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Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan School: Darülmaârif

MUAMMER DEMİREL

Throughout the period when Ottoman sultans were on the throne, their mothers were given the title Valide Sultan or Mehd-i Ulyâ, its synonym. Valide Sultans used to reside in private flats in the Ottoman Palace and were in charge of the Harem Quarters. Some are known to have intervened in state affairs. Valide Sultans were allotted a special allowance known as ‘paşmaklık’ as well as a certain payment from the mint.¹

Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan was one of the most outstanding Valide Sultans in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Her name has been recognized through her benevolence and the investments that she made in housing, health and education. Many of the establishments such as hospitals, bridges, mosques, and schools that Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan initiated are still functioning today.

Bezmiâlem, the daughter of a Georgian family, was given at a young age to the palace as a concubine by slave traders. Having been given the education particular to concubines, she married Sultan Mahmud II after giving birth to Ottoman Prince Abdulmecid on 25 April 1823, becoming the sultan’s second wife.

Bezmiâlem was ranked ‘Valide Sultan’ and ‘Mehd-i Ulyâ’ of the sultanate when the reformist Sultan Mahmud II died on 30 June 1839 and his heir, Prince Abdulmecid came to the throne.² Sultan Mahmud II’s attempts at reforms and his foresight influenced Bezmiâlem; his achievements served as a kind of training. Bezmiâlem was involved in the affairs of the country; and she undertook responsibility for reforms sustaining Sultan Mahmud II’s system. In terms of government and state affairs, the greatest help given to Sultan Abdülmecid, who came to the throne in his youth, was provided by his mother, Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan.³

Bezmiâlem was intelligent, wise, compassionate, philanthropic and benevolent.⁴ She spent all the allowances, salaries and other incomes allotted to her by the Ottoman State on feeding the poor, marrying off orphans, providing financial aid to the wretched who were in prison, and on building permanent beneficial edifices. Valide Sultan initiated many philanthropic institutions offering help in the fields of education and development in Istanbul and other provinces. To make it possible for these institutions to continue after her death, she founded charitable foundations, the incomes of which she made payable to these philanthropic institutions. Some of the philanthropic institutions and charitable foundations established by her and the incomes paid to them were determined and recorded in the years 1840–51 (1256–67