



## MINI REVIEW

# Women's Social Status and Prestige in Asia Minor during Medieval Era

Sefa Bulut\*

Head of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Department, Ibn Haldun University

Although there are a number of sources about women and status of women in Seljuk's during Medieval Era and many research papers have been published by women academicians in recent years, there are not many resources available about women status and rights in medieval Anatolia. In fact, there is lack of knowledge and written material both in Turkish as well as English.

In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, German historian [1] drew attention to the issue, but stated that such women's organization was not possible under the circumstances of that period. Taeschner was thinking rather about the woman rights and status in the medieval Western world, in particularly Europe. In the middle Ages, women in the East were respected and had very important place in society and was considered important part of society unlike in the West. Considering the historical events in that period, the fact that the Turkmens (Turks) migrated to the west, and later, to the "West" upon the Mongol invasion. They were always on the move and the lack of permanent settlement, raising livestock for livelihood, and the fact that men were constantly engaged in wars and raids granted women active roles and duties. Women contributing to the economy prevented its breakdown by working and selling the things they produced in the times of war [2]. Indeed, it was the case, women whose husbands went to wars looked after their nomad groups, cared for animals, sold the goods they produced and became the "man" of the house, as well.

Throughout the middle Ages, Western experts were surprised by the fact that Turkmen women supported, worked and struggled shoulder to shoulder with men in all fields of life and participated in the community life [3]. Another Western author, [4] writes that women rode horses, joined wars and raids, shot arrows, drove carriages and played football. Women led an equivalent life to men's in nomadic equestrian Turkish tribes. Women were engaged in every profession in social life such as monarchs, poets, shamans and oracles. They rode horses, shot arrows, yielded swords and went to war alongside men (Duran, 2018). Similarly to these findings, Ibn Fadlan, another traveler who traveled to Turkic countries in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and was sent to the Bulgarian King by the Caliph, mentioned in his travelogue that women took part in all social activities in Turkish tribes on the banks of the Volga River and wrote

that they run religious state feasts with men. Likewise, French ambassador De La Broquere who visited Anatolia in 14<sup>th</sup> century wrote that Turkmen women fought alongside men, even there were 30 thousand women cavalry under Beylik of Dulkadir and they rode horses to war like men. Similarly, it is known that Malik-Shah I's wife Terken Khatun had her own diwan and officers and an army of 12 thousand people under her command [5]. The Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk stated that the Turkish khans consulted with their wives in the state affairs and valued their ideas. The Seljuk Sultans also attached great value to their khatuns and their opinions [5].

When we look at the medieval Seljuk art, men and women were drawn at the same height, on the same level and offering treats to each other in paintings and porcelains. This indicates that men and women had very similar roles, supported each other, and both genders had sovereignty. There are even depictions and statues of women alone. There are also pictures of women drawn riding horses alone and carrying a gun [6]. Ibn Battuta (1304-1368) noted in his travelogue, "Among the behaviors that I have seen and amazed me in this country is the extreme respect of men for women. Sometimes you come across women alongside their men, and then, you can mistake these men for those women's servants. Ibn Battuta had many interpretations like this. Again, when describing the palace of the Ilkhanate state, he spoke of the fact that women have a significant place among the Turks and Tatars, and that the Turkish and Tatar sultans issued the edicts by the order of the khans and khatuns [7]. Although the Umayyad and Abbasid women were treated just like in the pre-Islamic Jahiliyyah (ignorance) period and such situation was presented as an Islamic necessity. The Seljuk's did not forget the Turkish traditions and preserved the value of women all the time. Due to influence by the cultures and traditions of the countries they conquered, the Seljuk's formed a new and authentic civilization called the "Seljuk Culture, which adhered to original and old traditions [6].

**Correspondence to:** Sefa Bulut, Ibn Haldun University, Head of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Department Istanbul, Turkey; E-mail: sefabulut22[AT]gmail[DOT]com

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The Mongol invasion led to a very great destruction and trauma in Anatolia. The Mongols delivered great damage in cities especially where they encountered resistance. It was during this period when the Turkmens, who had already run from the Mongols and came to Anatolia, had organized and mounted an armed resistance against Mongols. The most interesting thing is that they fought along with their wives against the Mongol invasion. When their combat failed, their properties and workplaces were severely damaged and were taken away; some were killed, and the survivors migrated further to the extreme far regions. Thus, they had to move further west [8].

The Bacıyan-ı Rum Organization, like the Akhi Organization, allowed women to contribute to the economic, social and cultural areas, regardless of any gender discrimination. Since this organization was formed by women, it was essential that every person had a profession and showed usefulness in all fields of society because they knew about the basic requirements of social development [9]. Hence, the Sisters had abilities and courage of battling, riding, archery, hunting and joining the wars individually. During the Mongol invasion, they served with their husbands both at the front and behind the front [10]. These women made significant contributions to the unity and solidarity of the society during the 150-year-old Anatolian occupation of the Mongols and prevented several conflicts.

During the same period, as women and men could not have religious conversations together, the Akhi Sisters tried to transfer to women's communities what they had learned from sheikhs [11]. There were even lodges and zawiyas established by women themselves. According to [12], the founders of Kız Bacı, Ahi Ana, Sakari Hatun and Hacı Fatma zawiyas were women. He also stated that the sheikhs of some zawiyas were women. In the Bektashi tradition, women members of the sect were called "bacı" ("sister"). Futuwwa and Malamatiyya sects coming from Khorasan had presented very deep impacts on the fact that women in Anatolia were very active in Sufism. These women's understanding of futuwwa had always been based on helping the poor and the orphan, committing oneself to serve

others, spreading goodness and loving people. Moreover, women were also active in the Mevlevi Order in this century. Among the disciples of Rumi, there were female disciples of lower and upper echelon and wives of the sultans addandum.

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