

## Roxolana in the Spanish Golden Age

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History has not been generous with facts concerning the origin of Hürrem, “the favorite concubine” of Suleyman the Magnificent. According to some scholars (Howard 193), she was born in Poland around 1500 and her original name was Alexandra Lisowska. She was supposed to have either been bought or taken as a slave by the Ottomans in any of their raids into Christian territories. Though Hürrem’s Christian origin and her initial status of slave in the sultan’s harem are accepted by most, there are scholars (Karpát 756) who say that she was a native of Ukraine. This hypothesis is backed by Yermolenko:<sup>1</sup>

Roxolana is believed to have been born in the western part of Ukraine around 1505. Sometime between 1515 and 1520, when she was around 15 years of age, she was abducted by the Crimean Tatars in one of their slave raids on Ukraine. [...] and according to a legend was purchased for the imperial harem by Ibrahim Pasha, the close friend of the young Crown Prince Suleiman. (2)

However, suppositions about her life became facts once she was made the favorite concubine of Suleyman (r. 1520-66). In Turkish sources she is mentioned by the name of Hürrem, while in the Western world she will be known by the names of Roxelana, Roxolana, Rosa Solimana, Rosa or Rossa. Her official status and her influence over Suleyman seems to have been considerable for, breaking with Ottoman tradition, the Sultan decided to marry her, which provoked the consequent scandal among his subjects (Imber 90). Such was Suleyman’s affection for Hürrem that, in a break with custom, she was not to leave Constantinople to accompany her sons to their governorships in the provinces, but remained there at the center of power with immediate access to the Sultan. The Topkapi palace was her permanent residence. And as a last token of Suleyman’s affection for her, when she died in 1558, she was buried in the grounds of Süleymaniye Mosque, next to the Sultan’s own mausoleum.

According to Western sources (Mcjannet 143), once Roxolana ensured her position by marrying the Sultan, she plotted with the help of Vizier Rustan, who was married to one of her daughters, against Mustapha, Suleyman’s eldest son, whose mother was another concubine. It seems that she aimed to get rid of Mustapha and place one of her sons as the Sultan’s heir. This is in essence the version given by a contemporary European, whose name was Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522-92). His

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<sup>1</sup> To Yermolenko’s book the author of this article has contributed the foreword and translation *The Second Part of the Pontifical and Catholic History* (1606) by Gonzalo de Illescas and the foreword and translation of Lope de Vega’s *The Holy League* (1603).

book about the Ottomans, which is a collection of letters originally written in Latin in 1554, was translated into vernacular languages<sup>2</sup> and circulated widely throughout the Western world. De Busbecq was well acquainted with the Ottoman imperial court, since he was ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor to the Sublime Porte, a post that he kept from 1554 until 1562.

Mustapha's death, as suggested by De Busbecq, though ordered by Suleyman, who was ultimately responsible for any crucial decision,<sup>3</sup> was attributed by his subjects to the influence that Roxolana exerted on him through the use of spells and magic potions and to Vizier Rustan. Possibly people were made to believe so by Rustan himself in order to divert blame from Suleyman and to boost the army's morale with the intention of preventing a possible uprising:

[Una vez muerto Mustafá] en todo el real hubo general luto por muchos días; y durara mucho más (porque no había talle de otra cosa) si no hubiera desterrado Solimán, y enviado a Constantinopla a Rustan, privado de su cargo (a lo que se deja entender, por consejo del mismo Rustan), en cuyo lugar y oficio fue proveído Achmat Bajá, el cual era el primero después de Rustan entre los visires; hombre de más ánimo que consejo. Esta mudanza aplacó los ánimos de los soldados, y teniendo por creído (según es el vulgo crédulo) que ya Solimán había caído, aunque tarde, en la cuenta de las maldades de Rustan y de los bebedizos y hechicerías de su mujer, y por eso lo había echado de cabe sí, y cuando volviese a Constantinopla tomaría venganza también de la mujer. (De Busbecq 29r and 29v)

Nowhere in the book, though, when speaking of Roxolana, does De Busbecq mention her beauty. Maybe this was due to the fact that such a quality was something taken for granted and a *sine qua non* for the inclusion of a woman in the Sultan's harem. Thus, it is only her influence on Suleyman that is emphasized in the book. The same happens in Giovio's book, which is another Western source for the Ottomans. Roxolana, under the name of Rossa, appears as Soliman's [*sic*] wife in *Mustapha*, a play written by the English Fulke Greville (Rees) around 1596. And it is also her influence on the Sultan because of her magical powers that is emphasized by this drama.

However, it seems certain that Roxolana was a woman of great beauty and, according to various pieces of circumstantial evidence, she deserved to be painted by the great Venetian painter Titian. In his book on Titian, Beroqui affirms: "Seguro es,

<sup>2</sup> The Spanish translation was published in 1610. Quotations from De Busbecq will be given from this edition. There also exists an English translation, though it was published much later.

<sup>3</sup> Based on De Busbecq's evidence, it seems clear that, in spite of Roxolana and Rustan's influence on Suleyman, the Sultan had the last word on important matters. When talking about the Sultan's future heir, De Busbecq says that (in spite of Roxolana's preference for Bayazid) "mas al fin se habrá de hacer lo que el padre quiere, que está muy firme y puesto en que no reine después de él otro que Selim, si fuere vivo" (100v-01r).

pues, lo dicen Vasari y Ridolfi, que el Vecellio [Tiziano] retrató a Rossa,<sup>4</sup> mujer del Gran Turco [...]; y seguro es, también, que [el retrato] vino a España” (144). The Spanish playwright Lope de Vega was not the only one to be impressed by her portrait, as can be inferred from what he says in his *La Dorotea*, but many other people<sup>5</sup> who had witnessed her beauty were impressed as much. In a dialogue between two characters (Ludovico and Fernando) belonging to that play, we can read:

- Más hermosa muger no la pintó el Ticiano, aunque entre Rosa Solimana, la favorecida del Turco. [*sic*]  
 —¿No pudiérais dezir Sophonisba, Atalanta o Cleopatra?  
 —Éssas no las pintó el Ticiano.  
 —Bien dezís, que este retrato le auemos todos visto. (238)

The original portrait by Titian has been lost, but –as Suida (168) pointed out and reproduced in 1949– it is very possible that a portrait in The Ringling Museum of Sarasota (US) could be an identical copy of Titian’s original work. Some years later, De Armas (349) did not hesitate to assume that a copy of Roxolana portrait by Titian, though in very poor condition, was kept in The Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida.

Both Roxolana’s beauty and her magical powers are two features of Roxolana’s mentioned by other Western sources. Though not so close to the Ottoman court as De Busbecq, although he lived during Suleyman’s lifetime, the Spanish cleric Gonzalo de Illescas (1521-74) refers in his history to these two characteristics of Roxolana’s when speaking of Suleyman’s wife:

Pero estorbábanle extrañamente el hacerlo [...] Roxolana su nueva mujer, que la había poco antes tomado, y tenía ya hijos de ella. La cual le tenía tan cautivo con su hermosura, y aun (según dicen) con sus hechicerías y encantamientos, que no le dejaba salir de Constantinopla, a lo menos para irse muy lejos de ella. (262r)

Given the attraction that Europe felt for a historical figure like Suleyman the Magnificent, it is difficult to understand why certain facts having to do with him were very soon distorted in the Western world. Lope de Vega in Spain (1562-1635) is a case in point.

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<sup>4</sup> In his edition of *La Dorotea* by Lope de Vega Morley indicates: “A esta Rosa o Rossa (es decir, rusa, por su origen) se la llama con frecuencia Roxolana” (238). Quotations from this play will be given from this edition.

<sup>5</sup> The famous poet Quevedo (1580-1645), who was also known for his love of painting (Candelas-Colodrón), was also impressed by the portrait: “Entre sus dedos vimos/ nacer segunda vez, y más hermosa,/ aquella sin igual gallarda Rosa,/ que tantas veces de la fama oímos” (135).

It was well known in Lope de Vega's lifetime what type of monarch Suleyman had been, for Western chronicles of the time, when dealing with this historical figure, praise his courage and magnanimity, and do not spare laudatory expressions to describe him both as a man and ruler. He was also considered an enemy of Christendom who had to be brought to a halt. For instance, De Busbecq provided the following biographical sketch:

De Solimán por ventura me preguntará V.M. qué es lo que me pareció. Está ya viejo, tiene la cara y presencia dignas de tanta majestad y grandeza. Siempre estuvo en opinión de cuerdo y templado, aun en la edad que conforme a su usanza podía pecar y vivir más desenvueltamente, sin reprehensión; porque ni en su mocedad se dio al vino, ni fue aficionado a muchachos, que suelen ser los regalos y entretenimientos de los turcos; ni con razón le pueden achacar aun sus propios enemigos cosa que entre más en hondo que el ser demasiado rendido y sujeto a su mujer. (55r)

As far as Gonzalo de Illescas is concerned, his praises of Suleyman are even higher than De Busbecq's, as can be seen in the following excerpt referring to the Sultan's death:

Murió este valeroso Príncipe sobre la ciudad de Ciguet, cinco días del mes de septiembre de este año de sesenta y seis. Estúvose secreta su muerte por algunos respetos, y antes que se publicase ganaron los suyos la ciudad. Falleció Solimán en edad de sesenta y seis años, habiendo cuarenta y siete que reinaba en Constantinopla, con grandísima gloria y majestad, por haber sido siempre excelentísimo capitán, muy diestro y bien afortunado en las cosas de la guerra, y muy prudente en las cosas de la paz y gobernación de sus Reinos y amplísimo patrimonio, el cual ensanchó grandemente, ganando de la parte de Hungría a Belgrado, y a Buda, y otras muchas y muy importantes plazas de la Cristiandad. Y por parte del mar Mediterráneo, la insigne isla y ciudad de Rodas. Fue hombre de muy buen entendimiento, y codicioso de ensanchar sus estados tanto como cada uno de sus antecesores, y grandísimo enemigo del nombre Cristiano, como por nuestros pecados lo habemos probado muchas veces los que ahora vivimos. (349r)

When Suleyman died, the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega was four years old and the reigning sultan at the time was Selim II, Suleyman's son by Roxolana. However, it will be absurd to assume that such a learned and well informed writer as Lope de Vega would not have known about the existence of Suleyman and his special relationship with Roxolana. Consequently, it is puzzling to find that in *La Santa Liga*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Quotations from this work will be given according to Arroyo-Stephens' edition.

—one of Lope de Vega’s historical plays— three glaring historical errors occur which we think happen on purpose. First, there is no mention of the name of Selim’s father; second, Roxolana —in the play either Rosa or Rosa Solimana— is the name given to Selim’s favorite concubine; and third, the Venetian painter Titian, another character in the play, appears in a scene before the Venetian Senate the day of his arrival from Constantinople and moments before Selim’s ambassadors unexpectedly made their entrance.

*La Santa Liga* was written between 1598 and 1603<sup>7</sup> and the action of the play recreates both the splendor of the Ottoman Empire and its defeat by the European powers. The play opens with various scenes in the Sultan’s palace in Constantinople and closes with the battle of Lepanto, where an alliance of Christian forces, called the Holy League, puts a stop —at least temporarily— to the Ottoman naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. On the whole, the action of the play and the main characters match historical events and figures.

It is a historical fact, for instance, as stated in the play, that the fact that triggered the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 was the occupation of the island of Cyprus by the Turks, an island that had been until then in Venetian hands. Regarding the real reasons that the Ottomans had for the conquest of the island of Cyprus, most historians agree that the Venetian control of this island and others, like Crete, implied a threat to the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean. Given that the reigning Sultan was Selim II (r. 1566-74), Suleyman I’s son and heir, who was very fond of all kinds of sensual pleasures, wine included, and that his early policy towards Christendom was based on non-aggression, there are some historians (Shaw 13) who suggest that in order to allow the conquest of Cyprus the Sultan had to be persuaded by a frivolous argument, as was the reputation of Cyprus for vintage wine. Selim II’s reticence to wage war against Christendom and his *modus operandi* to break the truce with Venice are historical facts accurately portrayed in *La Santa Liga*. All this in turn means that Lope de Vega was well documented in historical sources. That is, the information extracted from the play matches that provided by historical accounts. For instance, this is Gonzalo de Illescas’ record of the aforementioned event:

Un poco antes que se levantasen los moriscos de Granada, comenzó el Gran Turco Selim II, nuestro adversario, a moverse contra la Cristiandad y a darnos la molestia ordinaria que sus pasados acostumbraron a procurarnos. No había hecho jornada ninguna importante en todo el tiempo de su imperio, de que no poco sosiego se había causado de la república cristiana [...]. En el mar de Suria bien cerca de la Tierra Santa tenía la República de Venecia de muchos años atrás la isla de Chipre, y conservábanla con estar metida de todas partes en medio de las tierras del Turco, así por el gran valor que aquella República siempre tuvo en conservar sus tierras, como porque de muchos años atrás, como ya se ha

<sup>7</sup>These two dates are tentatively given by Morley & Bruerton 236.

dicho, estaban en paz con el Turco y duraba entre ellos el asiento y concordia que Solimán asentó con Venecia, y el mismo Selim la había confirmado y jurado de nuevo de guardarla. Estaban con esto los venecianos muy seguros, sin pensar que de parte de Selim se les había de dar desasosiego [...]. [F]ue así que Selim, por consejo de sus amigos y vasallos, determinó romper la tregua que con Venecia tenía. Para tener ocasión de romperla, envió al Senado sus embajadores pidiéndoles que sin dilación le entregasen la isla de Cypro [*sic*] que le pertenecía como cosa que había sido de los Reyes de Jerusalén, cuyo reino, él y sus antecesores, habían ganado en justa guerra [...], apercibiéndoles que si no se la entregaban luego, se la quitaría por fuerza y tendría por rompida la tregua que con ellos había asentado. Esta demanda tan injusta turbó extrañamente al Duque y al Senado veneciano, y después de algunos comedimientos que con el Turco usaron, representándole la poca razón que tenía de pedir lo que no era suyo, ni de romper las capitulaciones que con ellos tenía puestas y juradas, sin haberle dado ellos ocasión ninguna para hacerles la guerra, finalmente se vinieron a resolver en que no entendían darle lo que sin contradicción era suyo, antes pensaban defenderlo con las armas en caso que porfiase a quererlos despojar de su hacienda. (351v-52r)

Illescas does not speak about Selim II's nature and it seems then evident that Lope de Vega must have used other historical sources for his portrayal of the personal features of this Sultan. It is a well known fact that Selim II took little interest in the government of his empire, which was handed over to his favorites, and that he devoted himself to a life of pleasure and sensuality (Shaw 13). Considering that all these traits are accurately depicted in *La Santa Liga*, it seems rather puzzling that in one of the first scenes of the play –after Selim refuses to hear his viziers' advise to abandon his easy life– Selim's father (who appears as a shadow) is not named:

Deténte, aguarda: ¿dónde huyes, sombra?  
 Y si eres alma, aguarda un poco, espera.  
 Selín tu hijo soy, Selín te nombra.  
 Padre, ¿por qué te vas de esa manera?  
 Cuanto miro parece que me asombra;  
 todo me causa horror, todo me altera. (495)

We must add that in the play the name “Solimán” appears twice, although this name does not refer to the historical Suleyman on either occasion. The first time, the name “Solimán” is used by Mustapha, who acts as Selim's ambassador with the mission to claim the island of Cyprus, when addressing the Venetian Senate. Although the meaning of the word is not clear at first sight, from the context it could be inferred

that “Solimán” stands for either “*musulmán*” (“Muslim”) or “grand.” These are Mustapha’s words when he is invited to take a seat:

Estad, Senado, atento:  
 Selín, Sultán Solimán  
 de la gran casa otomana,  
 señor de lo más del mundo por mares y tierras tantas,  
 a vos, Senado y famosa  
 República veneciana,  
 salud, amistad y paz;  
 a nuestros profetas, gracias. (594)

On the second occasion, the name appears at the end of the play and is included in the lyrics of a song recited by two Spanish rogues who celebrate the victory of Lepanto:

¡Muera el perro Solimán!  
 ¡Vivan Felipe y don Juan!  
 ¡Viva Felipe famoso  
 y el gran don Juan glorioso,  
 que por venir victorioso  
 la palma y laurel le dan!  
 ¡Muera el perro Solimán!  
 ¡Viva don Juan dos mil años!  
 Y al Gran Turco lleve el diablo;  
 hágale Judas el plato  
 con pólvora y alquitrán.  
 ¡Muera el perro Solimán!  
 ¡Vivan Felipe y don Juan! (564-65)

Considering the low social origin of these two characters, the word “Solimán” in their lips could imply that for ordinary people that name could be equated with the word “sultan,” for it was thanks to the great Suleyman I—known by the name Soliman at the time—that the knowledge of the Ottoman Empire spread throughout the Western world. And both names, “Solimán” and “sultán,” have a certain phonetic similarity in Spanish. At the same time, the mention of the name “Solimán” at this precise moment could serve two additional purposes. On the one hand, it allows the playwright to contrast the name of don Juan with that of Solimán by means of a coincidence in rhyme (ending). On the other hand, denigrating and manipulating the name “Solimán” while praising that of don Juan could be an attempt to make people believe that the past splendor of the Ottoman Empire had been overturned. After the Ottoman defeat in the battle of Lepanto at the hands of the Holy League led by don Juan of Austria, it was now time for Spain’s imperial glory, as the song clearly suggests.

It is also a historical fact that Selim II had a favorite concubine whose name was Nurbanu and that, following in his father's footsteps, he took her as his legal wife. Unlike Hürrem, Nurbanu (d. 1583) outlived Selim II and, from 1574 until her death, she enjoyed a political role as mother of the reigning sultan. For it was her own son, known by the name Murad III (1574-95), who would succeed Selim II. However, in *La Santa Liga* the name of Rosa Solimana is given to Selim's favorite concubine. Inevitably the following question arises: Why did Lope de Vega choose this particular name which sounded so closely to 'Suleyman,' for the word "Solimana" was a derivative of "Solimán," that is, it contained or included the name of this sultan? A possible answer could be that "Solimana" had the invaluable advantage of having been made famous as the name of a historical sultana (thanks to Suleyman I). Another possible reason could be that the audience of the play, who were for the most part ignorant of history, would be easily induced to believe that the name Solimana meant "Muslim woman," "Ottoman woman", "sultana," or even that a word composed of *sol* "sun" + *-mana* (a similar ending as in *musulmana*, "Muslim woman," or *otomana*, "Ottoman woman") suggested the beauty attributed to the character in the play due to the connotations that the word *sol* has in Spanish. While distorting history by misusing the name of Suleyman's wife the playwright possibly had in mind other interests, and keeping alive this brilliant sultan's memory or being faithful to historical facts concerning his life were not among them.

The third historical inaccuracy in *La Santa Liga* was to include Titian as one of the characters of the play. The Venetian painter appears in a scene which opens at the Venetian Senate, moments after his arrival from Constantinople, where the Sultan had commissioned him to paint Rosa Solimana's portrait, who, according to the play, is Selim's favorite concubine and has enthralled him with her beauty. In 1570, the year when the island of Cyprus was taken by the Turks, the Venetian painter was still alive (he died six years later, in 1576). But he could not have painted the historical figure known as Hürrem or Rosa Solimana –Suleyman I's wife and Selim II's mother– at this date for she had died in 1558, that is, twelve years before. And, as it has already been pointed out, historical evidence shows (Beroqui; Suida; Armas) that Titian made a portrait of the historical figure known as Hürrem or Rosa Solimana, although it is highly uncertain whether the Venetian painter traveled to Constantinople at the time of Suleyman I in order to paint her portrait (Sandoval).

However, when Titian appears in *La Santa Liga* he has just come to Venice from Selim's court, bringing a copy of the portrait of Rosa Solimana, Sultan Selim's favorite concubine. He is welcomed by the Venetian Senate moments before the arrival of Selim's ambassadors whose mission will be to claim the island of Cyprus. The painter is welcomed by one of the Senators with the following words:

Seáis muy bien venido a vuestra patria,  
pintor famoso, gran Ticiano ilustre,  
honor del siglo antiguo y el moderno. (503)



Upon this salute, the painter addresses them by saying:

Senado veneciano excelentísimo,  
 por vuestro gusto fui a Constantinopla,  
 que Selín os pidió que me enviádes  
 a retratar a Rosa Solimana,  
 contra los ritos de su infame secta;  
 retratéla, servíle y, bien pagado,  
 vuelvo a mi patria y esta carta os traigo. (503)

The contents of the Sultan's letter are made known by another senator:

Selín, Sultán por la gracia de Dios, Emperador de Constantinopla, etc., a vos, el noble Senado y República veneciana: las paces que el año pasado juré con vosotros vuelvo a jurar de nuevo, para que hasta mis herederos queden inviolables. Del Ticiano, vuestro pintor famoso, quedo bien servido; pídoos encarecidamente le hagáis noble, pues ni por el arte lo desmerece, ni su virtud me obliga menos que a pedíroslo. Dios os guarde. (503)

All these historical inaccuracies do not seem to happen by chance or the author's misinformation. On the contrary, they appear to have been deliberately planned. However, before advancing any hypothesis, we should remember that these anachronisms are included in a dramatic work meant to be enjoyed by a large public. But besides entertainment Lope de Vega could be adding another ingredient to his play: indoctrination. It must be stressed, as Renuncio-Roba (207) does in his own study on *La Santa Liga*, that Lope de Vega is the creator of the so-called "new comedy" or "national comedy," a successful type of theatre largely intended for entertainment. In addition, Lope de Vega and other contemporary writers helped with their works to reinforce the values that made up the Spanish national consciousness, values that logically were championed by the two great institutions of the time: the Catholic Church and the Monarchy.

Having in view these considerations, it may be better explained that a historical drama, like *La Santa Liga*, could alter historical facts if these suited the author's ideological purpose. In *La Santa Liga*, Lope de Vega attempts to blur out Suleyman the Magnificent's memory. First by distorting history in relation to his wife Rosa Solimana, and second by manipulating his name in contexts that contribute to damage his prestige. For Suleyman is mentioned in derogatory terms after the defeat of the sultan's army at Lepanto, as the lyrics by the two rogues' song at the end of the play indicate (see above). The playwright's aim is to stress the grandeur of Spain for his audience, whose king, Philip II, a staunch advocate of Christianity as the play remarks,

is to be glorified because he has contributed an army and a leader that have been crucial for the defeat of the Turks at Lepanto.

The anachronism dealing with Titian is only a poetic liberty taken by the author of *La Santa Liga* to show his admiration for the Venetian painter, who is mentioned, at least, fourteen times in his works (Herrero-García; Sánchez-Cantón;). It is a known fact that Lope de Vega was extremely well versed in the theory and history of art, as De Armas has pointed out (338). In addition, various scholars have noted the influence of several paintings in his plays, that is, the existence of a pictorial sense in many of his works (Castro and Rennert; Clements; Sánchez-Jiménez & Olivares).

Did Lope de Vega achieve his objective by altering some historical facts? In the short run, he very possibly contributed to darken the great historical figure of Suleyman I. Concerning Titian, it does not matter much whether the Venetian painter painted Hürrem or any other beautiful sultana. The reputation of Titian as a great painter, which Lope de Vega praises in the play by the laudatory words addressed to him by one of the Venetian Senators, has not suffered the slightest change throughout history. However, the character of Rosa Solimana created by Lope de Vega in *La Santa Liga* outlived the historical figure of Rosa Solimana, Suleyman I's wife. Around the 1630's, not many years after *La Santa Liga* was written, a fictional character called Rosa Solimana appears again in a drama entitled *La Baltasara*<sup>8</sup> whose role this time will be to play the part of Sultan Saladin's wife!

*La Baltasara*<sup>9</sup> is a co-authored play. The first act was written by Luis Vélez de Guevara (1579-1644). Antonio Coello and Francisco de Rojas were the authors of the second and third parts respectively. The title derives from the name of a beautiful and famous actress in Madrid in the 17th century whose life is dramatized in this play. Only the first act of this play concerns us here. The character played by the actress representing Baltasara is no less than Rosa Solimana, wife of Saladin (1138-1193), Sultan of Egypt and Syria. The drama starts with the presence on stage of several characters announcing *The Great Comedy of Saladin* to be performed and explaining the role that the character representing actress Baltasara is to have in the play. The action of the play proper takes place in the vicinity of Jerusalem in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Saladin and his wife Rosa Solimana enter the scene, they gaze at the city from a

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<sup>8</sup> Quotations from this play will be given according to the undated edition at the Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid).

<sup>9</sup> According to a conjecture by Castilla, the play could not have been performed before 1638 or after 1643. In this respect, Castilla says: "Publicada en 1652, en el primer volumen de *Comedias nuevas de los mejores ingenios de España*, *La Baltasara* pudo haber sido escrita unos diez años antes. Ciertos datos permiten situar con una cierta aproximación la fecha de su estreno no antes de 1638 ni después de 1643" (371). However, Lobato suggests that Castilla's dates should be revised considering that the play was supposed to have been performed in Seville in 1636 (20).

distance, and Baltasara in her role of Rosa Solimana speaks up challenging the followers of Godfrey of Bouillon, the first King of Jerusalem:

Católicos Paladines,  
nobles franceses Bullones,  
los que repetís al pecho  
la blanca cruz de Godofre:  
yo soy Rosa Solimana,  
del solimán<sup>10</sup> como soles,  
la que vive con su aliento  
tan altiva, que se opone  
a los estruendos de Marte  
y a la saña de sus golpes. (4v)

Both Saladin and Rosa Solimana are willing to fight the Christians and they encourage each other to launch an attack on Jerusalem. While this is happening and Saladin announces his intention to lead his own troops, Rosa Solimana suddenly turns into Baltasara. That is, the character of Baltasara stops playing the role of Rosa Solimana and begins to play the part of the famous beautiful actress called Baltasara. Later she resumes her role as Rosa Solimana and together with Saladin they make plans for carrying out the military campaign against Jerusalem. With that purpose in mind they quit the scene and the first act ends. In the following two acts there is no trace of the characters of Saladin and Rosa Solimana. The action will be centered around several other characters involved in the life of the actress Baltasara who will show their feelings towards her as they make their entrance into the stage.

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Nonetheless, however interesting or amusing the whole plot of this drama might be, what I wish to highlight is the fact that in *La Baltasara* the character of Rosa Solimana created by Lope de Vega has outlived the historical figure of Hürrem.<sup>11</sup> Thus Lope de Vega was able to create with his character (Rosa Solimana) a female figure that encapsulated and epitomized for a 17<sup>th</sup>-century audience the most salient

<sup>10</sup> It is obvious that the mention of the name “Solimán,” a name given to Saladin by his partner in this part of the play, cannot refer to the historical figure Suleyman I. This reinforces our idea of the meaning given to that name by Lope de Vega in *La Santa Liga* (see above).

<sup>11</sup> Prior to *La Santa Liga*, Lope de Vega had used the name of “Rosa Solimana” in *Los españoles en Flandes* (1620), when Rosela, in love with Don Juan de Austria, says: “Pues si Rosa Solimana, / hija del turco, os adora, / por la fama que atesora / vuestra virtud soberana; / si vuestros retratos tiene / y os quiere tanto, sin veros, / bárbara, aunque no en quereros, / y a quien a pedirle viene / por la vida de don Juan / otorga cualquiera cosa, / ¿no seré yo muy dichosa?” (vv. 2237 et ss., Cortijo ed.). Lope de Vega will mention again “Rosa Solimana” in *El rey sin reino* (1625) and there is a reference to her in the second act of *Tanto es lo de más como lo de menos* by Tirso de Molina (1631).

features of the beauty and positive exoticism (in a Maurophiliac context [Fuchs]) that Spanish literature and culture came to identify with the name of *sultana*. When later playwrights<sup>12</sup> needed a character to play the role of a 12<sup>th</sup>-century sultana they drew inspiration from the character created by Lope de Vega in *La Santa Liga* to embody Sultan Selim's favorite lover and did not hesitate to use her same name and personal and physical features for the character of another sultana who lived four centuries before Hürrem.

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<sup>12</sup>As an anecdote, it must be added that it was not only playwrights that were influenced by the fictional character of Rosa Solimana created by Lope de Vega in *La Santa Liga*, but also painters like Vicenzio Carducci (1578-1638). This Italian painter, who lived in Madrid, authored a treatise on painting dedicated to the Spanish King Philip IV. His book was published in 1633, and Carducci (375) accepts as a true fact the story told by Lope concerning Titian and Selim's request addressed to the Venetian Republic requesting a noble title for the painter as a reward for the portrait he made of his favorite lover Rosa Solimana.

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