her large land property^{٩٧}.

No wonder, she accumulated substantial riches. Her legendary wealth^{١٠٨} had captured the attention of her Western contemporaries. The wife of the British consul in Istanbul for example had once commented with much fascination-if not envy-on Princess Zaynab's "immense wealth"^{١٠٩} in a press interview.

Such wealth of an Oriental woman living in a harem was very striking and rather unusual for English women then. Ironically, they were still struggling for the promulgation of "The Married Women Property Act"^{١١٠} to get property rights so as to control their own money and assets. As a result, Mrs. Heap looked to someone like princess Zaynab who adroitly run her massive fortune with remarkable admiration. As an English woman, she might have felt herself far lagging behind in this particular regard.

Also one gets to know from a telegram sent to the Ottoman Sultan by 34 Ulema of the Hanafi School at Al Azhar mosque, whom princess Zaynab had previously entrusted with managing some of her valuable properties and

directing its revenues for charities, that the estimated value of such property together with its annual income for eleven years was 300,000 Sterling^{r^}. The outraged Ulema were complaining that the princess' brother denied them the right to manage this vast property and got it instead through unlawful means while withheld its income that was supposed to go to charity for 11 successive years. No doubt, such complaint also shed lights on the enormous fortune of the princess.

It goes without saying that this enormous fortune must have given princess Zaynab an immense weight in higher circles. At the same time, it enabled her to exercise a prodigious influence in Cairo and Istanbul alike since money is power.

A Great Benefactress:

All along her life, Princess Zaynab showed much compassion to the poor and the needy and was always considerate to others. Equally significant, she displayed a keen and rather genuine interest in philanthropic works which earned her a place as a great benefactress.

As mentioned before, she endowed a substantial part of her wealth to Al Azhar mosque for religious and charitable purposes. To be more precise, she bequeathed some valuable properties in trust to its Hanafi Ulema^{é^}. This large waqf which she set-up there in 1266 H./1860 included providing salaries and bread for Hanafi scholars and students out of its proceeds.^{o^} It was quite clear that she felt the urgent necessity to support religious scholars who acted as the guardians of Sharia so as not to bow and scrape. In other words, she tried to ensure their financial independence in order to live with dignity and never make concessions when it comes to their responsibilities. This reflects a very progressive vision rarely equaled at her time. In the same vein, she endowed one third of her fortune to charitable works and benevolent societies before her death[^].

On the other hand, her magnificent mansion in Istanbul, as was the case for her palace at Al-Azbakiyya, had always been the resort of the poor and homeless. During the holy month of Ramadan in particular, she used to open its doors to passersby and let them in to share with them iftar meal. Also she used to invite theologians to explain to the audience some chapters of the Holy Quran^{v^} as spiritual nourishment during this month. Besides, she had a great capacity to get on with people no matter their background. No wonder, she used to talk to poor villagers in the course of her walks by the cemetery side and chat with them freely to get to know their problems in order to help them^{^^}. Obviously, she was increasingly disturbed by the grinding poverty that surrounded them therefore; she did her best to relieve their suffering. One can safely say, she had always displayed a high sense of social responsibility. Unlike many of her peers who belonged to the ruling elite, she

couldn't live in bourgeoisie haughty isolation. No wonder, she proved to be service-driven and other-oriented. For instance, she heavily supported the families of the injured soldiers and the refugees during the Ottoman-Russian war^{9^}. In the same manner, she constructed some roads, erected a bunch of public water fountains and repaired a number of old mosques. She was also willing to offer cash assistance at time of crises^{9^}.

Her big heart was not limited to humans but also extended to street animals. One day while walking at Aksaray district, she saw a huge number of cats grouped together in front of one of the houses of the neighborhood. This scene had captured her attention so she asked some of the passers about this house. She got to know that its owner who was an elderly unmarried poor woman used to feed the cats which won her the title of "Kedic Emine" or the "cat keeper". In response, Princess Zaynab ordered at once a special allowance to be regularly given to this kind-hearted woman from her own treasury to enable her to take good care of street cats and feed them.^{19^}

As a result, she became a member of the Ministerial Council of pious foundations known as "Conseil du Ministere des Foundations Pieuses"^{19^}. Moreover, she was later granted the highest Ottoman decoration "Ordre du Chefakat"^{19^} after her death in recognition of her benevolent works especially the hospital which she established together with her husband Kamil pasha.

This hospital in particular remains her biggest contribution at all. This hospital was the first private charitable hospital to be built in Istanbul and the oldest health care institution that survived there to the present^{19^}.

Significantly, it is still operating under their names: "Zeynep Kamil Hastanesi". It had currently turned to be a big medical and research center there.

Zaynab- Kamil Hospital:

The merciful couple decided to establish a hospital that could render free medical services for poor patients who couldn't afford treatment costs.

They decided to build it at Üsküdar that lacked medical institutions then. Without waste of time, they purchased a large lot of land on the hilltop overlooking Üsküdar at Nuh Huyusu or Noah's wells neighborhood. They chose this region in particular for a number of reasons. Princess Zaynab's mother who died in 1863 was buried nearby in the graveyard of the mosque of Fenai Tekkasi or the lodge of the Fenai dervish order. The graves of the dervishes of the Celveti order were also located in its vicinity. That's to say, they chose this place to erect their charitable edifice that would comprise their mausoleum after their death for purely spiritual and religious reasons.^{19^}

After obtaining the consent of the Ottoman Sultan Abd Al Aziz to establish this hospital, Kamil pasha laid its foundation stone in June 1875 one day

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prior to the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the rise of the Sultan to the throne of the Ottoman Empire⁷⁹.

The construction of the hospital was interrupted because of the death of its founder Kamil pasha as well as the outbreak of the Ottoman-Russian war. Although, she was heart-broken because of her husband death, Princess Zaynab spent great energy in order to complete the hospital till their dream was eventually realized. At last, the hospital was inaugurated in March 1882⁸⁰.

It was first called "Gureba-i İnas Hastahanesi" or Hospital of poor women and "Üsküdar Nisa Hastahanesi" or Üsküdar women's hospital and later it became known as "Zeynep Kamil Hastahanesi"⁸¹ or Zaynab-Kamil Hospital after its original founders and it still retains this name to our day. It served mainly as a maternity and birth hospital. To pay tribute to the merciful couple who didn't have children during their marital life, all girls born inside the hospital are given the name of "Zaynab" while all boys born there are given the name of "Kamil"⁸². This tradition became a strictly-observed one among the local community of Üsküdar which confirms that the populace remains loyal to the memory of giant figures. They always cherish it and continue to hold dear.

To ensure that the hospital would continue to serve poor patients even after her death, she allocated part of her wealth for sustaining it and left a waqfyyiah deed⁸³ for this purpose.

Similarly, the merciful couple established a school and orphanage: "pour les enfants pauvres, ilya une grande ecole le Darulchefekat qui est un lycee' plutot qu'un orphenient"⁸⁴. Such outreach initiative which the merciful couple took reflects an impressive degree of social awareness.

A Political Activist:

Princess Zaynab had much believed in her brother Abd Al Halim and in his inherent right to the throne of Egypt. However, he lost this right after Khedive Ismail's success in obtaining an Imperial Firman changing the law of succession of the throne in Egypt⁸⁵. Therefore, she continued to support her brother unfailingly in order to restore what they both believed to be his very right from his usurper.

However, Halim's eventual exile to Istanbul⁸⁶ had shattered his morals. Therefore, Princess Zaynab acted as his motherly friend. She stood by his side and tried hard to assure and comfort him. It isn't surprising that he spent most of his time there in her company⁸⁷ as he was strongly attached to her. It seems that they were poised to overthrow Ismail and continued to work together to bring the downfall of his regime. To this end, princess Zaynab didn't mind sacrifice a lot of money to help Halim with: "Prince Halim has now spent well-nigh all his substance amongst his adherents in Egypt, and in

the systematic subventioning of continental news- papers; but his sister is still rich and willing to spend more money if occasion requires it." ^{٥٠١}

As a strong woman who used to stand for what she believed, she dedicated herself to realize this dream no matter its toll: "Both the prince and his sister have always treated this promise as a dead letter, and have consistently devoted their lives and their fortunes to the hopeless pursuit of a phantom crown." ^{٥٠٢}

It comes as a little surprise that they worked underground to build a popular base for Halim in Egypt and to mobilize an international public opinion in support. Therefore, she entrusted her old general agent in Egypt Osman pasha Fawzi who was formerly in the service of her father and remained loyal to his memory with this task. Apparently, they decided to throw their lot with Urabi and the nationalists whom they thought to be a black horse. They commissioned Fawzy with opening channels with the leaders of the National movement and concluding an agreement with them. According to Urabi's lawyer Mr. Broadley, they hatched together a plan resting mainly on: "appropriating the ideas of Arabi, coalescing with either him or his friends and finally coming to power as a popular ruler on the shoulders of the National party" ^{٥٠٣} For this purpose, Princess Zaynab also transferred a huge sum of money about 30000 Pound through the Ottoman Bank to Osman pasha to be handed to one of their agents named Hassan Musa Al Aqqad.

According to Broadly, Hassan Musa was supposed to use this money to buy the loyalty of the National party and persuade them to support Halim's claims^{٥٠٤}. However, the fall of Urabi and the intervention of Britain had blown their plans and ruined such a project.

Actually, Broadly, who was defending Urabi and was trying hard to drop the charge that he collaborated with Prince Halim and his sister, portrayed Princess Zaynab as a typical opportunist who adopted a Machiavellian approach for the sake of her beloved brother. This view seemed to be somehow prejudiced against her. Indeed she might have tried to polarize the nationalists to her brother's side so as to serve his interests, yet her being mass-oriented as discussed before when speaking of her innumerable charities suggests another interpretation. She might have supported the national movement because she sympathized with their fair demands too.

On realizing that all their efforts failed to bear its fruit, Princess Zaynab became increasingly concerned with securing Halim's financial conditions for fear of future sways and uncertainties. Therefore, she ceded to him the right to direct her property and appointed him a trustee: "La

princesse Zeineb Hanum à qui revenait de droit ce mutévellik, en avait laissé la direction à son frère, le Prince Haliin pacha qui lui succéda"^{٥٠٥}. In fact, Halim outlived her and thus inherited the lion's share of her vast property^{٥٠٦}.

Indeed, Princess Zaynab failed to put her brother on the throne of Egypt, yet her attempts to do so leave no doubt that women who lived inside the harem constituted a formidable power to be reckoned with. They weren't passive onlookers who remained in the shade. Rather, they were movers of events.

An Eminent Status:

Princess Zaynab had always enjoyed an eminent status all along. No wonder, she was cordially received by the Sultan himself when she first arrived at Istanbul after her flight from Abbas Pasha. It seems that Sultan Abd Al Majeed was eager to meet her personally to solace her for the suffering she passed through and congratulate her for the reunion with her husband¹¹.

In Istanbul, Princess Zaynab moved in more exalted social circles along with Kamil pasha whom she continued to support wholeheartedly. He rose in ranks and was soon appointed as Minister of Commerce¹², then Minister of Finance and President of Council of State¹³. In a later stage, he became "Sadr Azam" or Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire in 1863¹⁴.

Similarly, Princess Zaynab carved a special place among elite circles. It is not surprising that she was honored with receiving the Ottoman Sultan Abd Al Aziz in her palace located at Beyzid during the month of Ramadan. She gave him a grand welcome. She ordered all the way from the mosque to her palace to be covered with carpets and served him iftar meal in golden plates and pots that worthies a fortune. She also gave him on this occasion a copy of the Holy Quran that was a masterpiece in its craftsmanship as a present. It comes as a little surprise that the Sultan was much taken by princess Zaynab's unrivaled hospitality that he kept expressing his gratitude for her so many times¹⁵.

After his ascension to the throne of Egypt, her half-brother Said pasha well received her in Cairo thus drawing shutters on all the vicissitudes of Abbas former reign. At her departure from Egypt, he put his big steamer called "Faid Gehaad" under her disposal. Despite the fact that Said was reluctant to send his steamer to Istanbul lest it should be seized by the Sultan¹⁶, he put his worries aside in order to give Zaynab Hanım a proper send off that befits her status.

Princess Zaynab was also admired by all her European visitors like Mrs. Heap wife of the British consul-general in Istanbul. After paying a visit to Princess Zaynab's harem, Lady Heap described her as "one of the most remarkable of living Turkish women"¹⁷. She put much emphasis on her "intelligence, liberal ideas"¹⁸ that added to her credit, defined her status and well-placed her among her peers.

Combining Originality and Modernity:

Although princess Zaynab continued to live on the old Ottoman style, she didn't reject modernity. It is quite obvious that she managed to maintain that delicate balance between retaining old traditions and acting in a rather progressive manner.

It comes as a little surprise that she emerged as a patroness of arts while her house became an intellectual salon where she used to hold poetry contests among talented female poets. It also hosted Musical performances and dancing shows. During winter time, she often held sweetmeat contests at her house to entertain her guests while in summer she held moonlight parties on the Bosphorus. She also used to go with her female guests in magical nightly promenades on the Bosphorus. They used to take boats while wearing their white Yashmak and their fur cloaks and were usually accompanied with musicians and singers to enjoy romantic nights on the Bosphorous under moonlight.^{٩١١} Such water parties together with the scene of the ladies promenading in the boats had always grabbed the attention of the masses who lived by the waterside. They usually rushed to watch them from the windows of their houses with much joy. No wonder, these occasions had turned to be "festive events in the sleepy little villages on the Bosphorous"^{٩١٢}

In response to tide change of the later half of the 19th century, Princess Zaynab commissioned the celebrated French architect Garnier who designed Paris opera house to build her a sumptuous mansion on modern patterns with a western style façade^{٩١٣}. It was the first building entirely constructed of stones in Istanbul "Her yali a large gray palace is one of the handsomest on the Bosphorous"^{٩١٤}

She also had another Konak or grand mansion at Bayazid that was elegantly furnished. It was considered one of the world's largest wooden buildings at the time^{٩١٥}. It had large halls lined with tall mirrors inserted in gilded frames and beautifully decorated ceilings as well as a massive staircase with balustrades cut of fine Bohemian crystal and banisters made of wrought bronze.^{٩١٦}

The mansion was named after her rather than her husband which indicated that she had a special place in the hearts of the people of Istanbul thus they gave her name to the place. After her death, it came to house the faculty of Arts of Istanbul University^{٩١٧}. Unfortunately, it was entirely burnt because of a huge fire that broke inside it in 1942^{٩١٨}.

Death and Burial:

After a long life full of ups and downs, Princess Zaynab Hanım died in 1884^{٩١٩} and was buried next to her husband in a small tomb on the Neo-Classical style^{٩٢٠} standing in the garden of their charitable hospital at Üsküdar^{٩٢١}.

Being an iconic figure due to her high-profile engagement in philanthropy, there was widespread public mourning at the time of her death whether in Istanbul or in Cairo.

Conclusion:

The life scenes of princess Zaynab Hanim shatters a lot of fantasies that long evolved around the Harem institution. Such misconceptions showed women who lived inside the harem as mute and helpless creatures who were reduced to submissive status. The abovementioned fantasies were originally produced at the hands of Orientalists during the 18th and 19th centuries. Nevertheless, they had unfortunately survived to the present as they were deeply rooted in Western minds.

In contrast to those common but patently false Western stereotypes of Harem, Princess Zaynab who belonged part and parcel to this institution was able to wield power and drew status from it. She proved to be a strong, independent and accomplished woman who could reach her goals no matter the challenges she faced. At a critical moment which she passed through, she wasn't disposed to sit quietly under her frustration. On the contrary, she relentlessly strove to turn the tide into her favor while her endeavor to hang on in face of hardships drove her activism.

Equally important, she didn't live a dull secluded life inside the harem but she was deeply engaged with her local community to which she was highly committed. No wonder, she was celebrated for her wide range of pioneering charity work which she set up to help those in need. She was also noted for her heart of sympathy that extended to many people both in Egypt and Turkey. Such life-long devotion to the care of the others made her a popular figure fondly remembered and deeply revered. It is not surprising that she left behind an imposing reputation among her contemporaries.

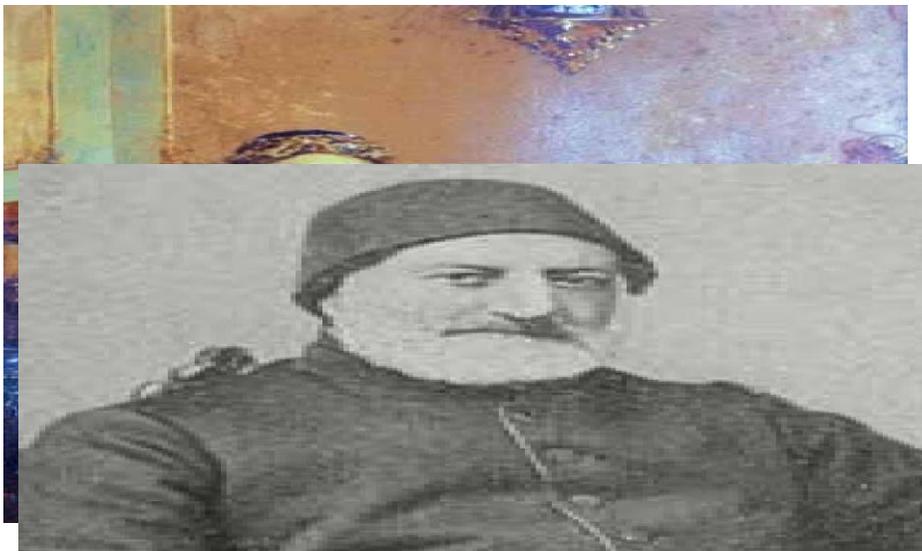
In Short, the life of Princess Zaynab offers a key to our understanding of the extremely crucial role which Harem's women were able to play in their society from their own place. It also confirms that women who lived inside the Harem were not held in confinement as inaccurately thought. On the contrary, the Harem had been their very stronghold and their platform of activism.

**Beyond Harem's Doors: A Glimpse into the Life of Princess Zaynab Hanım
Pictures**



Princess Zaynab at a young age

http://www.egyptedantan.com/famille_souveraine/famille_souveraine37.htm



Kamil Pasha

<http://www.biyografi.net/kisiyrinti.asp?kisiid=5084>



Zaynab-Kamil Hospital at Uskudar

https://www.uskudar.bel.tr/userfiles/files/MNA_Uskudarli_Meshurlar.pdf



Shepherd Hotel (Originally Princess Zaynab's Hotel at Al Azbakiyya)

<http://grandhotelsegypt.com>

Notes:

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- ¹ Del Plato, 27
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- ¹ **Hanafi al-Mahallawi, Harem Muluk Misr: min Muhammad 'Ali ila Faruq** (Cairo: Dar al-Amn, 1993), 57.
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- ¹¹ Lane-Poole, 3:78.
- ¹¹ Alim Kahraman ed., *Uskudarli Meshurlar Ansiklopedisi*, (Istanbul: Üsküdar Belediyesi, 2012), 388
- ¹ Emine Foat Tugay, *Three Centuries: Family Chronicles of Turkey and Egypt*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 119.
- ^o *Ibid.*, 119.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 120.
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- ¹¹ Lane-Poole, 3:78.
- ¹¹ "The Levant Mail", *Times*, July 3, 1845, 5.
- ¹¹ "Egyptian Affairs", *Times*, November 22, 1845, 5.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹¹ She was an English Orientalist and the sister of the famous Orientalist Edward William Lane
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^{^A} <http://zeynepkamil.gov.tr/HastaneIcerik.aspx?p=4938d548-df37-4482-b92e-c8e9fc816b17>

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