

Theme Study - Women in History – The Concubine Who was Born to be a Haseki

Hurrem Sultan (1502–1568), often called Roxelana in Europe, was a Russian slave who was sent to Istanbul to serve as Sultan Suleiman's concubine (r.1520-1566). Suleiman violated harem tradition by marrying her (1534), enabling her and their son to live in the Imperial capital instead of a province as was normal, and she progressed swiftly through the ranks of the Imperial household. Their wedding was described as "an incredible affair, one that is totally unmatched in the history of Sultans" by an envoy who was present in Istanbul. Hurrem was crowned the first haseki in Ottoman history thanks to her marriage to Suleiman and the birth of five sons. She gained access to authority that no other Imperial woman had previously experienced thanks to her close relationship and intimacy with Suleiman.

Hurrem advocated for a shift in the Grand Vizier to her son-in-law in order to increase her political influence inside the Imperial court. Mihrimah (1578), the daughter of Hurrem, was politically married to Rustem (1561), the governor of Diyarbekir. Hurrem plotted to become Suleiman's Grand Vizier (1544–1553, and 1555–1561), replacing the executed Hadim Suleiman Pasha (1544). Hurrem was able to use this clever marriage to forge an alliance with Rustem, gaining continuous access to information about the empire and the chance to exercise her influence over the entire Imperial court, while Rustem benefited from Mihrimah and Suleiman's connection with him as he rose to the position of highest Vizier in the Imperial court.