

The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent: Art, Architecture, and Ceremonial at the Ottoman Court

Professor Gülru Necipoglu

Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Harvard University

agakhan@fas.harvard.edu

The "Golden Age" of Ottoman-Islamic visual culture in the 16th century, considered within its ceremonial and historical contexts, with focus on architecture, miniature painting, and the decorative arts. The urban transformation of Byzantine Constantinople into Ottoman Istanbul, the formation of an imperial architectural style, and artistic contacts with contemporary European and Islamic courts are stressed. Art and architecture of Safavid Iran and Mughal India are considered as a comparative backdrop. Themes include the role of centralized court ateliers in propagating canons of taste, the emphasis on decorative arts in a culture that rejected monumental sculpture and painting, and representations of the East by European artists in the Orientalist mode.

Assignment:

Length: 10-12 pages

Topic: You may choose one of the suggested topics below, or you may work on another topic of your choice. Sources: Some (but not all) of the sources you should consult for the suggested topics are mentioned in connection with those topics below. We have also provided a preliminary bibliography of suggested sources that will be relevant to many different topics.

- Compare the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed and the Masjid-i Shah in Iran, which were built at roughly the same time, both abutting public squares. Issues you may want to consider include: the differing plan types (4-iwan vs. centralized plan); the relation of the buildings to the urban setting; the relation between exterior articulation and interior space; and the differing approaches to spatial definition, materials, and decoration. (Henri Stierlin, *Ispahan, image du Paradis*.)
- Read the *Resale-i Mimariyye*, an early 17th century Ottoman treatise on architecture by Ca'fer Efendi (Howard Crane, transl.). The treatise is an account of the life and works of the architect Mehmed Aga, builder of the Sultan Ahmed complex. Discuss the kinds of information it provides about the education of the Ottoman architect and about contemporary views of architecture. Focus on the specific case of the architect Mehmed Aga and analyze the Sultan Ahmed mosque complex in terms of this document. As a secondary emphasis, you may want to discuss the ways in which Sinan's classical style is transformed or reinterpreted in this structure.
- "The two separate and contradictory functions of a mosque's decoration" are "those of unifying or singling out parts." (Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, pp. 133-134). Compare the different approaches to architectural decoration in the following mosques: the Süleymaniye, Selimiye, Rüstem

Paşa, Sokollu Mehmed Paşa at Kadırga, and Sultan Ahmed Mosques. Include tile revetment, painting, stone carving etc. in your discussion; make sure to factor out later decorative additions. You might also focus on inscriptions.

- Matrakçı Nasuh's (Nasûhü's-Silâhî) *"Beyân-ı Menâzil-i Sefer-i Irâkeyn-i Sultân Süleyman Hân"* (Hüseyin G. Yurdaydın, ed.) is an illustrated manuscript produced under the patronage of Sultan Süleyman. It topographically depicts the various stops of the Ottoman army during Süleyman's campaign to Iran and Iraq in 1533-36. (It is published in facsimile with English text). Discuss the plan of Istanbul in detail. What aspects of the city does it emphasize? Discuss the conventions for representing specific building types, and identify buildings we have studied. How is the representation of Istanbul different from those of other cities in the manuscript? How does this plan compare with other plans of the city by the Western viewers Vavassore (16th century) and Buondelmonte (15th century)? Compare the different "images" of the city that these three depictions create and discuss their different emphases. (The plan by Vavassore can be found in *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power*, plate 23, and the Buondelmonte plan is in the following article: Ian Manners. "Constructing the Image of a City: the Representation of Constantinople in Christopher Buondelmonti's *Liber Insularum Archipelagi*," *Annals of the American Association of Geography*, 1997). Also see Walter Denny, "A Sixteenth Century Architectural Plan of Istanbul," *Ars Orientalis* 8 [1970]: 49-63; Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul*, chapter 1 [Sourcebook].)
- The *Süleymanname* (also published in facsimile with English text, ed. Esin Atıl) is another manuscript produced under the patronage of Süleyman. It is an illustrated life of the Sultan focussing on the highlights of his career. Discuss the themes the manuscript conveys and the image of the Sultan it presents. Which kinds of events in the ruler's life are highlighted and which ones are underemphasized? What types of subjects are used in creating a royal iconography? What is the general imperial message conveyed by the manuscript as a whole? Why do you think the manuscript was created?
- The *Surname-i Humayun* of 1582 is an illustrated manuscript produced in the reign of Murad III. It, too, has been published in facsimile with English text. It depicts the lavish festivities to celebrate the circumcision of a prince, during which different guilds parade with models and samples of their crafts. Write a paper on this manuscript focussing on one specific theme. Possible themes include the Ottoman arts industry and its organization; the importance of visual aspects of imperial ceremonies; the integration of the concept of art with the functionality of objects; or the role of conspicuous consumption in the Ottoman context vs. the role of conspicuous consumption in Italy in this period (for which you may consult Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods*). You may also write on another theme in the manuscript that you find interesting, in which case you must discuss this theme with Persis and clear it with her by April 9.

- Although the term "Orientalism" today is used with reference to 19th century visions of the East, the West was fascinated with the East long before that. The nature of this fascination with the "other" differed according to historical context. Focus on one of the following two topics, or, after consulting the sources listed below, on a topic of your choice that you should discuss and clear with Persis by April 9.
- Discuss the ways in which the Ottoman world was depicted in 16th century Europe by Nicolas de Nicolay, Pieter Coecke van Aelst (original sources in Houghton Rare Books Library), and Melchior Lorichs (Widener Library). For a contemporaneous textual source, read the travel account of G. de Busbecq (original in Houghton, later edition in Widener) Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to piazza: Islamic trade and Italian art, 1300-1600* -- the last chapter on the representation of the East; Alastair Hamilton, *Arab culture and Ottoman magnificence in Antwerp's Golden Age*; Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests*.
- Compare the 16th century images referred to above with the 19th century Orientalist depictions of the painter Gerome. Discuss the differences in attitude due to the changing relations of Europe and the Ottoman world. (Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," and Edward Said, *Orientalism*.)
- Write a paper on an aspect of Iznik ceramic wares or Ottoman textiles. You should read the following books, identify a specific theme you wish to address, and clear it with Persis by April 9. Possible themes include relations with Italy; political and/or economic functions of luxury goods; the issue of decorative vocabulary; and the development of technique and style. (Nurhan Atasoy, *Ipek: the crescent and the rose: Ottoman imperial silks and velvets*; Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby, *Iznik: the pottery of Ottoman Turkey*; Walter Denny, *Gardens of paradise: 16th century Turkish ceramic tile decoration*; Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to piazza: Islamic trade and Italian art, 1300-1600* -- see the chapters on tiles and textiles; Topkap1 Palace Museum, *Silks for the Sultans: Ottoman Imperial garments from the Topkapi Palace*).

Preliminary Bibliography:

Atil, Esin. *The Age of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent*

Atil, Esin. *Turkish Art*

Goodwin, Godfrey. *A History of Ottoman Architecture*

Hoag, John. *Islamic Architecture*

Itzkowitz, Norman. *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition*

Kuran, Aptullah. *The Mosque in early Ottoman Architecture*

Kuran, Aptullah. *Sinan, the Grand Old Master of Ottoman Architecture*

Levey, Michael. *The World of Ottoman Art*

Lewis, Raphaella. *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey*

Muller-Wiener, Wolfgang. *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*. (Consult especially for plans.)

Stierlin, Henri. *Soliman et l'Architecture ottomane*