

# Roxolana in European Literature, History and Culture

Edited by

**GALINA I. YERMOLENKO**



# Roxolana in European Literature, History and Culture

Edited by  
GALINA I. YERMOLENKO  
*DeSales University, USA*



ASHGATE

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Published by  
Ashgate Publishing Limited  
Wey Court East  
Union Road  
Farnham  
Surrey, GU9 7PT  
England

Ashgate Publishing Company  
Suite 420  
101 Cherry Street  
Burlington  
VT 05401-4405  
USA

[www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com)

### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Roxolana in European literature, history and culture.

1. Hurrem, consort of Suleiman I, Sultan of the Turks, ca. 1505?–1558 2. Hurrem, consort of Suleiman I, Sultan of the Turks, ca. 1504?–1558 – In literature. 3. Hurrem, consort of Suleiman I, Sultan of the Turks, ca. 1504?–1558 – Influence. 4. European literature – History and criticism. 5. Other (Philosophy) in literature.

I. Yermolenko, Galina I.  
809.9'3351-dc22

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Roxolana in European literature, history and culture / edited by Galina I. Yermolenko.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-6761-2 (hardback: alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4094-0374-6 (ebook)

1. Hurrem, consort of Suleiman I, Sultan of the Turks, ca. 1505?–1558—In literature.  
2. Hurrem, consort of Suleiman I, Sultan of the Turks, ca. 1505?–1558—Literary collections. I. Yermolenko, Galina I.

PN57.H87R69 2010  
809'.93351—dc22

2009047142

ISBN: 9780754667612 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781409403746 (ebk)



**Mixed Sources**

Product group from well-managed  
forests and other controlled sources  
[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org) Cert no. SA-COC-1565  
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
MPG Books Group, UK

ROXOLANA IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE,  
HISTORY AND CULTURE

*To my late mother*

*Tamara*

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## Notes on Contributors

**Beate Allert** is Associate Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Purdue University, Indiana. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley, and she specializes in discourses on seeing and perception. She has published three books: *Die Metapher und ihre Krise: Zur Dynamik der "Bilderschrift" Jean Pauls* (Peter Lang, 1987), *Languages of Visuality: Crossings between Science, Politics, and Literature* (Wayne State University Press, 1996), and *Comparative Cinema: How American University Students View Foreign Films* (Edwin Mellen, 2008). Her articles and reviews have appeared in journals such as *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, *Lessing Yearbook*, *Monatshefte*, *German Quarterly*, and recent book chapters, in *Visual Culture* (Heidelberg, 2008); *The Enlightened Eye: Goethe and Visual Culture* (Rodopi, 2007); *Literary Encyclopedia* (<http://www.LitEncyc.com>) (London, 2006); *Companion to G. E. Lessing* (Camden House, 2005); and *German Romanticism* (Camden House, 2004). She is currently working on a book on G. E. Lessing.

**Andrzej Dziedzic** is Professor of French in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. He received his Ph.D. in French literature from Northwestern University. His main area of specialization is sixteenth-century French literature and culture. In addition to numerous articles that have appeared in national and international journals, he also presented his research at various conferences in the United States, France, Canada, Japan, and Poland. He is a recipient of several grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Association of Teachers of French, and the University of Wisconsin system, among others. His current research project focuses on the early modern encyclopedia and its origins and evolution in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France.

**Oleksander Halenko** is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU), from which he received his Ph.D. He authored *Documentary Publication on the History of Ukrainian SSR* (Kyiv, 1991), co-edited *The Crimea in Ethno-Political Dimension* (Kyiv, 2005), and translated into Ukrainian Halil İnalcık's *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300–1600* (Kyiv, 1998). His other publications include chapters and articles in several scholarly collections, as well as in Western and Ukrainian periodicals, such as *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, *Ruthenica*, *Krytyka* [Critique], *Східний Світ* [Eastern World], and *Сходознавство* [Eastern Studies]. He is currently working on two book projects which examine the international slave trade in early modern Eastern Europe and the Ottoman province of Kefe (Caffa).



**Judy A. Hayden** is Associate Professor of English and Director of Women's Studies at the University of Tampa. She has published extensively on women's writing, particularly women's writing and culture in seventeenth-century England. In addition to several book articles, she published essays in journals such as *Women's History Magazine*, *English*, *Papers on Language and Literature*, *Critical Survey*, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, and *Studies in English Literature*. Her book *Of Love and War: The Political Voice in the Early Plays of Aphra Behn* will be out from Rodopi Press shortly. She had co-edited a number of collections in Women's Studies through Cambridge Scholars Press. Her most recent research interests and forthcoming book projects involve early modern travel narratives and scientific discourse.

**Claire Jowitt** is Professor of English Literature at Nottingham Trent University. She has written widely on colonialism and the origins of empire, piracy, and maritime violence, and Renaissance conceptions of "race" and gender. Her books include *Voyage Drama and Gender Politics, 1589–1642: Real and Imagined Worlds* (Manchester University Press, 2003), *Pirates? The Politics of Plunder 1550–1650* (Palgrave, 2007), and *The Culture of Piracy 1580–1630: Literature and Seaborne Crime* (Ashgate, forthcoming 2010). She is currently co-editing, with Nabil Matar, *Three Plays about Muslim Women 1594–1631* for Manchester University Press; co-editing, with Daniel Carey, *Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe* for Ashgate's Hakluyt Society Extra Series; and, along with Daniel Carey and Andrew Hadfield, she is General Editor of the new Oxford edition of Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1598–1600).

**Özlem Ögüt Yazıcıoğlu** is Assistant Professor of English and Comparative Literature in the Department of Western Languages and Literatures at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. She holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Purdue University, with special focus on English and German literature as well as literary theory and criticism, particularly post-structuralism and semiotics. Her research areas include modern and postmodern fiction, ethnic studies, and minority literature. She has published articles in national and international journals such as *Litera*, *Ethnic Studies Review*, and *Romance Languages Annual*, and chapters in *Orhan Pamuk'un Edebi Dünyası [The Literary World of Orhan Pamuk]* (Istanbul, 2008) and *(Re)reading Shakespeare: Text and Performance* (Istanbul, 2005). Many of her international conference presentations have been published in proceedings (of selected papers).

**Virginia Picchiatti** is Associate Professor of Italian at the University of Scranton. She received the Ph.D. in Italian, with a minor in Film Studies, at Indiana University, Bloomington. She has published a book on the representation of women's relationships in Dacia Maraini's writings and films, as well as essays on Maraini, the cinema of Federico Fellini, gender transgressions in Italian cinema, and the representation of Judaism and the Jewish experience in Italian cinema, 1992–2004.

**Ana Pinto** is Associate Professor in the Department of English Philology at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, Spain. She specializes in the literature and history of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Her publications include *Los Viajes de Sir John Mandeville* (Madrid, 2001) and *Mandeville's Travels* (Madrid, 2005), as well as various articles on the history of the English language. She has contributed various articles on the etymology of English words, such as “she,” “caramel” and “downtown.”

**Maryna Romanets** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Northern British Columbia, Canada. Her articles—on contemporary Irish, British, and Ukrainian literatures, focusing on the issues of postcolonialism and intertextuality, representation and gender, politics and language, as well as on the mechanisms of textual production and translation theory and praxis—have appeared in *Cahiers Victoriens & Edouardiens*, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, *Interculturality and Translation*, *Nordic Irish Studies*, and as chapters in several books. The author of *Anamorphotic Texts and Reconfigured Visions: Improvised Traditions in Contemporary Ukrainian and Irish Literature* (Ibidem, 2007), she is currently working on a book project titled *Postcolonial “Erotomaniac” Fictions and the Making of New Identities in Ukraine*, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

**Galina Yermolenko** is Associate Professor of English in the Humanities Department at DeSales University. She holds a Ph.D. in English from Marquette University and a Ph.D. in Germanic/English Philology from Simferopol State University, Ukraine. Her scholarly interests include literature of the British Renaissance and early modern Ukrainian and Russian literary and cultural relations with the West, as well as early modern travel and European perceptions of the early modern Ottoman Empire and slave system. She has published articles in *Spenser Studies*, *Muslim World*, and *National Social Science Journal*. Her editing of the current collection sprang from her work on an on-going book project, *Roxolana: From Slave to Legend*, for which she received funding from the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

# Acknowledgments

This volume sprang out of my book project, *Roxolana: From Slave to Legend*, on which I have been working for several years. I therefore would like to express my gratitude to many people and organizations that helped me with shaping both my own book and this collection.

The research for this volume was partly supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose 2004 Summer Stipend enabled me to travel to and do research in several places in Ukraine, including Kyiv, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and the small town of Rohatyn, Roxolana's birthplace. My warm thanks go to the citizens of Rohatyn for their warm hospitality and support, and especially to Mykhailo Vorobets, deputy chair of the Rohatyn City Council and an enthusiastic Roxolana historian, for sharing with me his vast knowledge on the subject. I also thank Pavlo Zahrebelny, author of a 1979 novel on Roxolana, for conducting a telephone interview with me in Kyiv; and Volodymyr Hrabovetsky, Professor Emeritus residing in Ivano-Frankivsk and author of a study on Roxolana, for an interesting discussion on the subject. Oleksander Halenko, of the Institute of History of Ukraine at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, has my thanks for providing his expertise on the history of Ottoman slave trade in early modern Ukraine and for arranging a meeting for me with several researchers at the Institute of History of Ukraine at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in Kyiv. Halenko also gave me his excellent reader comments on my earlier essays that are partly incorporated into this volume.

I am indebted to the American Council of Learned Societies for the 2004 Library of Congress Fellowship in International Studies. I thank the staff members of the Kluge Center at the LOC—Mary Lou Reker, Robert Saladini, Joanne Kitchin, Regina Thielke, and Jacquia Warren—and the fellows of the Kluge Center at the time—Derick deKerkchove, Patricia Sieber, Gian Mario Cao, and Marcia Ristaino—for their support and various scholarly assistance with the Roxolana project.

I am very grateful to the administration of DeSales University, particularly the Provost Karen Walton and the Humanities Department Chair Stephen Myers, for their generous funding and continued encouragement of my research. I also thank my DSU colleagues Annette Benert, Brennan Pursell, Elisabeth Rosa, and Richard Noll, who at various points assisted me with research advice and translations, and commented on the conference papers and essays that went into this volume. The Humanities Department secretary Gloria Lewis has my thanks for her unending patience and help with numerous technical and clerical challenges that stood in the way of this volume. I am also grateful to my current and former DSU staff members, Toni Faccani, Kim Sando, and Dean Shaffer, for their assistance with the formatting and technical issues related to the collection typescript.

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Phyllis Vogel, of the Interlibrary Loan Services at DeSales Trexler Library, for her hard work and her magical ability to unearth the most inaccessible research materials and archaic texts throughout the years.

Special thanks go to Nabil Matar, of The University of Minnesota, for his valuable advice and support of my Roxolana project.

I thank all the contributors to this volume for their effort, diligence, and perseverance. Several of the contributors have my gratitude for their additional effort with bringing this volume to completion: Maryna Romanets, of the University of Northern British Columbia, for her reader comments on my chapter and the enormous assistance with Slavic transliterations; and Özlem Öğüt Yazıcıoğlu, of Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, for her advice on Turkish transliterations and for procuring the Turkish images for the collection.

I also thank Erika Gaffney, my editor at Ashgate, for her guidance and patience.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to my sister Luidmila Yermolenko, for her assistance with the Ukrainian research and her unconditional love.

*Galina Yermolenko  
Hellertown, PA  
August 2009*

# Note on Texts, Transliterations, and Spellings

## Foreign Language Words and Passages

Short original foreign language words and passages follow their English translations and equivalents in the main text. Longer original foreign language passages are provided in the footnotes. Occasionally, for emphasis, foreign words or short phrases are used first; in such cases, their English translations are signaled by square brackets and single quotation marks.

## Spellings

Archaic English and foreign language spellings are usually retained in quotations from old sources and their titles. Conventional English spellings of foreign words are used when available and where appropriate.

The collection uses several variants and spellings for the names of Roxolana and Suleiman, as well as other related Turkish figures (both historical and fictional). These variants have been in use for several centuries, and they occur in the various historical and literary texts discussed in this volume. The general “name” policy for this volume is to retain the versions and spellings used in the original texts, providing, in parentheses, their most common modern variants.<sup>1</sup>

## Transliterations

This volume follows modern Turkish orthography for words and names of Turkish, Arabic, or Persian origin. Several unfamiliar Turkish letters correspond to and are transliterated in Latin/English letters, according to the following:

- c** — as **j** in English (e.g., Cihangir – Jihangir)
- ç** — as **ch** in English (e.g., Çelebi – Chelebi)
- ş** — as **sh** in English (e.g., paşa – pasha)
- İ, ı** — as **I, i** in English (e.g., İbrahim – Ibrahim)
- ö** — as **o** in English (e.g., Özen – Ozen)
- ü** — as **u** in English (e.g., Hürrem – Hurrem)

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<sup>1</sup> For more specific comments on the early modern and modern versions and spellings of the names used in this volume, see Appendix 2.

Transliterations of Ukrainian and Russian bibliographic citations (in the footnotes to Chapters 1, 5, 6, and Bibliography) follow the Library of Congress (LC) system. In the main text of Chapters 1, 5, and 6, the LC conventions have been modified. In the reproductions of both Ukrainian and Russian personal names, the soft sign (*ь*) is not transliterated (e.g., Sichynsky, Novosiltsov). Ukrainian initial *я*-, *ю*-, *є*- appear as *ya*-, *yu*-, *ye*- (e.g., Yuri); final *-uĭ*, *-iĭ* (in personal names) are rendered as *-y*, *-i* (e.g. Sichynsky, Yuri); and *-i* appears as *-i* (in Kyiv).

Ukrainian place names are spelled in both the main text and in transliterated bibliographic citations according to standardized Roman-letter correspondences to the Ukrainian language geographical names (e.g., Kyiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv).

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# Introduction

Galina Yermolenko

Any study of the West's relations with the harem must be in large part a study of the imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Roxolana, or Hurrem Sultan, the legendary wife of Suleiman I, the Magnificent (1520–1566), left a special trace in Europe's cultural memory. The impact of this Asian queen on the Western imagination is comparable only to that of Cleopatra. “The greatest empress of the East,” Richard Knolles wrote of her—rather high praise, considering the scathingly critical portrayal the venerated English historian gave the “wicked woman” in his famous *Generall Historie of the Turks* (1603). Most other historians were equally harsh to Roxolana, often portraying her as a witch and ruthless schemer whose tight grip over Suleiman, and her insidious harem intrigues, led to the decline of the Ottoman Empire.

Although Western historians have been struggling to define Roxolana's legacy for over four centuries, it is often overlooked that she was largely a creation of the European imagination. Due to the lack of historical records and hard evidence, most of what is known about this woman rests on a handful of secondhand contemporaneous accounts and subsequent reinterpretations and speculations by numerous historians, quasi historians, dramatists, and other men of letters who have shaped the Western discourse on Roxolana. Yet, despite the fictions written about this woman, her allure and impact on Europeans have not been critically explored to date.

The present collection is the first book-length critical study of the Roxolana figure in European history, culture, and imagination from the mid-sixteenth century to the present. Contributions to this collection examine cultural responses to Roxolana in both Western and Eastern Europe—namely, Italy, Spain, France, England, Germany, Turkey, Poland, and Ukraine. The collection attempts to account for Roxolana's unwavering appeal across the continent by probing into European attitudes and ideological biases in relation to the Ottoman Other and the Female Other.

Because most of what was written about Roxolana in Europe is based on several famous moments of her career at the Ottoman court, and because the essays and translations in the present collection refer to these famous stories in various ways,

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 1.