

Hakan Yalap*

Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University

SULEIMAN THE MAGNIFICENT AS A TV SERIES HERO: AN EMPEROR, A LOVER, A POET

Abstract

Suleiman I, known in the West as Suleiman the Magnificent, is the tenth sultan of the Ottoman Empire. During his long reign, he organized expeditions to both the east and the west. In addition, he attracted attention with his palace and private life due to his love affair with Hürrem Sultan. This situation formed the framework of the series called “Magnificent Century”, which has a large number of viewers in Turkey and around the world. The series, which fictionally portrays the life of Suleiman the Magnificent and his palace circle, was also criticized by the nationalist-conservative audience in Turkey. However, it should not be forgotten that Suleiman the Magnificent, the hero of a political and romantic series, was a ruler, a lover and ultimately a good poet. In this paper, the criticisms towards the Magnificent Century TV series and the poem Muhibbi wrote to Hürrem Sultan as a poet were examined.

Keywords: *Magnificent Century, Classical Turkish Literature, Suleyman the Magnificent, TV Series.*

* hakanyalap@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Suleyman the Magnificent was born in Trabzon on (6 November 1494). His father is Yavuz Sultan Selim and his mother is Hafsa Sultan. Although today he is known by his title of Kanuni rather than his name, this title dates back to the 18th century. For the first time in the century, Dimitrie Cantemir was mentioned in Ottoman history, XIX. It became widespread by being adopted by Ottoman historians in the 19th century. Contemporary Western writers called him “Magnificent” or “Grand Turc”. In addition, in Western sources, it is stated that Süleyman Çelebi, who ascended to the Ottoman throne during the Interregnum period, caused II. He is also described as Solomon. He spent his childhood years in Trabzon, where his father served as a sanjak governor. He received his primary education from the teachers assigned to him in the Trabzon palace. He received his primary education from the teachers assigned to him in the Trabzon palace. According to Evliya Çelebi, while he was in Trabzon, he learned jewelery making from a Greek, together with his foster brother, Kadı Ömer Efendi’s son, Yahyâ (Beşiktaşlı Yahyâ Efendi).

When he was ten years old, he had to go to the banner, probably II. Bayezid’s appointment was delayed due to the continuous pressure by his sons. He witnessed his father’s struggles for the throne; he supported his military preparations to gain the throne. His father’s ascension to the throne in 1512 also paved the way for future power for him. As a matter of fact, he was summoned to Istanbul shortly after the accession of Yavuz Sultan Selim. For a while, he followed his father’s fight against his uncles from the capital city where he was assigned to protect. and after they were eliminated, he was sent to Manisa as the sanjak lord, as the sole heir to the throne (April 1513). In a document belonging to the first months of his visit to Manisa, it is determined that he was accompanied by his mother, sister, teacher Hayreddin, his lala Kasım and 458 servants. In this list, the names of Mahidevran, the mother of his first son Mustafa, and his close friend Ibrahim, who would later become his grand vizier, are also found. During this time, he learned the functioning of the state and through his teachers he was prepared for the throne. His duty in Manisa ended when he received the news of his father’s death (21-22 September 1520) from the messenger sent by Grand Vizier Pîrî Mehmed Pasha. He moved to Istanbul by land with his men and reached Üsküdar on September 30, 1520 and went to the palace and sat on the throne.

SULEIMAN THE MAGNIFICENT'S REIGN

First of all, he allowed about 600-800 artists and scientists who were exiled from the country during the time of his father to return to the country. He made his first expedition to Belgrade, which had a symbolic meaning for the Ottomans, and conquered the city in 1521. During his time on the throne, he organized expeditions to both the east and the west and made conquests. He commanded thirteen expeditions, including Belgrade, Rhodes, Mohaç, Vienna, Alaman, Irakeyn, Pulya, Karaboğdan, Istabur, Esztergon, Iran, Nakhchivan and Zigetvar. He is the fourth Ottoman sultan to die during the campaign. He is the fourth Ottoman sultan to die during the campaign. Suleiman the Magnificent's death on 6-7 September 1566 was kept secret by his vizier Sokollu Mehmet Pasha, with the idea of preventing the conquest from being left unfinished and some confusion, until his son Selim arrived in Zigetvar twenty days later.

Sultan Süleyman is an artistic sultan who sings poetry under the pseudonym Muhibbi. Muhibbi who is poet and started with Murat II, is the fifth of the Ottoman sultans. His great grandfather was Fatih, his grandfather was Mehmet II. like Bayezid and his father Yavuz, he was interested in poetry and wrote around 3000 poems, mostly ghazals. Almost all of his poems are extremely successful within the framework of the classical Turkish literature tradition. Although he wrote many poems, it is seen that he did not fall into carelessness in these poems. His ghazals are full of subtle dreams and figures of speech.

“MAGNIFICENT CENTURY”

The life of Suleiman the Magnificent, who deserved the title of “magnificent” with both the conditions of the period he lived in, his performances and his reign, was brought to the screen with the TV series “Magnificent Century”, which aired 139 episodes between January 5, 2011 and June 11, 2014. Throughout the series, it has been one of the most watched TV series in Turkey and around the world. However, in the same vein, serious criticism has also been made against the series in Turkey. The basis of these criticisms was the discomfort of nationalist-conservative segments that the way the Ottoman Empire was handled and represented was not compatible with their perspective. The point where the problem comes to a head is that in the series, the life of our

ancestors, sanctified by the nationalist-conservative segment, is fictionalized with all its human aspects, without glorifying it.

Conservative segments associated this form of representation, which goes beyond their own perspective on Suleiman the Magnificent, with ideological opposition, intent and betrayal. Suleiman the Magnificent's private life in the harem, sexuality, and the portrayal of the sultan as someone fond of pleasure and entertainment formed the basis of criticism towards the series.

Even though it is said that what is told in the series is ultimately a fiction, criticism has never decreased.¹ On the other hand, in terms of the narrative language of television, it is extremely difficult to portray a period with all its political and cultural dimensions in a historical drama. Because the television image is simple and direct. There is no room for detail or exaggeration. For example, if we make a comparison, unlike the image being the determining factor in cinema, it is the sound that fixes the meaning in television; visual descriptions often contain no more than what is provided by sound. While details come to the fore in cinema, in television the background and context are depicted only superficially. Precisely because of this narrative structure of television, if history is represented with a film instead of a written text, pages of historical data can be presented in a short time. At this point, historians sometimes criticize what is not shown or voiced, without taking into account the narrative structure of television. The conservative concerns that came to light with the TV series *Magnificent Century* stem from the fact that the mythical narrative of their roots, which they describe as "ancestors" and which help them make sense of their own identities, has been deviated from and may be destroyed.

Concerns about the serie are the concerns of the advocates of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which became more powerful and integrated into the cultural policies of the state after the 1980s. The underlying reason for this concern is that, in the public imagination, the Turkishness of an Ottoman Empire that could be perceived as being dominated by foreign concubines would be questionable, and the sultans who drank alcohol would be detrimental to their Muslimness. This will undermine the "golden age" narrative and the mythic narrative of historical heroes that underpin the Muslim-Turkish identity. The rise of the Ottoman Empire and the conquests and domination of sultans such as Mehmet the

¹ S. Aydos (2013), "Muhafazakâr Milliyetçi Muhayyilede Kanuni: Muhteşem Yüzyıl'a Yönelik Tepkilere Dair Bir Okuma", *History Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 1.

Conqueror, Yavuz Sultan Selim, and Suleiman the Magnificent over other states have always been glorified and praised as a “golden age” by the nationalist-conservative segment. However, especially in line with the goal of becoming a regional power determined by foreign policy in the last decade, references to the Ottoman Empire and the mentioned sultans have become more frequent in various cultural and political channels. “Fatih Project”, “Conquest 1453” movie and various history programs about the Ottoman Empire are the first ones that come to mind. Ironically, although it angered some of those who supported the socio-political vision, the Magnificent Century series also contributed to the increase in interest in the Ottoman Empire.

The fact that Turkish TV series have become very popular in the countries in the Ottoman hinterland such as the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa, and the possibility that Magnificent Century will be broadcast in these countries has raised concerns among those who react to the series that it will misrepresent the Ottoman Empire not only at home but also abroad. In this context, the concern valid for nationalist-conservatives has actually been seen in many circles in Turkey for many years. This is a concern that is usually accompanied by the uneasiness and fear we feel about the “wrong” presentation of Turkey to the world, especially to the West, whose gaze we assume is always on us, in the films we shoot. But this time, it is not only the West that we are afraid of being misrepresented, but also the countries that Turkey is trying to become a role model in line with its new policies. In the TV series Magnificent Century, which received a record level of criticism before it was even released, “the history of our nation is portrayed as if it consisted of the conflict of a handful of women”, “Immoral reflection of the lives of Ottoman sultans”, “the denial of our history”, The reason why familiar “national sensitivities” such as “humiliation of the Ottoman Empire” came into play in advance, It is the Turkish people’s fear that their perception of the Ottoman Empire will change as well as being presented as “bad” to the world.²

Despite this, the relationship between Kanuni and Hürrem at the center of the series is also remarkable. It wouldn’t be wrong to say that the skeleton of the series is built on the love between these two. However, the reflections of the same relationship on the palace environment constituted the starting point of all criticisms towards the series, as explained above. However, the reflections of the same relationship on the

² *Ibid.*

palace environment constituted the starting point of all criticisms towards the series, as explained above. Suleiman the Magnificent's love for Hürrem Sultan can be seen in the sultan's own poems. One of these is an ode thought to have been written by Suleiman the Magnificent to Hurrem Sultan. This ghazal should be examined in terms of showing Suleiman's poetic side:

Celîs-i halvetim, vârim, habîbim mâh-ı tâbânım

Enîsim, mahremim, vârim, güzeller şâhı sultânım

(My best friend, my friend, my only being, my lover, my moonlight. My closest friend, my confidant, my presence, my beautiful sultan.)

Hayâtım, hâsılım, ömrüm, şarâb-ı kevserim, Adn'im

Bahârım, behçetim, rûzum, nigârım, verd-i handânım

(My life, my everything, my life, Kevser is my wine, Eden is my heaven. My spring, my smiling face, my day, my lover, my smiling face.)

Neşâtım, işretim, bezmim, çerâğım, neyyirim, şem'im

Turunc u nâr u nârencim, benim şem'-i şebistânım

(My joy, my fun, my assembly, my light, my candle. My orange, my pomegranate, my citrus, my light that illuminates my night.)

Nebâtım, sükkerim, gencim, cihân içinde bî-rencim

Azîzim, Yusuf'um, varım, gönül Mısr'ındaki hânım

(My delicious plants, my sugar, my treasure, the one who never makes me sad in the world. My saint, my Joseph, I exist, my sultan in the land of the heart.)

Stanbûl'um, Karaman'ım, diyâr-ı mülket-i Rum'um

Bedehşân'ım ve Kıpçağım ve Bağdâd'ım, Horasânım.

(My Istanbul, my Karaman, my Anatolian land, my Bedahshan, my Kipchak, my Baghdad, my Khorasan.)

Saçı mârım, kaşı yayım, gözü pür fitne, bîmârım

Ölürsem boynuna kanım, meded hey nâ-müselmânım

(My hair in curls like the letter Vav, my eyebrows bowed, my seductive lover with eyes full of mischief, my beauty with a languid look. If

I die with my longing for you, O non-Muslim lover, my sins will be on your neck.)

Kapında, çünkü meddâhım, seni medh ederim dâim

Yürek pür-gam, gözüm pür-nem, Muhibbî'yim vü hoş hâlîm!

(I am a preacher who always praises you at your door. I am a lover with a troubled heart and tears, that is, I am Muhibbi and I am happy with this situation.)

When we look at the translation of the poem, it will be seen that it does not actually express the meaning given by the pronunciation in classical Turkish literature. Despite this, this poem, with its entire universe of meaning, clearly reveals Suleiman the Magnificent's perspective on Hürrem Sultan, who is at the center of his life. In this poem, the sincere inner thoughts and despair of a lover and a statesman who spent his whole life on expeditions and who did not hesitate to kill even his own as a result of palace conflicts can be observed. The beauty of the different themes, proverbs and idioms he puts forward in his poems, the care and attention he shows in language, and the harmony of voice and words reveal how close he is to the great poets. Muhibbî, who often emphasizes the need to be pure-hearted and decent, states that he has a fascinating poetic power and praises himself like every divan poet. He also complains about human conditions such as not being valued and being alone and desolate, which were common in poets of that period.

CONCLUSION

Despite all the controversy, Magnificent Century broke the viewing record both in Turkey and in the societies under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. Although the background of this is the hidden realities of Ottoman harem life and the desire to know this today, it can also be thought that there is a love and amorous adventure of a ruler within society and the palace. Suleiman the Magnificent, a political and romantic figure, was not reflected in the nationalist-conservative Turkish society as desired in the series, and was highly criticized in Turkey at the time it was broadcast.

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