

two of them. They said that in the first place they thought it very strange that so many grown men, bearded, strong, and armed, who were around the king (it is likely that they were talking about the Swiss of his guard) should submit to obey a child, and that one of them was not chosen to command instead. Second (they have a way in their language of speaking of men as halves of one another), they had noticed that there were among us men full and gorged with all sorts of good things, and that their other halves were beggars at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty; and they thought it strange that these needy halves could endure such an injustice, and did not take the others by the throat, or set fire to their houses.

I had a very long talk with one of them; but I had an interpreter who followed my meaning so badly, and who was so hindered by his stupidity in taking in my ideas, that I could get hardly any satisfaction from the man. When I asked him what profit he gained from his superior position among his people (for he was a captain, and our sailors called him king), he told me that it was to march foremost in war. How many men followed him? He pointed to a piece of ground, to signify as

many as such a space could hold; it might have been four or five thousand men. Did all his authority expire with the war? He said that this much remained, that when he visited the villages dependent on him, they made paths for him through the underbrush by which he might pass quite comfortably.

All this is not too bad—but what's the use? They don't wear breeches.

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## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What lessons does Montaigne draw from accounts of the new world?
2. Why do you suppose Montaigne chose cannibalism, of all possible topics, to compare European and American cultures?
3. How does he reflect the crisis of the Iron Century?
4. Are there any human constants for Montaigne?
5. Does he believe in a single human nature, a single ideal of virtue?

## HENRY BLOUNT

### FROM *A Voyage into the Levant*

*The Englishman Henry Blount was an adventurer and traveler. His acute, sympathetic observations of the Turkish Empire render vividly the great power of the Ottomans. In the 1630s, after more than a century of invasion and conquest, the Ottoman Turks were still considered a menace—aggressive, hostile, and heathen—to the Christian West. This particular passage, concerning the organization of the*

*Turkish army, suggests that the perception was not misplaced. At the same time, however, the 1634 publication of his A Voyage into the Levant signals Blount's growing fascination with a wider, non-European world.*

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From *Documentary History of Eastern Europe*, edited by Alfred J. Bannan and Achilles Edelenyi (New York: Twayne, 1970), pp. 100–4.

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### Turkish Power in the 1630s

At length we reached Vallivoh, a pretty little town upon the confines of Hungary; where the camp staying some days, we left them behind, and being to pass a wood near the Christian country, doubting it to be (as confines are) full of thieves, we divided our caravan of six score horse in two parts; half with the persons, and goods of least esteem, we sent a day before the rest, that so the thieves, having a booty, might be gone before we came, which happened accordingly; they were robbed; one thief, and two of ours slain; some hundred dollars worth of goods lost. The next day we passed, and found sixteen thieves in a narrow passage, before whom we set a good guard of harquebuzes and pistols, till the weaker fort passed by; so in three days we came safe to Belgrada.

The city, anciently called Taurunum, or Alba Graeca, was the metropolis of Hungary, till won by sultan Soliman the second, in the year 1525. It is one of the most pleasant, stately, and commodious situations that I have seen; it stands most in a bottom, encompassed eastward by gentle and pleasant ascents, employed in orchards or vines; southward is an easy hill, part possessed with buildings, the rest a burying-place of well nigh three miles in compass, so full of graves as one can be by another; the west end yields a right magnificent aspect, by reason of an eminency of land jetting out further than the rest, and bearing a goodly strong castle, whose walls are two miles about, excellently fortified with a dry ditch and out works. This castle on the west side is washed by the great river Sava, which on the north of the city loses itself in the Danubius, of old called Ister,

now Dunny, and is held the greatest river in the world, deep and dangerous for navigation, runs eastward into the Euxine or Black Sea, in its passage receiving fifty and odd rivers, most of them navigable. Two rarities, I was told of this river, and with my own experience found true; one was, that at mid-day and mid-night, the stream runs slower by much than at other times; this they find by the noise of those boat-mills, whereof there are about twenty, like those upon the Rhoane at Lions; their clackers beat much slower at those times than else, which argues like difference in the motion of the wheel, and by consequence of the stream; the cause is neither any reflux, nor stop of current by wind or otherwise, for there is no increase of water observed. The other wonder is, that where those two great currents meet, their waters mingle no more than water and oil; not that either floats above other, but join unmixed; so that near the middle of the river, I have gone in a boat, and tasted of the Danuby as clear and pure as a well; then putting my hand not an inch further, I have taken of the Sava as troubled as a street channel, tasting the gravel in my teeth; yet it did not taste unctious, as I expected, but hath some others secret ground of the antipathy, which though not easily found out, is very effectual; for they run thus threescore miles together, and for a day's journey I have been an eye witness thereof.

The castle is excellently furnished with artillery, and at the entrance there stands an arsenal with some forty or fifty fair brass pieces, most bearing the arms and inscription of Ferdinand the emperor. That which to me seemed strangest in this castle (for I had free liberty to pry up and down) was a round tower called the Zindana, a cruelty not by them devised, and seldom practiced; it is like old Rome's Gemoniae: the tower is large

and round, but within severed into many squares of long beams, set on end about four feet asunder; each beam was stuck frequently with great flesh hooks; the person condemned was naked, let fall amongst those hooks, which gave him a quick or lasting misery, as he chanced to light; then at the bottom the river is let in by grates, whereby all the putrefaction was washed away. Within this great castle is another little one, with works of its own; I had like to have miscarried with approaching the entrance, but the rude noise, and worse looks of the guard, gave me a timely apprehension with sudden passage, and humiliation, to sweeten them, and get off; for, as I after learned, there is kept great part of the Grand Seignior's treasure, to be ready when he wars on that side the empire: it is death for any Turk or Christian to enter; and the captain is never to go forth without particular license from the emperor. Here the bashaw of Temesuar, joining the people of Buda, and his own with those of Belgrade and Bosnah, they were held encamped on the south side of the town, yet not so severely, but the Spahies, Janisaaries, and Venturiers, had leave to go before to the general rendezvous, as they pleased, though most of them staid to attend the bashaws; they there expected Murath bashaw; he, five days after our arrival, came in with a few foot, but four thousand horse, of the Spahy Timariot's; such brave horses, and men so dexterous in the use of the launce, I had not seen. Then was made public proclamation to hang all such Janissaries as should be found behind these forces. With them the next day we set forward for Sophia, which in twelve days we reached. The bashaws did not go all in company, but setting forth about an hour one after another, drew out their troops in length without confusion, not in much exact order of file and rank, as near no enemy. In this and our former march, I much admired that we had a caravan loaded with clothes, silks, tissues, and other rich commodities, were so safe, not only in the main army, but in straggling troops, amongst whom we often wandered, by reason of recovering the Jews sabbath; but I found the cause to be the cruelty of justice;

for thieves upon the way are empaled without delay; or mercy; and there was a Saniack, with two hundred horse, who did nothing but coast up and down the country, and every man who could not give a fair account of his being where he found him, was presently strangled, though not known to have offended; for their justice, although not so rash as we suppose, yet will rather cut off two innocent men, than let one offender escape; for in the execution of an innocent, they think if he be held guilty, the example works as well as if he were guilty indeed; and where a constant denial makes the fact doubted, in that execution, the resentment so violent terrifies the more: therefore to prevent disorders sometimes, in the beginnings of war, colourable punishments are used, where just ones are wanting. This speedy and remorseless severity makes that when then their great armies lie about any town or pass, no man is endamaged or troubles to secure his goods; in which respect it pretends more effect upon a bad age than our Christian compassion, which is so easily abused, as we cannot raise two or three companies of soldiers, but they pilfer and rifle wheresoever they pass; wherein the want of cruelty upon delinquents, causes much more oppression of the innocent, which is the greatest cruelty of all. Yet without their army there want not scandals, for in the way we passed by a Palanga, which is a village fortified with mud walls against thieves, where we found a small caravan to have been assaulted the day before, and divers remaining sore wounded; for through all Turkey, especially in desart places, there are many mountaineers, or outlaws, like the Wild Irish, who live upon spoil, and are not held members of the state, but enemies, and used accordingly. In all our march, though I could not perceive much discipline, as not near an adverse party, yet I wondered to see such a multitude so clear of confusion, violence, want, sickness, or any other disorder; and, though we were almost three score thousand, and sometimes found not a town in seven or eight days, yet was there such plenty of good basket, rice, and mutton, as wheresoever I passed up and down to view the Spahies and

others in their tents, they would often make me sit and eat with them very plentifully and well. . . .

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### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does Blount's account reveal about the perils of travel within Europe during the seventeenth century?
2. Why do you suppose Blount reserved so much of his attention for the Turkish military force?
3. What does he most admire?
4. How does his account of Turkish soldiers contrast with that of Christian soldiers by Grimmelshausen?
5. Does the description of Turkish society and military organization serve as a deliberate contrast to and criticism of those organizations ravaging much of central Europe in the 1630s?