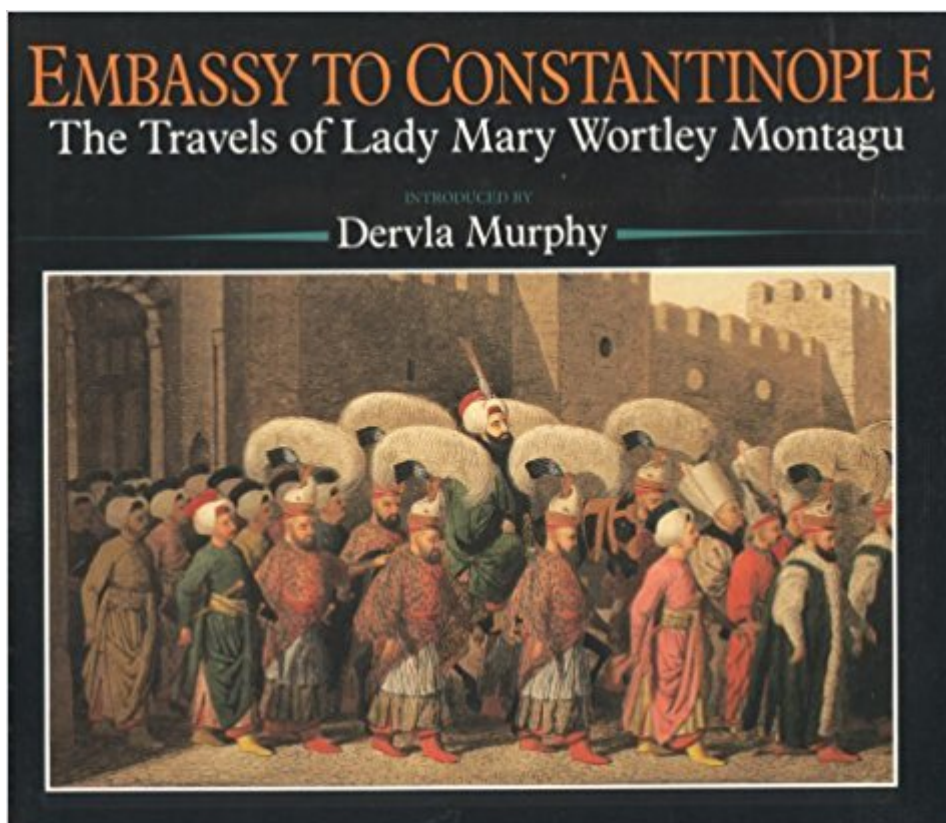


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Embassy To Constantinople



Synopsis

Today Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, one of the most independent and lively eighteenth-century women, is mainly remembered as an entertaining and erudite correspondent. Some of her most celebrated letters were written from Constantinople, where she was staying with her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, the Ambassador to the Sultan's court. They lived with their young son in the Ottoman capital for fifteen months, and her letters, full of vivid and witty observations, provide a unique picture of Turkish life and customs. Lady Mary had the sympathetic curiosity of the true traveller; she was charmed by everything in Constantinople "the customs, costume, buildings and gardens" and was determined to see everything. She visited the Harem and explored the old quarter disguised in a heavy veil and flowing robes "even donning men's clothes to penetrate the all-male sanctity of the Santa Sophia mosque. The failure of her husband's peace mission brought an end to the visit. Reluctantly they sailed for home, with Lady Mary's pen still busily recording the details of the voyage. This illustrated edition of the Turkish letters has been edited to make it more immediately readable. A sparkling essay by Dervla Murphy, herself a fearless traveller, outlines the events of Lady Mary's life and explains how the letters came to be published in defiance of the family wishes. The illustrations, which are largely from the Searight Collection (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum), appear in book form for the first time and add greatly to the charm of this edition. Modern visitors to Turkey will be fascinated by this spirited portrait of an earlier age, while all who appreciate character, courage and a lively pen will enjoy meeting this most unusual woman.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Lady Mary was a bright light of England's age of reason. (The New York Times) Her letters are the height of intelligence, at turns witty, coy, shrewd and always precisely observant.... A fascinating excursion into 18th century Constantinople. (The Book Reader) The letters are of particular interest to the modern reader. (Middle East Journal) [Lady Mary] had a good eye for culture and an ability to report on it objectively and wittily. (Arab Book World)

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) was born Lady Mary Pierrepont. She spent her childhood in the care of her paternal grandmother at West Dean Manor near Salisbury and later at her family seat of Thoresby Park in Nottinghamshire. She was a voracious reader and soon developed a strongly independent outlook. Her courtship by Edward Wortley Montagu evoked the disapproval of her father, which forced an elopement under dramatic circumstances. The marriage was not a success and later in life they separated. On their return from Constantinople, Lady Mary pioneered the smallpox inoculation in London that she had studied in Turkey. After her separation, she pursued to no avail a much younger Italian writer, and went to live in Venice. She died in London and her Embassy Letters were published a year later. Dervla Murphy was born in 1931 in County Waterford, where her father was County Librarian. Along with most of his family, her father was deeply involved in the Irish Republican Movement. Dervla Murphy was educated at the Ursuline Convent, Waterford, until 1945 when she returned home to nurse her invalid mother. She made her first historic bicycle journey to India in 1963, and has since undertaken many journeys with her daughter, Rachel; these have been the subject of many successful books. Dervla Murphy has long been an admirer of Lady Mary and her letters.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was one of those few women of her era who has left a testament to her experiences and life. This book is perfect for anyone remotely interested in early women adventurers and/or the life of an Englishwoman in Constantinople in the early 18th century. Lady M, after observing the traditional practice of inoculating children against smallpox pioneered the practice back in England with her own children. Eventually Lady M separated from her husband and pursued her much younger Italian lover to his homeland. Truly a woman out of step with the prevailing view of women in her times, and this book is a real gem. It consists mainly of letters written to her family and friends.

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