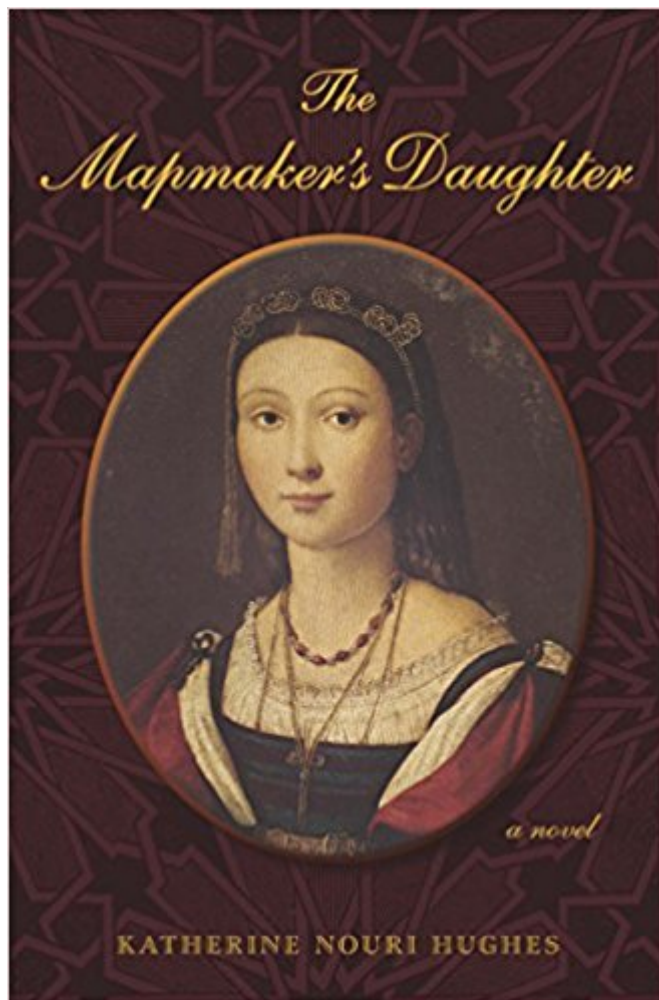


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The Mapmaker's Daughter



Synopsis

The Mapmaker's Daughter, a historical novel set in the 16th century, is the confession of Nurbanu, born Cecilia Baffo Veniero - the mesmerizing, illegitimate Venetian who became the most powerful woman in the Ottoman Empire at the height of its power under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. The bold backstory of the Netflix Series, Magnificent Century Narrating the spectacular story of her rise to the pinnacle of imperial power, Queen Mother Nurbanu, on her sickbed, is determined to understand how her bond with the greatest of all Ottoman sultans, Suleiman the Magnificent, shaped her destiny not only as the wife of his successor but as the appointed enforcer of one of the Empire's most crucial and shocking laws. Nurbanu spares nothing as she dissects the desires and motives that have propelled and harmed her; as she considers her role as devoted and manipulative mother; as she reckons her relations with the women of the Harem; and as she details the fate of the most sophisticated observatory in the world. Nurbanu sets out to "see" the causes and effects of her loves and choices, and she succeeds by means of unflinching candor - right up to the last shattering revelation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Voice of the great, elusive necessity in all historical fiction is rapturous and irresistible in The Mapmaker's Daughter. Katherine Hughes's novel just seems to talk to us, and in so doing makes these titanic events seem human and natural, and thus all-the-more preoccupying. A very impressive book, indeed." (Richard Ford) "A heartbreaking read that marries a strong story arc with a dedication to historical details." (Booklist (starred review)) "A fascinating evocation of the major players of the Ottoman renaissance." (Kirkus

Reviews)“When the fiction is good, the history is usually distorted, and on the rare occasions when the history is good, the fiction is usually less interesting than the straight historical narrative. This novel is a remarkable exception . . . part history, part fiction, it is enthralling.” (Bernard Lewis, Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies, Emeritus, Princeton University)“Of all the appetites the lust for power is the strongest and most dangerous. This is a lively, absorbing and utterly convincing self-portrait of a woman who came under the influence of the greatest of all Ottoman sultans with tragic consequences.” (Edmund White, author of *Inside a Pearl: My Years in Paris*)“Based on a historical event of rare improbability the rise in the sixteenth century of a daughter of Venice to the rank of Queen Mother in the mighty Ottoman Empire this novel is a gorgeous feat of imagination, a stellar work by a gifted writer.” (Arnold Rampersand, Stanford University, author of *Ralph Ellison*)

KATHERINE NOURI HUGHES, Iraqi-Irish by birth, has spent much of her career as a speech-writer. She has published two books on K-12 education, been a communications executive in the for-profit and non-profit sectors, and serves on the boards of the American University in Cairo, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and WNET/13, the public television station. She attended Princeton University where she received a Masters Degree in Near Eastern Studies. She lives in Princeton, New Jersey and has two daughters and two grandchildren. *The Mapmaker's Daughter* is her first novel.

I expected more *Magnificent Century* less feeling sorry for herself. Yes I understand being taken from your home and sold is sad...don't get me wrong...but she was not mistreated, they continued to educate her, and in the end freed. There are much better books about the time period *Adora* and *Kadin* both by Betrice Smalls to name a couple

How does an illegitimate Venetian girl become the wife of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire? What was her life like? What kind of power does she wield, and how? "The Mapmaker's Daughter," a fictionalized memoir of Cecilia/Nurbanu, the real-life Venetian captive who became wife and then mother to Sultans, seeks to answer those questions. Cecilia/Nurbanu, in Katherine Nouri Hughes's retelling of her story, is an exceptional girl who becomes one of the most powerful women in the world. The daughter (illegitimate, we later discover) of an older Venetian nobleman and a young Venetian woman who possessed the then almost-magical ability to draw maps, Cecilia loses first

her father, then her mother, and then, at the age of 12, her freedom, when Barbarossa raids her home and takes her captive, delivering her to the harem of Suleiman the Magnificent, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. Cecilia is pretty, but much more importantly than that, she is literate, and not only literate, but brilliant. She is pulled out of the regular harem population and assigned to learn to write in Arabic, and then to be the study companion of the Sultan's favorite son. She converts to Islam and gains the name Nurbanu, becomes the concubine and then the wife of the heir-presumptive, and finally the Queen Mother. Her path, however, is not one of uninterrupted upward progress: there is death, the birth of daughters (a tragedy for a concubine), and a terrible dying command from Suleiman that she must decide whether to fulfill or not, knowing that either way she risks tearing apart her family and their empire. "The Mapmaker's Daughter" is not an exceptionally long book, and the narrative style is fairly straightforward, but it is densely filled with details, making it a rich, slow read. It conveys the flavor of the 16th century, its barbarism and its simultaneous striving for science and enlightenment, with a naturalness that appears effortless but is in fact difficult to achieve. Nurbanu and her family are not modern people in 16th-century dress, but of their era, which they accept and yet also rebel against, not questioning the system of concubinage, for example, but attempting to make it more humane. Cecilia/Nurbanu herself is a brilliant creation, a gifted intellectual with a love for science who, on finding herself a concubine, manages to work within the confines that have been placed upon her to become educated herself, and to instill in her children a love for science and technology as well. The 16th century was a heady time of exploration and discovery, in the Ottoman Empire as in Europe, and Cecilia/Nurbanu's story gives a sense of a society that is still medieval, but on the brink of becoming the modern world that we know today. Fans of intellectual historical fiction, and readers looking for books on influential female figures, will be well served by this book. My thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for providing a review copy of this book. All opinions are my own.

Some claim Nurbanu was a Venetian woman named Cecilia Baffo Veniero abducted from Paros island when it was captured by Barbarossa. Others say she was a Greek woman named Kale Kartanou from Corfu. To this day, no one knows for certain. Once in the folds of the Ottoman Empire, she became known as Nurbanu. Her destiny was to become favourite consort and legal wife of Ottoman Sultan Selim II and mother of Murad III. Wherever she came from, she one day found herself the head of the Sultan's harem. Despite the Sultan's right to take as many concubines as he wished, Nurbanu was his favorite because of her sharp wit and breathtaking beauty. Because of her propensity for good judgement, he treated her as an advisor and respected her opinion in

many matters. In return, she was a devoted wife and wonderful mother. When she gave birth to Murad, she knew that one day, when it came time to succession, he might be murdered, as had happened many times in the past where entire families were massacred. Nurbanu was determined never to let this happen. Murad was away serving as governor of Manisa when her husband died in 1574. Nurbanu realized her life's son may be in danger by a usurper of power. Before anyone could learn of her husband's death, she hid his body in the harem in an icebox and then summoned her son to return home. Only when Murad made it home, did she announce her husband's death. In this way, Murad became the next sultan and she became the highest ranking woman in the sultanate and very powerful indeed. She managed the government and acted as co-regent with her son. Her reach was long. She was a pen pal of Queen Catherine de Medici of France and the Venetians proudly followed her reign, writing about her often. That's because she was good for the Venetian government. For as much as she was loved by the Venetians, she was spurned by their rivals, the Genoese who resented her unwavering support of all things Venetian. When she died in Istanbul on December 7, 1583, it was suspected she might have been poisoned by a Genoese spy. It is a fascinating novel about a woman intelligent enough to manoeuvre about in a dangerous regime where a slip of the tongue or a wrong action could result in immediate death.

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