

SULTAN SULEIMAN KHAN THE LAWGIVER

A Lifetime on Horseback



Joyline

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This story is based on historical events. Its scenes and conversations have been imaginatively recreated.

Istanbul had not yet woken. In the palace courtyard, a horse was stamping its hoof impatiently. The groom checked the saddle one last time. Beyond the gates, soldiers were getting ready, supply wagons were lining up, and banners were unfurling in the morning breeze. A long journey was about to begin.

When Sultan Suleiman stepped into the courtyard, everyone turned toward him. The young sultan stroked his horse's neck. Ahead lay months of travel, swollen rivers, and mighty fortresses. The armies of kings would stand in his way. On such a journey, he would have to lead not only himself but thousands of people.

He put his foot in the stirrup and mounted his horse. The great gates opened. The name of the young ruler leaving Istanbul that day would one day be heard all around the world: **Sultan Suleiman Khan, the Lawgiver.**



Suleiman was the son of Sultan Selim the Grim. Since childhood, he had seen the responsibility a ruler carried. In the books laid open before him, he read about the wars of the past, and on maps he searched for distant cities. But the things he needed to learn were not limited to warfare. Listening to people, understanding the affairs of state, and finding the right words to express his thoughts mattered too.

As a prince, he served in Manisa. There, he considered the news that arrived and gained experience in governing. Then came the news of his father's death. The responsibility for the state now rested on his shoulders.

He was young when he took the throne in 1520, but the state he inherited was vast. Alongside those who trusted him were rulers who wanted to test him. They would not have to wait long to discover what kind of sultan Suleiman was. His first great campaign would take him to Belgrade.



Belgrade Fortress was like a mighty gateway rising beside the rivers. It had thick walls, towers, and soldiers to defend it. It had withstood earlier Ottoman sieges. The gateway before Suleiman would not open easily.

As the army approached, the sultan studied the walls carefully. Powerful cannons alone were not enough to capture a fortress. The roads had to be held, the rivers watched, and the soldiers placed in the right positions. As the days passed, the siege tightened. Even at night, work in the camp did not stop; preparations were being made for the next day.

In 1521, Belgrade was captured. The young Sultan Suleiman had won his first great success. An important gateway into Europe was now in Ottoman hands. His rivals were beginning to understand that the ruler they faced would not remain in his father's shadow.



After Belgrade, he turned toward a fortress in the middle of the sea: Rhodes. The Knights of Saint John defended it. They were experienced in warfare, with strong walls, deep moats, and powerful defenses.

The siege went on and on. Summer passed, the weather changed, and weariness settled on the soldiers' faces. A gap opened in the walls one day would be repaired the next, and after each attack, preparations began again. Suleiman could see that this fortress could be taken with patience and care. At the head of his army, he continued the siege.

After months of struggle, the knights surrendered in 1522. Suleiman met with their leaders and allowed them to leave the island under the terms of their agreement. He had overcome the strong defenses of Rhodes. Now he was a ruler whose power was felt both on land and along the sea routes.



In 1526, the army set out from Istanbul once more. This time, the road led to Hungary. Rain battered the roads for days. Streams swelled, and the ground turned to mud. Moving the heavy cannon wagons became difficult. Sometimes the soldiers had to struggle with the road itself before they could reach the enemy.

Facing Suleiman was King Louis II of Hungary. The king's army included powerful armored horsemen, experienced warriors, and troops from different countries. A mounted charge by these soldiers was dangerous enough to scatter the forces in their path.

At last, the Ottoman army approached Mohács. The ranks of the opposing army could be seen in the distance. As Suleiman's soldiers took their positions after the long march, movement began across the plain. The Hungarian cavalry were preparing to charge. The great clash everyone had been waiting for was now close at hand.



First, a distant rumble was heard. Then the sound of hoofbeats grew louder. Armored horsemen were gathering speed across the plain, their lances pointing forward. Dust rising from the ground swirled around the approaching horses.

At such a moment, an army gripped by fear could lose its order. In Suleiman's army, however, the commanders knew their positions, and the units supported one another. The first clashes were fierce. The Hungarian cavalry pushed deep into the Ottoman lines. The danger on the battlefield was real; victory was not yet in anyone's hands.

Suleiman was at the center. Around him, the janissaries, the cannons, and the other units kept up the fight. The horses' speed, the weapons' power, and the soldiers' endurance were all being tested on the same battlefield. In the midst of it all, the sultan had to keep his army in order. Out of these difficult moments would come a victory that people would talk about for years.



As the battle went on, the Hungarian army's attack lost its force. Ottoman firepower and counterattacks began to take effect. Units scattered, and Suleiman's army gained the upper hand on the battlefield.

On August 29, 1526, Mohács ended in a great Ottoman victory. The Hungarian king also lost his life during the retreat. This short but momentous battle changed the future of Central Europe. Suleiman had faced not a small force but the great army of a kingdom. He had defeated it.

By evening, the noise of the plain had given way to a weary silence. Soldiers were searching for one another, and units were gathering again. For Suleiman, however, victory brought new questions: Where would the army camp? How would supplies reach it? What would the next step be? A great commander's work did not end when the battle was over.



After Mohács, Suleiman faced the Habsburgs, one of Europe's most powerful dynasties. Emperor Charles V ruled over vast lands. His brother Ferdinand also wanted to establish his rule over Hungary. Suleiman was now contending not only with fortresses but with the plans of great states.

In 1529, he led his army to the gates of Vienna. But the rain, the difficult roads, and the approaching winter made the siege harder. The city could not be taken. The sultan withdrew his army. In later years, he set out on campaign again; the struggle continued on battlefields, at fortresses, and in meetings between envoys.

Not every gate opened on the first attempt. Suleiman's strength could also be seen in his ability to contend with such powerful rivals for many years. The courts of Europe watched carefully to see which way he would march. Even news of preparations for a campaign caused plans to be reconsidered in distant capitals.



Suleiman's journeys also took him east. The Safavid state was a powerful rival. Mountains, great distances, and the army's needs made these campaigns difficult. In 1534, Baghdad came under Ottoman rule. In the west, Ottoman rule expanded to include Buda and other important centers.

At sea served Barbarossa Hayreddin Pasha, one of the great commanders Suleiman had chosen. In 1538, at Preveza, he faced a large allied fleet led by Andrea Doria. Barbarossa's victory increased Ottoman power in the Mediterranean. Suleiman was not aboard the ships in that battle; his navy and commanders carried out his state's struggle at sea.

Among the main places captured during his reign were Belgrade, Rhodes, Buda, Esztergom, Baghdad, and Szigetvár. Each of these places on the map had been reached only after long journeys, great preparations, and hard struggles.



When he returned to Istanbul, building plans and state documents were now placed before him alongside campaign maps. Suleiman's name would also be remembered for laws, architecture, and poetry. Rising above the city, the Süleymaniye, built by the architect Sinan, expressed the power of his age through stone and domes.

In his poems, he used the name “Muhibbî.” In one line, he wrote, **“No happiness in this world can equal a single breath in good health.”** He meant that there could be no happiness in the world greater than a healthy breath. These were the words of someone who knew long journeys, weariness, and illness.

As the years passed, his beard turned white. Yet his name was still spoken of in distant lands with great respect and attention. In Europe, they called him **“Suleiman the Magnificent.”** This name spoke not merely of a splendid palace but of one of the most powerful rulers of his age.



In 1566, preparations for a campaign began once again in Istanbul. This time, the sultan setting out was no longer the young Suleiman who had marched to Belgrade. He was over seventy, had fallen ill, and had carried the burden of a long reign. He had to travel part of the way in a carriage. Even so, he set out on his last campaign at the head of his army.

Szigetvár held out with its moats and strong defenses. As the siege continued, Suleiman's health grew worse. In September, he died in his campaign tent. The fortress was captured shortly after his death.

During his forty-six-year reign, he had personally set out on thirteen great campaigns. Years of his life had passed on horseback, along the army's roads, and in military camps.

And so the journey of the young ruler who had mounted his horse one morning in Istanbul came to an end. He left behind great victories, an expanding state, and buildings rising toward the sky. Even centuries later, whenever his name was spoken, the same title was heard: **Suleiman the Magnificent.**

