Galina I. Yermolenko, ed. *Roxolana in European Literature, History and Culture.* Franham, Surrey, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010. xi, 318 pp. Illustrations. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. Cloth.

Roxolana was a priest's daughter from Rohatyn who lived in the sixteenth century and was captured in a Crimean Tatar raid. She arrived in the Ottoman Empire as a slave and went on to become one of the most powerful women of her time. She must have been tremendously persuasive because she convinced Suleiman the Magnificent, her master, to break with the long-standing tradition of sultans producing heirs through concubines rather than marriage and to take her as his wife. Owing to her prominence and power, she stimulated the imagination of writers across Europe and beyond. What Europeans saw in her, however, was not a nice Ukrainian girl of unusual intelligence who succeeded under the most difficult of circumstances; rather, they saw her as a scheming Oriental vixen, bent on achieving and holding power at all costs, and they used her in literary works as an example of various forms of evil. Only Ukrainians, and only in the relatively recent past, ascribe positive features to this remarkable woman.

Roxolana might, indeed, have been a clever conniver. It is said that she provoked Gulbahar—the Circassian woman who preceded her as Suleiman's favourite—into an attack and then refused to see her sultan when he called her to his bed on account that she was too disfigured by the injuries. As a result, Gulbahar lost the sultan's favour and Roxolana gained it. It can also be said that with her marriage she was placed in a difficult position. Normally, the woman who had borne a son by the sultan was sent away from the palace and became primarily the mother of a potential successor, while another woman assumed the role of harem favourite and consort. Roxolana held both roles and had to deal with the conflicting loyalties. It is these dual roles and the tensions between them that may have led to the picture of Roxolana as a destructive conniver. Roxolana's situation was also complicated by the fact that she bore three sons. It was customary for the sultan's consort to be allowed to bear one male child only and to be tied to that one child; Roxolana had three sons, one of whom was deformed, and this, too, made her allegiances exceptionally complex. Because of the position in which she was placed, Roxolana often appears as a schemer and manipulator, responsible for the deaths of anyone and everyone who stood in her path. One such death was that of Mustafa, the son of Gulbahar (Roxolana's predecessor as the sultan's favourite), a young man tragically killed by Suleiman himself. The other was the execution of Ibrahim, the grand vizier and the man who had gifted Roxolana to Suleiman many years earlier. Whether Roxolana was actually complicit in these events is less important than the belief that she

played a pivotal role, and stories of her ruthlessness grew and flourished across Europe, where she was used as a cautionary example in a variety of ways.

The book under review begins with an introduction in which Galina I. Yermolenko gives a biography of Roxolana and a brief summary of the book's contents. This is followed by a section with critical essays, the first of which is also by Yermolenko and provides summaries of the various attitudes toward Roxolana. It is really only in Ukraine and Poland that Roxolana is seen as a positive figure—here she is praised for protecting her Slavic brothers from Turkish and Tatar raids and attacks. Western European attitudes, however, were hardly as positive. Claire Jowitt offers the reader the first analysis of Western views and demonstrates how Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West or a Girl Worth Gold* uses a Roxolana-like figure to criticize female rule, casting aspersions on the leadership of Queen Elizabeth I. There are two parts to this work, written far enough apart to show correspondence to the changing political situation. The exotic queen here is named Tota, but Jowitt feels that she is clearly based on the imagined Roxolana. The greedy and conniving queen in Fulke Greville's *Mustafa* is named Rossa and, thus, more certainly based on Roxolana, as Judy Hayden shows in chapter 3. This is but one of a set of plays that drew parallels between the Ottoman court and that of Charles II, showing that the king's proclivity for sexual adventures, like the lust of Sultan Suleiman, might lead to undesirable consequences. Especially important is Roger Boyle's play, also entitled *Mustapha,* where the relationship between the title character and his half-brother, Roxolana's deformed son Zanger (Jihangir), played an important role.

German literature was more kind to Roxolana, as Beate Allert shows in her chapter on drama in the Baroque and Enlightenment periods. Various German writers—Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, August Adolph von Haugwitz, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Christian Felix Weisse—show her as a master of rhetoric, a woman with a keen understanding of her husband's psychological make-up. In Lohenstein's play, for example, Roxolana, threatened by the sultan's interest in Isabelle, Ibrahim Pasha's beloved, manages to manipulate both her husband and the members of the court.

Roxolana is seen more positively in the land of her birth, and Oleksandr Halenko argues that the image of Roxolana as a supporter of the Ukrainian cause—a woman who helped Ukrainians even while she was the leader of the Ottoman Empire—comes from folk poetry, specifically Ukrainian epic songs, or dumy. The Marusia Bohuslavka duma sings about a Ukrainian girl in the home of a powerful Turkish pasha. The pasha, like many Ottoman magnates, holds Cossacks as slaves. Marusia, also a captive, is his trusted servant, perhaps his wife, yet she cannot forget her homeland and risks her position to free the Ukrainians. It is this widely known image, Halenko claims,

that was transferred to Roxolana. While linking Roxolana to the Marusia of the epic is the traditional view, held since the nineteenth century, in today's Ukraine, Roxolana has come to be used in new and unexpected ways. Iurii Vynnychuk's *Zhytiie haremnoie* [Life in the Harem], for example, is erotic literature. As described by Maryna Romanets, this work is a fictional autobiography in which Roxolana describes her own sexual awakening and offers advice on female and male sexual pleasure to other women.

In Turkey, Roxolana is often seen as the person who precipitated the fall of the empire by upsetting the long-functioning system of concubinage. Turkish literary works about Roxolana, as Ozlem Ogut Yazicioglu writes in this volume, include plays that paint an unflattering picture. Some writers, however, question the negative image of Roxolana. One such piece is a work by Adnan Baykal entitled *Interview.* While being unable to totally reject disapproval of Roxolana, the author does try to present a more nuanced view by imagining what she might say on her own behalf.

In addition to critical essays, the book offers translations of excerpts from a number of the literary works which the essays analyze, each accompanied by an explanatory foreword. There is an appendix, with plot summaries of the other literary works discussed, and a note on the various renderings of the names applied to Roxolana and to the people in the Ottoman Porte. This is followed by a chronology of the events important in Roxolana's life. The book contains bibliographies of primary and secondary sources. Overall, it is a useful handbook for people interested in this most intriguing figure of Ottoman, Ukrainian, and European history.

This reviewer found the book useful not only as a source of information about Roxolana, but also as a case study in the divergent views that one historical figure can inspire. It is hard to imagine that one and the same person could be viewed in so many different ways; but Roxolana was, and the many ways in which she was constructed across the globe and over time provide an invaluable lesson in the vagaries of history. One thing that is sorely missing from this study is a discussion of Roxolana's own writing. Roxolana was constructed by others—but she also constructed herself. In fact, all indications are that she was a master of presenting herself to Suleiman the Magnificent and others in precisely the way that she wanted to be seen. Roxolana left a correspondence between herself and her husband. This reviewer has seen comments that look at this correspondence as evidence of Roxolana's knowledge of Turkish. But how did she use this knowledge to present herself as she wanted to be seen? This question begs an answer.

Natalie Kononenko
University of Alberta

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