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The conference and the resulting volume reflect several premises: first, that the unique documentation of the Ottoman period reveals the multiple, often paradoxical, and always complex conditions of Middle Eastern women's experience; second, that the years between, roughly, 1650 and 1830 represent a period already experiencing dramatic social and institutional change when Western domination and indigenous Western-looking reforms transformed the patterns and the pace of change throughout the region; and third, that women's roles and status in the nineteenth century and in the contemporary era can best be understood in the light of a multiplicity of pasts, one of the most significant of which must surely be the period just prior to the radical reconfigurations of the nineteenth century. Since this "early modern era" embraces the less studied Ottoman generations—and arguably some of the least understood in Middle Eastern history as a whole—the volume addresses itself to this period.

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