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The Newsletter of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) is intended to share the wealth and beauty of Islamic culture contained within the extensive and comprehensive al-Sabah collection of Islamic art, ranging from Early Islam to the 18th century, and the variety of scholarly and artistic activities associated with the collection.

The collection itself is organized according to both historical period and geographical region, and the reference library and the publications of the Dar are closely related to the collection.

The Dar has sponsored archaeological excavations in Bahnasa, Upper Egypt that date to the Fatimid period and, before the invasion, the art school associated with the Dar promoted skills in the various artistic genres that are represented in the collection. At present, our annual lecture series has been revived and is a focal point for historians and other specialists, featuring talks by prominent international scholars on various topics of Islamic art, archaeology and architecture.
Ali Abdelrahman Al-Bidah at the Hofstra University Museum’s Conference

The Kuwaiti calligrapher Ali Al-Bidah represented Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah at the conference and exhibition from April 14 to May 24, 1996, on the theme *Inscription as Art in the World of Islam - Unity in Diversity*. With his knowledge of the different styles and aspects of Arabic scripts, Al-Bidah designs calligraphic decorations for mosques and other public buildings. He was one of 14 artists and calligraphers from several different countries whose works were exhibited.

The exhibition focused on different media, and spanned several centuries and diverse cultures where Islam became accepted as the primary *modus vivendi*. Geographically the area covers North Africa to South East Asia, that includes the Arab countries, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The occasion was organized by the Museum of New York’s Hofstra University, in particular by its creative and industrious Curator and conference organizer, Dr. Habibeh Rahim. Those attending the conference represented internationally renowned centers of Islamic scholarship, and the exhibition contained works from well-known Islamic art collections of both museums in the United States and private collectors.

Images of Kuwait: Futuristic Multimedia Presentation of the DAR

If you did not know better, you might think the new exhibition of the DAR entitled *Images of Kuwait* belongs on the set of Kubric’s 2001 *Space Odyssey*.

Making its debut in Kuwait at the Kuwait International Airport, this 8 x 5 x 3 metre, high tech, black box houses one of the most extraordinary multimedia presentations ever offered in Kuwait. Visitors enter through a unassuming passageway in the front and are transported into a world of sights and sounds from Kuwait.

The images, projected onto a cleverly designed screen flanked with 12 mirrors appear to mold themselves around a 360° sphere giving the illusion of a screen the size of a small planet hanging in space.

1997/98 Lecture Series

The DAR announces its 1997/98 public lecture series of internationally acclaimed Islamic scholars. The lecture series is sponsored by the DAR and the Kuwait Ministry of Information.

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NEW Acquisition in the al-Sabah Collection

LNS 157 HS - Large Carnelian Bead, Eastern Iranian World, perhaps Bukhara, 4th c. AH/10th c. AD

A majesterial, indeed a princely representative of a previously unknown group and of a previously unknown and clearly most refined school of hardstone carving, this gorgeous piece contains within itself unequivocal indications of its cultural milieu.

It is clear that Eastern Iran was home in the early middle ages to a prolific and extremely sophisticated tradition of hardstone carving, from vessels through small beads. While this piece exhibits connections with an unpublished group of Abbasid, probably ninth century rock crystal and glass cut stone beads which are suspected of being Basra products (al-Sabah Collection), it has more intimate connections with the decorative repertory of Sasanian East Iran, with its powerful swirling, ropey, almost muscular arabesque stems and its palmettes and trefoils accented by depressions, veining and hatching. Strikingly specific comparisons may be made between the small colonnettes on the edges and those on the facade of the Mausoleum of Isma'il al-Samani in Bukhara (d. 295/907), and a peculiar type of small trefoil used as a corner charge on another piece from this group in the al-Sabah Collection (LNS 128 HS) has extremely close parallels in those of the portal tympani of the same mausoleum.

Mr. Manuel Keene, Curator, al-Sabah Collection
LIBRARY GIFTS

The seasonals rains have been plentiful the last few years in Kuwait. Dar al-Athar al-Islamyyah has also enjoyed a similar delight—in the form of gifts for the library. Our many friends have made these thoughtful gestures, and they are truly appreciated. Their kind consideration for the restoration and improvement of the library will be of benefit to many scholars, now and in future.

A.S. Melkian - Chirani C.N.R.S., Paris. Pand-0-
Sokhan Off printing. Janet Francois. De Recherche
Melkian-Chirani of the Centre National de la

Kuwait: Arts & Architecture Gift of the editors: Mrs.
Arline Fullerton (wife of the former British ambas-
sador to Kuwait) and Prof. Gesa Fehrenhain.
Curator, Tarek Risko Museum.

Robinson, Frances, ed. Cambridge Illustrated
History of the Islamic World (Cambridge
Cambridge University Press, 1976) Gift of the edi-
tor, Prof. F.C.R. Robinson, Professor of the History
of South Asia at Royal Holloway, University of

Silk Stone, The Art of Asia Third (London: Hai
Publications, 1976) Gift of the publishers, Hai

Fontana, Maria Vittoria Alessandro Magno Storia E
Mito di Alessandro nell' Islam Fondazione
Monaco Leonardo 1995 Gift of the author
Dr. Maria Vittoria Fontana, Istituto Universitario
Cineteca, Dep. di Studi Arabici, Naples, ITALY, 1996.

[Editorial Board] Newsletter Society of the Friends
of the Museum, vol. 4 no. 2 vol. VI, n. 1 + vol. IV, n.
2 + vol. V, n. 2 + vol VI, n. 1 + vol VII, n. 1 + vol
VII, n. 2 + vol VII, n. 1 + vol VII, n. 2 + vol IX, n.
1 [American University of Beirut, Lebanon] Gift of
Dr. Leila Badre, Curator, AUB Museum, Beirut,
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Archaeological Museum and The Arab Heritage
Club of the American University of Beirut, 1982)
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Museum International (UNESCO September 1994)
Gift of Mariella Lord, Editor-in-chief

Beyrouth, Beirut Unveils Its Treasures (General
Direction des Antiquites, Solidere and UNESCO)
Gift of Camille Amin, Director, National Museum,
Beirut, LEBANON, 1996.

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Second issue Fall 1995 [Beirut National Museum,
1995] Gift of Camille Amin, Director, National
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UNESCO) Gift of Camille Amin. Director, National
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Vittoria Fontana, Istituto Universitario Orientale,

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Mrs. Claudia Faras al-Rashed, Photographer,
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No. 4, Dec. 1966, pp. 449-52 Gift of the author
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Gift of Prof. Luis Zangheri, Accademia delle Arti

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1995) Gift of Prof. Luis Zangheri, Accademia delle

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(Frankfurt am Main: Museum fur Kunsthandwerk,
1996) Gift of Amul Herbst, Direktor, Museum fur
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November, 1996.

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of Architecture, November, 1996.


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King, David A. "World Maps for the Direction and Distance of Mecca (vol. 1 and 2)." International Congress on the History of Science, Engineering and Technology. [Frankfurt: Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, 1996]. Gift of Prof. David A. King, Professor of the History of Science and Director of the Institute for the History of Science (HIS), Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main, GERMANIA, November 1996.


Exhibition catalogue. Runi e Fornas [Milan: Sera, 1996]. This exhibition catalogue is the gift of Senora Elena Pecchi Cogolli, owner of Corsia Per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecchi, Firenze, ITALY June 1996.


Het Mogeolite Rijk Tsjerino De Yuan Dymaia. Gift of Dr. Jef Tesse, Gemeentemuseum, NETHERLANDS, 1996.


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Ottoman Carpets of
500 Years

A Famous Carpet Collection in Hungary

Abridged from a lecture by Ferenc Batári

The Budapest Museum of Applied Arts, founded in 1872, was the third museum after the London Victoria and Albert Museum (1857) and Vienna Österreichisches Museum (1868) in the world to deal with applied arts. These museums were collecting ancient, modern and contemporary works of decorative arts in order to polish the taste of the public and the demand of the customers and at the same time to give high level examples for designers and artisans.

Besides central Asia in the history of Turkish carpet-making art, Anatolia has played the most important role. In that area this branch of craft flourished without interruption. The local practice may be divided into two periods: the earlier Seljuk Turkish and the later Ottoman Turkish period. The few existing Seljuk carpets from the 13-14th centuries are preserved almost exclusively in Istanbul and Konya museums.

In the 13th century, a new Turkish tribe appeared on the frontier of the Anatolian Seljuk Sultanate. In about 1250, the Sultan of Konya donated to the head of this tribe, Ergöglü, the surroundings of the village Sürgüt, in return for border guarding services. The son of Ergöglü, Osman I (1281-1324) who made himself independent of Konya, became the founder and name giver of the Ottoman Empire, which influenced the history of the Near East and Europe throughout four centuries.

The second period of Turkish carpet-making art is represented by the Ottoman period. Its golden age extended from the 15th to the 17th centuries.

European paintings, of 14th century, representing carpets offer some information in this respect. In the pictures of Italian painters the field of the carpet is divided into squares or hexagons. In the cassette formed this way geometrical stylized animal figures were composed. Only a few surviving materials of this type are known from the 15th century. One incomplete piece is conserved in the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. This fragment is approximately half of the original size, and thus the complete design can be reconstructed. A similarly designed carpet may be seen in a work of the 15th century Venetian painter Carlo Crivelli (1437-1493) conserved in the National Gallery of London, and titled "Annunciation with St. Emidius" (1482-1486). This type of carpet is named "Crivelli Carpet" after Crivelli's above mentioned painting. For a while only the Budapest "Crivelli Carpet" was known from this type. Two later versions of the type came to light in Anatolia recently, one of them preserved in the Ulus Camii of Sivrihisar, the other was acquisitioned by the German Kirchheim Collection.

In the second half of the 15th century the animal-motif carpets, perhaps due to the growing importance of Sunni traditions in Turkey gradually disappeared from European paintings. It was replaced by more conservative manner of carpet ornamentation, showing kinship with the tribal symbols of Central-Asian Turkomans. Two basic variations of this new carpet design came to be named after a representation of each: by Hans Memling (c. 1430-1496) and Hans Holbein (1498-1543) named "Memling" and "Holbein" carpets. A particular group of the endless repeat, overall patterned early Ottoman pieces, is represented by the "Lotto" carpets. This group is also named after a painter, Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480-1556), a representative of the Venetian renaissance, who in harmony with the taste of other Italian and Dutch artists depicted such characteristic, arabesque-lattice-patterned Turkish carpets in some of his works. The composition scheme of the "Holbein" and "Lotto" are identical, but with the latter in the intersections of the square-network the four lobe, cruciform arabesque rosettes are more accentuated and here also two kinds of rosettes create a continuous pattern. Another group of the overall patterned carpets consists of the so-called white-ground Uşak carpets. In this group there appears the "three ball" motif, the "bird" and "scorpion" or "crab" pattern in the carpets.

The central field of our carpet with the "three ball" motif is adorned with rows of pyramids made up of three balls each. The origin of the "three ball" pattern is still uncertain. Some people see tiger skin in it. Others believe that the "three ball" motif comes from the heraldic arms of Timur, or that it may even be a Buddhist emblem. The latter idea may be closer to the truth, because the three balls usually appear with the double cloudlands forming the well known chinamani symbols. It is very likely that this decorating element had also arrived through the "Silk Road" and spread in Anatolia by the intervention of Chinese fabrics.

There was a development of the "chinamani" to the later appearing "bird" pattern. The central field of the carpet
is ornamented with an S-palmette network formed of the cloudband. Into the intersections of the net rosettes are worked in, each composed of five balls. In the same way, palmettes and rosettes are organized in a square network in the “bird” carpets as well. We may regard the “scorpion” carpets as a variant of the “bird carpets”.

In the course of the 15th and 16th centuries, as the wealth of the Ottoman Empire was growing, the desire for culture and luxury intensified in high places. The example was set by the art produced among the “followers of the true faith” in the Arab countries and Iran. The international atmosphere and aristocratic arts of the Istanbul Court had become a model and an ideal in other parts of the Empire as well. The new taste found its way to the carpet-making workshops too. Beside the traditional endlessly repeatable patterning, so very convenient for textiles, the concentric composition built up around a central medallion became fashionable.

In Ottoman carpets, Egyptian and Persian influences are present in the production techniques as well as in the pattern. In both territories bookbinding art, and in Iran illuminated miniature art, had a marked influence on the composition built up around a central medallion.

Prayer rugs constitute a specially characteristic group of oriental carpets. Their coming into existence is due to the second basic duty of the Moslems, the salat. The ornate prayer niche the mihrab was built into the Makkah-oriented main wall of the mosque as an indication of the direction of the Qibla. In prayer rugs, which may be considered a creation of Ottoman Court manufacture the central field is usually designed in monochrome. The horseshoe-shaped arch of the mihrab is supported by a graceful column on each side. The border strip is adorned with the so-called Herati pattern in which the reciprocally placed rosettes are framed by lanceolate-leaves alternating with pomegranates. Among these appear the best loved flowers of the Turks: hyacinth, carnation, and tulip. An early incomplete example of this type can be found in the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest.

Double niche “Transylvanian” carpets acquired their somewhat deceptive names because they were found to have survived in the highest number in protestant churches of Transylvania. Transylvania was formerly the eastern part of Hungary. In 1526 Süleyman II attacked Hungary and defeated the Hungarian troops at Mohács, where the Hungarian king himself Lajos II was slain in action and the central part of the country also fell victim to the battle. The Turks maintained their occupation until the end of the 17th century. After this national catastrophe the Hungarian Principality of Transylvania was formed.

The 19th century brought a new impulse to the Ottoman Turkish carpet-making art, but this was manifested primarily in the quantity of works produced by the looms. Numerous finely woven, attractively patterned carpets were also produced, but even these could not reach the clear composition and splendid colour scheme of the early works. Uşak, while earlier playing a leading role up to that time, was left behind by Gördes and Kula and simultaneously new town and provincial carpet-making centres were springing up, such as Milas, Mucur, Kirsehir, Bandirma etc. Along with the gradual impoverishment of the Empire, the economic importance of carpets increased. Besides workshops products and village homecraft works even carpets and rugs made by nomadic or half-nomadic tribes were considered as “commercial goods”.

The declining Ottoman Empire made efforts at the end of the 19th century to revive its carpet-making art by means of examples drawn from the past. In the workshops of Hereke, Kayseri, Istanbul, and Bandirma, carpets were produced in the manner of the 16th-17th century Persian and Anatolian works. The products were destined both for export and for the domestic demand. As Sunni traditions had been neglected, pictorial carpets were brought into fashion. The carpets coming off the looms of small workshops or of households, which copied European tastes with bunches of flowers, became a welcome decoration of Turkish homes.

At the same time attractive carpets were made on the looms of nomadic women. Their products with strong composition and vivid colouring were contrasting with the declining town works.

At the same time a new carpet style was being born in central Anatolia. The women of Karapinar began to make, besides the export-oriented carpets of traditional patterning, a very simple and modestly adorned type of carpets for their own use, named the “tülü”. They worked mostly with undyed white, brown and black wool using geometric motifs. In these works, similar to modern Scandinavian textiles, we can recognize a possibility of new prosperity in Turkish carpet-making art.

Right: “Grivioli” rug fragment, Anatolia, 15th century.


Numismatics, the study of historical coins (in Arabic we may say "ilm al-maskukat"), has long enjoyed an honoured place among disciplines concerned with investigation of the past. Surprisingly, the civilizations of the Near East learned to print on metal not only centuries, but even millennia, before learning to print on paper.

With the coming of Islam, there was another innovation in coinage very helpful to the historian and archaeologist. This was the placing upon the coin of an explicit date of its issue. Specialists in the subject recognize also a field of what we call para-numismatics (al-taḥqīq fima yushmān bih bi al-maskukat); the study of objects similar in form to coins, but which were not in fact intended for use as a medium of exchange. In this category we must include medals, issued by rulers and ministers for commemorative purposes, and the talismans, which had the character of propitious charms, often including representations of zodiacal signs.

During excavations carried out in Iran between 1971 and 1976 at the site of Chubayra near Kirman, a number of small discs were found. These discs were flat on one side, and convex or dished on the other, measuring about 18mm in diameter. Each had a single hole in the centre, as if intended for attachment with a cord pulled through the hole and knotted. Seven of these objects were made from ivory or bone, two examples in a hard black, and bluish stone, the first possibly jet. There seems no evidence what type of garment required such fastenings, or how many such "buttons" were employed on each, though they are reminiscent of the toggles on a modern duffle-coat.

The site of Chubayra stands at nearly 7000 feet of altitude, and is bitterly cold in winter, so some type of overcoat should have been in use, though there are few specimens surviving of such garments from medieval Iran. Since at least some of these buttons were made of ivory, they must have been quality items. Several bear traces of green or red coloration, and have cleverly incised decorations around the edges (see plate 2). Some of the discs bear schematic figures in the form of birds, and others geometric patterns. These inclusions are again often inlaid in colour. Thus it is clear that the garments from which they came, if such was their use, were of good quality.

Often the decorations on the buttons are on the convex side, suggesting that this was placed outwards, presenting a hemispherical surface. In a few cases, however, it appears that the dished, concave side of the plainer buttons may have been placed towards the front. In the former case, one could even imagine that the ivory pieces constituted the "cap" of a tassel, such as could perhaps form the termination of a girdle or similar cord.

Unexpectedly, close analogies to these finds came from the excavations at Corinth in Greece, where even examples with the engraved bird decoration have been found. The
study traces their origin to the buttons used to fasten the sleeves of the Ionic *chiton* in Classical Greece. The *chiton* is an untailored woman's gown made from a single length of fabric. It is folded and sewn down the open edge to form a tube. An opening is left for the head and neck, and the rest of the upper edge is then fastened with a row of buttons, which may number four, six, or more frequently eight.

An argument partly in favour of this theory is provided by two discs recently exhibited at the British Museum (see plate 1). This disc is apparently of ivory or bone, about 18 mm in diameter, with a single central hole, and decorated on the convex surface with incised roundels and geometric patterns. This specimen comes with a small group of Sassanian bone and ivory objects found in Iraq. The majority of the examples from Corinth, however, belong to the Byzantine period of the 11th to 13th centuries A.D. The decorations are similar to those examples from Ghuwayra. In fact, the Corinth specimen with its bird decoration is an exact analogy for the Ghuwayra specimen, which suggest that the two could be the products of a single workshop. In view of the great distance between Corinth and the site in Iran, one is led to conclude that a centre of mass production for these buttons existed somewhere in the Levant.

Similar buttons, of rougher manufacture, were found in the excavations at Hamah. The levels excavated at Hamah were considered as being of the Mamluk period, so it is natural to look to the literature on the Mamluk period to find comparisons. According to L.A. Meyer, Mamluk costume, a type of Mamluk overcoat with collar, called maluta, was sometimes worn unbuttoned, as by the Mamluk Uzbeg in 900/1494-5. Presumably therefore when suitable it could also have been worn buttoned up. If the buttons used on Mamluk overcoats were not of this type, then we have to consider what other variety may have been in use for them. Use an overcoat may help explain the circumstance, noted by Gladys Robinson, that at Corinth buttons were never found in the graves.

In the excavations at Ghuwayra, three buttons were found (see plates 2, 3, 4, and 5). They are of ivory or bone that has been pigmented with green. All these have incised decoration round the edge, in the form of circle-and-dot, and diagonal line patterns, which in the first case at least were inlaid with contrasting red colouation. In one example, now at Tehran (see plate 7), the record shows that the decoration has the form of a short Kufic inscription. On quite a number of Islamic artifacts, of different periods, there is found a short repetitive inscription reading *ill-malik* which appears to mean "property of the king". As a further, informative, example, amongst minor finds in the excavation at Ghuwayra were a considerable number of square, flat bricks or tiles. Some of these were stamped with graphic motifs, others with a short inscription in Kufic script. This Kufic inscription was reversed, having been applied with a wooden stamp on which the inscription was carved in orthodox fashion, producing a reversed impression on the brick. It read *ill-malika "For the Queen"*. The inscription, in this and all the other cases, including the button, was intended, according to the lecturer, to serve a fiscal purpose.

In medieval Islam, workshops producing objects required by the court may have had the option, at least in certain periods, of paying a part of their tax obligation in products. Items produced to meet this tax liability needed to be marked, so that their destination and value could be reckoned, and set off against an outstanding tax liability. The receiving state authorities would also need to distinguish which items represented tax payments, and which were normal purchases that had been paid for. Products bearing the legend *ill-malik* "For the King" or *ill-malika* "For the Queen" are therefore considered to be items offered to the ruler in satisfaction of tax obligations. In the case of buttons, it seems possible that the inscription reads, once more *ill-malika*. If that proves correct, it was probably made for the court for the clothing of guards or officials. As for the other buttons, the striking similarities between those with bird decoration, and similar specimens at Corinth suggest that many were made at a single centre of manufacture and mass-production. Since the ivory and bone buttons were evidently made in quantity on a lathe, it is evident that a form of industrial production was in operation. The most likely suggestion is that the centre of output was in Egypt, whence the buttons could have been distributed either in bulk for use by local tailors, or on high quality clothing manufactured for export with buttons already attached.

Nonetheless, the wide range of their distribution, from Corinth to Ghuwayra, is certainly remarkable.
The island of Thera, also known as Santorini, is one of the Cyclades, islands of Greece in the South Aegean Sea. Thera is similar in many ways to Pompeii. Both were destroyed in a violent and complete way, buried under the ashes of a volcano (Thera around 1500 BC and Pompeii, much later in 79 AD). Just as the discovery of Pompeii, so well preserved under the ashes of Vesuvius, was a thrilling subject for the archaeologists and the whole world during the 18th century, we can say that the discovery of Akrotiri in Thera is one of the most interesting discoveries of our century and the most completely preserved prehistoric site in Europe.

The ancient name of what we now call Thera was Kalliste (“the most beautiful” in ancient Greek) or Strongyle (“the round one” referring to the shape it then had). Thera today is a group of islands which together form part of what was once a giant volcano.

The eruption, which occurred in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, caused the fragmentation of the original island. The central mountain burst open and the whole island was covered with volcanic ash and pumice, parts of Thera were buried to a depth of 60 metres. The curve of the island collapsed, permitting the sea to pour in and form a great volcanic caldera. The seabed in the caldera is 480 metres deep and the wall rises up 300 metres.

After the explosion, the once thriving town, near the present village of Akrotiri, was buried until the present century when it was discovered by the late Professor Spyridon Marinatos in 1967. Thirty years before, Professor Marinatos had published a famous article exposing his theory, very daring for his time, according to which the end of the civilisation of Minoan Crete was brought about by the cataclysmic eruption of the volcano of Thera around the 15th century BC.

The geographical position of Akrotiri, at the southern tip of the island facing Crete, 69 miles to the south, thus being a perfect base for trade with the Cretans, led Marinatos to excavate the area although there were no remains visible. Thick layers of volcanic debris had to be removed before the walls of the ancient houses began to emerge. Until 1967, nothing had been disturbed or displaced, creating a unique opportunity for the archaeologist. The basements and ground floors are preserved and sometimes much of the floors. The excavation is a great enterprise of conservation offering the unique opportunity to reveal whole streets of a prehistoric town. To protect the excavated remains from erosion, a roof was erected over the site.

The ancient buildings had been constructed of rubble and clay, reinforced with timber; but in 3,500 years the timber had disintegrated, the wooden parts had left only negative impressions in the surrounding pumice and it was necessary to replace the missing timber with other materials. Concrete was chosen because of its strength and its fluidity which allowed it to be poured into holes and assumed the shape of the missing wood. The volcanic ash that covered the city of Akrotiri penetrated into the houses in large quantities and it is in these layers of dust that the negatives of disintegrated objects can be found. Using the negatives as moulds, casts of parts or even entire pieces of furniture, such as a bed made of wood and leather and a round tripod table with its carved decoration, have been made. Hundreds of items of pottery, stone vases, tools, and other minor objects are found each season.

The earliest evidence of habitation at Akrotiri goes back to the Early Cycladic II period (around 2,500 BC). The site increased in importance later on, during the middle Bronze Age (2000 - 1500 BC) and from the imported pottery we know that the people at Akrotiri were involved in mercantile marine activities and perhaps handled the trade between the Greek mainland and Crete. The city that is presently excavated is dated to the late Cycladic I period, around 1550 BC. The size of the city must have been considerable by the standards of the time. So far, 10,000 square meters have been uncovered and the outskirts of the settlement have not been reached.

The general plan of the city resembles in many respects the present day village of Thera with narrow winding streets which may have been a deliberate attempt to check violent gusts of wind. Some of the houses have dentilicated facades and this contributed to the zig-zag nature of the streets. Often, the open space between two or three buildings forms a kind of square giving the settlement the appearance of a medieval town. Streets were paved with stones, more or less flat on their upper surface, beneath which ran the city sewers, narrow stone-lined ditches connected to pits which received effluent from domestic lavatories via clay pipes incorporated in house walls. The discovery of this elaborate sewage and drainage system demonstrates the high standard of civilization of Akrotiri.

There is no standard house plan at Akrotiri but there are some general principles. The doorway was flanked by a window. Basements normally have small windows, since they were used for storing foodstuffs, whereas there were large windows in the upper stories where people to slept and lived. The basic building materials were irregular unworked stones and clay. Timber reinforcements were used in the walls to strengthen them against earthquakes. Doors and windows were of wood. In smaller windows we have found impressions in the ash of a wooden grille. The staircases were usually stone built, and the floors were usually of beaten earth, and in a few cases they were covered with broken sea-shells. The inner walls were covered with a coating of clay and in the upper stories with proper plaster. This plaster was smoothed, while still wet, with sea pebbles and hundreds of examples of them have been found in the excavation. These smooth surfaces were then painted.

The excavation at Akrotiri has produced a large variety of artifacts. Pottery is common and of great importance. We have several thousand intact vessels as well as innumerable shards. The size and shape and even the decoration closely relate to their use. Large jars (pithoi) were used as containers for various foodstuffs. Some jars were ranged along the wall, separated by vertical stone partitions, while others were partially buried in the ground. So far fifty different pot-types have been found. Very few were meant to remain undecorated. Even domestic pottery was embellished with some kind of decoration. Some vessels had incised or plastic decoration but the majority was decorated by painting. The bulk of the pottery found was of local manufacture, others were imported, mostly from Crete. In the Cycladic tradition, motifs are freely arranged on the surface, rendered in black and red colour while the details are reinforced with white. The motif of birds is one of the most popular in Cycladic art. Three local vases (kylikes) are decorated with dolphins, swallows and wild goats. This type of pottery has been located so far only in Akrotiri and its use is unknown. The quantities of pottery found and the standardization of types with certain decorative motifs suggests a production on an industrial scale although this did not affect the originality of the decoration.
The Akrotiri excavations have produced a large number of stone tools and vessels and a fantastic cup in marble, which was probably imported since marble is not available there. Few metal objects have been found at Akrotiri; silver and gold objects are practically nonexistent. Metal objects were considered luxury items, and may have been removed with the evacuation of the city.

Lentoid clay loom weights, found in groups of several dozen, suggest that the loom was part of the furniture of the residential apartments in each house. Probably weaving was a major feature for local economy (garments, sails, etc.).

The late Cycladic city is unique in its wealth of wall paintings. In Akrotiri, the wall paintings were found in abundance and in excellent condition. We know exactly which part of the room they decorated and we can place them chronologically in the fifty years between 1550-1500 BC, when the eruption of the volcano took place. The wall painting technique is the same as that from Crete (the frescoes in Knossos date about 200 years earlier and it is probable that the artists from Thera learned their art from the Cretans). In contrast to the fragmentary compositions which have come down to us from Minoan Crete, the wall paintings at Thera are in some cases complete.

As for the technique used, a coat of lime plaster was applied to the wall. The outlines of the figures or patterns to be painted were made in the wet plaster but the technique was that of a true fresco; the artist made no effort to keep the surface wet, so he completed the work on a dry surface. As a result, in the same wall painting the paint has penetrated the plaster in some parts, but flakes off elsewhere. All the pigments used seem to have been of mineral origin and have survived quite well. Artists had a high degree of freedom in the execution and the paintings were remarkably unconventionised.

At Akrotiri, art was not the monopoly of a monarch but was patronized by the members of a competitive society who commissioned artists to paint their houses. A whole range of subjects comprise the iconography. In the painting of the "Lilies" we have a mountainous landscape that has been interpreted as depicting the mating time of the swallows which fly joyously among the blossoming lilies. The swallows fly either singly or in pairs and are shown in very naturalistic poses. It is interesting to note that nowadays swallows do not nest on Thera.

Framing seems to have been the dominant fashion in Tharan art and architecture. We often see, on the top and bottom of a picture, a number of alternating coloured bands, as seen in the "blue monkeys" fresco, unluckily quite damaged. The lower part of the composition is defined by wide wavy bands, the upper part by a frieze of spirals between two groups of horizontal bands.

On a narrow panel between two doors we have the magnificent wall-painting of "Boxing Children" illustrating a game between two youths. The use of blue colour in depicting the hair is always associated with young persons. The west, north and east walls of the same room were covered with paintings of "Six Antelopes". The bodies of the animals were outlined in a clear black line while the heads were drawn in greater detail, some features shown in red. The movement of the head, lips and tails gives to the animals an extraordinary animation and vitality.

From the "House of the Ladies", named after the wall-paintings found within, frescoes depict females in Minoan garments. On the north wall, a lady similarly attired but with bared breasts, faced east leaning with outstretched arms towards another female figure, probably seated, of which only part of the dress has survived. It seems that the murals on both walls belonged to a unified composition, a procession of women advancing towards some person or object, now lost, on the east wall, probably a religious scene. The women on both walls are shown under a series of three wavy bands of black and blue. The whole of the wall above these bands was covered with blue stars interspersed with red dots. From the same "House of the Ladies" comes the
fresco of the “Sea Daffodils”, named so by Professor Marinatos who identified the plants as sea daffodil. Another interpretation, proposed by Peter Warren, that the flowers depicted are clusters of papyrus seems more likely.

A narrow friere on the east wall of the same building depicts a tropical landscape. On both banks of a meandering river, wild beasts (such as a spotted panther-like feline) are shown amidst palm trees and other exotic plants and bushes. Both the flora and fauna in this riverscape led Marinatos to recognize a North African landscape.

The most impressive and informative painting from Akrotiri is the voyage of a “Flotilla” from one harbour town and its arrival at another. The town, of multistoried houses, from which the ships depart lies at the foot of a mountainous region. The flotilla consists of eight sailing ships. On the largest ship, embellished with garlands, there is a decoration of lions and dolphins. Dolphins are depicted playing around which adds to the joyfulness of the picture. The people in the town at the other end of the friere watch the arrival of the ships from hills, roof tops or large windows. The frieze has been interpreted in a variety of ways: the return of a fleet following a successful mission abroad: a ceremony of some kind; or visit by friends or allies. Marinatos proposed that the vessel was the flagship of the fleet and its captain the owner of the “West House”. Both murals suggest that Akrotiri had strong overseas contacts and that overseas trade was of vital importance. The excavation itself confirms the close contacts between Thera, the Greek mainland and Crete.

In the absence of written records it is difficult to reconstruct the social organization of late Cycladic Akrotiri. Usually there are burials and offerings which shed light on social status and religious beliefs and practices. Unfortunately at Akrotiri the cemetery has not yet been found. From the wall paintings and diverse artifacts some inferences about the people of Akrotiri can be drawn. Since there is no break in the thousand year long development of the site, we suggest that Akrotiri was inhabited by an indigenous, Cycladic, population. A strong Minoan influence is apparent in art and architecture. Compared with contemporary settlements, the conurbation at Akrotiri was very large and sufficiently organized to be called a town or city. The population of the town must have been quite large and tightly packed. It is clear that the community was highly organized. There must probably have been some sort of central municipal authority but none of the buildings excavated so far seems to have the dimensions of a palace. All structures are private homes, comfortable residences of apparently large families. That the whole community was an urban one is confirmed by the fact that there was no provision for the accommodation of animals.

The wallpaintings of Akrotiri give the best insight into the nature of Thera society. The fact that they have been found in all the buildings implies that a considerable part of the society was both familiar with them and could afford them. Akrotiri society must have been sufficiently civilized to support a special class of painters. The murals are too abundant and varied in quality to have been executed by a couple of amateur artists. Craftsmen, too, must have constituted specialized groups. Potters, as we have seen, worked on an almost industrial scale to satisfy local demand, but the way in which these classes were organized is a matter of guess work.

The civilization of Thera was at zenith when the end came. The absence of human or even animal skeletons from the ruins surely means that Akrotiri had been evacuated. Probably the strong earthquake was preceded by tremors which made people leave their homes. The absence of victims suggests that the Akrotinites had prior warning. This is the only possible explanation for the fact that no precious objects have yet been discovered at Akrotiri.

Soon afterwards, the whole site, indeed the whole island, was covered with consecutive layers of pumice. The thickness of this pumice varies, thinner on top of projecting walls, thicker in the streets and in pockets between the houses. The final phase of the eruption is recorded archaeologically by a very thick mantle of volcanic ash known also as tephr or pozzuolana deposited over the entire site and often exceeding 5 metres of thickness even after so many years of erosion. The height to which this ash was expelled in the air seems to have been considerable, judging from its distribution in the south and eastern Mediterranean (Crete, Rhodes). Sometimes the fine tephra fell inside the homes through open windows which has proved a blessing for the archaeologists since everything packed within the tephra is very well preserved. We do not know how long it took for Akrotiri to be buried completely. According to volcanologists the process must have been a short one.

If the chamber collapse of the volcano was sudden, the flow of water must have generated tidal waves. Professor Marinatos, who elaborated the theory associating the eruption of the volcano of Thera with the destruction of Minoan Crete, said that the earthquakes accompanying the eruption and the enormous tidal waves had caused severe damage in most Minoan sites. He sought a parallel at the eruption of the volcano of Krakatoa, between Sumatra and Java in 1883. Volcanologists consider it to be of the same type as Thera. The eruption of Krakatoa is very well documented and helps us to comprehend the forces at play in the Thera eruption. It is reported that the clouds of ash in Krakatoa were 50 miles high and that it was dark even 257 miles away from the epicentre. A tidal wave achieved a height of 36 metres more than 30 miles away and the eruption destroyed 295 villages. Over 36,000 people lost their lives, mainly by drowning. By comparing Thera with Krakatoa, Marinatos concluded that the Thera eruption must have been much stronger since its caldera is almost four times greater than that of Krakatoa. There is no doubt that it was a momentous event and a landmark in Aegean prehistory. From our existing knowledge we can say that at least two centuries elapsed before the island was inhabited again.

Memories of the Thera eruption have survived in various ancient traditions around the Aegean which referred to floods caused by inundations from the sea. Claude Schaeffer, the excavator of ancient Ugart in Syria, even ascribed the destruction of the port and part of the city in the second half of the fifteenth century BC to the action of a tidal wave.

Many scholars began to reinterpret the ancient myths and legends and even associated Thera to the lost continent of Atlantis. Generations of archaeologists, historians, philologists and natural scientists have become obsessed with Atlantis and there is no place in the world that has not been associated with it. The original story of Atlantis is mentioned by Plato, the famous Greek philosopher in 350 BC. According to Plato, Atlantis was an island continent in the midst of the true ocean with an advanced civilization and the strongest naval power of the time but there occurred violent earthquakes and floods, and in a single day and night of misfortune the island of Atlantis sank into the earth and disappeared in the depths of the sea. Whether Plato’s account of Atlantis is fact or fiction has been a controversial issue since antiquity. However, his description of the end of Atlantis seems to fit to the scenery of Akrotiri.
The Mu'nis al-Ahrar Manuscript in the al-Sabah Collection

Illustrated Poetry for a Princely Patron

by Stefano Carboni
Abridged from a lecture by Stefano Carboni.

Much of what had been told so far about this manuscript, the text of which (devoid of all but one of its illustrated pages) is presently in the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, was misleading in terms of the identification of the subject matter of its dispersed paintings. This manuscript had usually been described as an illustrated dictionary, a pictorial Larousse, an astrological codex, etc., but rarely—and correctly—as a poetic anthology. One of the six dispersed pages with illustrations, a folio in the Harvard University Art Museums in Cambridge, bears the title of a chapter from the manuscript and summarizes its contents. The six dispersed folios come from “The Twenty-ninth chapter, on illustrated poetry and on the elections of the Moon”. This is also clearly written in the table of contents of the actual manuscript.

We know from the chapter heading that the following verses are by “the master Muhammad al-Rawandi”. I asked for the assistance of Alexander Morton, lecturer of Persian at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, in order fully to understand the significance of the poems. Mr. Morton not only provided a full translation and a commentary on the poems he was able to demonstrate from internal evidence that the manuscript had been copied, and therefore illustrated, in Isfahan.

The structure of the illustrated poem must be briefly explained in order to understand how its paintings can be regarded as true sections of the text. The poem, which contains twenty verses, fills the first three of the six dispersed pages, those presently in Cambridge, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Princeton University. For example, the first line of text of the page in Cleveland, corresponding to the first hemistich of a verse, reads: “Ever all roasted at his table are”; the second hemistich that follows is not written in words but is illustrated in the painting just below: “Ox and fish, camel and horse and sheep”. This in itself is an amazing discovery since this type of book illustration was virtually unknown before. Furthermore, it is surprising to notice that the solution to the visual riddle, i.e. the second hemistich, is also actually written at the end of the first half verse in each hatched square visible on the page. Probably one was supposed to cover these squares with one’s thumb, while trying to read the second hemistich correctly, before giving up and peeking at the answer. These illustrations, exactly like written words, are arranged on one line and can be “read” in their proper order from right to left. Their yellow background, the palette and their liveliness make them rather charming and appealing. They can consequently be studied and set in an appropriate context in two ways: the individual objects can be compared to actual objects of the same period when the manuscript was compiled; in addition, they can also be compared with details found in other contemporary illustrations.

In the first category of pictures, the focus is especially on metal objects: for example, the basin represented on the verso of the page in Cleveland is of the jagged border type that was favored under the Ilkhanid in the first half of the 14th century. Among parallels in contemporary miniature painting, the knotted bag made of white cloth, a sort of money purse held by the treasurer, illustrated on the verso of the Cambridge page, is depicted in a miniature from the Great Ilkhanid Shahnama, the masterpiece of Ilkhanid painting produced in the early 1330s.

All the details seen so far are certainly very useful to give an appropriate and rather precise context to the paintings in the Mu’onis al-Ahrar and ensure that they belong to the late Ilkhanid period. But if we have any doubts they can easily be solved with the help of the manuscript’s illustrated double frontispiece. The latter is still bound to the original manuscript from which the six illustrated pages were detached and dispersed.

The scene on the left, slightly retouched but entirely original, shows a couple of high social status sitting on a large wooden throne. The couple are shown almost frontally; their faces seen in three-quarter profile. The prince raises a slender footed goblet, offering it to his companion. The princely status of the woman is indicated by the white handkerchief she holds in her right hand. This scene can easily be recognized as entirely Ilkhanid both for its composition and for the costumes worn by all the figures. The prince’s hat is very elaborate, crowned by a set of two large owl feathers and seven long eagle feathers, and with a long flap extending from its back. This type of headdress is often represented in Ilkhanid paintings, always in connection with royal or princely scenes. From miniature paintings in albums in Berlin and Istanbul it seems that the number of feathers crowning the hat identified the social status of its owner: in a miniature from the Berlin album, the prince’s headdress bears three eagle feathers while some of his attendants’ hats have only one each. The hat of the royal personage illustrated in the frontispiece of the Mu’onis al-Ahrar probably represents the latest and most flamboyant development in Ilkhanid headdress fashion.

The damaged hunting scene on the right of the original double page was arranged in registers of which only the bottom one is fully visible. It shows a rider dressed in the Mongol fashion in the act of piercing the body of a lion with his sword. Peculiar to the landscape are the green and red triangular mountains bordered in gold, set against a purple background. They are of particular interest because they are found in the very same shape in other undated manuscripts, thus suggesting that the latter’s date and location are close to those of the Mu’onis al-Ahrar. The foreground of the second register, representing a horseman hunting two hares, contains flowered plants that are commonly found throughout Chapter 29, thus confirming that all of these pictures were drawn and painted by the same hand.

The scenes just described are entirely Ilkhanid, but other elements of the double frontispiece also clearly indicate the influence of the contemporary production of illustrated manuscripts in Shiraz, i.e. of the so-called Injuid school of painting. This school is recognizable as a local independent development of Ilkhanid painting and is associated with the rule of the Injuid dynasty in the province of Fars in southern Iran between ca. 1330 and 1350. The general composition of the double-page, with its hunting scene on the right side and the throne scene on the left, is paralleled in an Injuid Shahnama of 1333, now in St. Petersburg; however, a similar composition is present already in a Kaffa’ wa Dimna dated 1307 in the British Library. This type of composition on a double page begins in the Ilkhanid period, although the idea of associating the image of the ruler with the royal pastime of the hunt in single-page frontispieces, in registers, is represented in North-Jazraran manuscripts of the first half of the 13th century.

The main question is, obviously, who are the two
royal figures represented in the Mu'nis al-Ahrar. The matter is complicated by the fact that the evidence provided by the dedicatory rosette of the Mu'nis al-Ahrar of the identity of the princely couple portrayed in the frontispiece has unfortunately been erased by damage to the page, thus we have to accept, for the moment, that a positive identification of the two characters cannot be provided. However, the presence of the rosette itself indicates that the compiler of the poetic anthology decided to dedicate his work to a personage who, around Ramadhan 741, had presumably gained control of the author's town, Isfahan. It seems almost certain that he decided to do so at the time he completed his work since there is no mention of a patron in the preface of the manuscript, as one would expect in the case he had begun his work under somebody's aegis.

The Mu'nis al-Ahrar is a significant milestone for the understanding of 14th century Persian book illustration because it is one of the very few codices of which we know almost everything: its date of completion (741/1341), its place of production (Isfahan), and its compiler and scribe (Muhammad ibn Badr al-Din Jafarm). Other illustrated manuscripts can now be reattributed to the same Isfahani workshop on the basis of this one. The codex was compiled six years after the death of Abu Sa'id in 1335, the year that is usually regarded as the official date for the collapse of the dynasty although it corresponds only to the beginning of its end. In the development of Ilkhanid painting, the Mu'nis al-Ahrar can indeed be considered the last illustrated manuscript produced in the pure Ilkhanid style. Two other manuscripts produced in the early 1350's demonstrate how the influence of Ilkhanid painting survived for at least two decades after the fatal decline of the dynasty.

One is the earliest known copy of the epic poem entitled Gushaspnama and is dated by its colophon to 1354 A.D. (Topkapı Sarayi, Istanbul). All the details of the vegetation, the costumes and the general composition are in debt to the best products of Ilkhanid painting. The second manuscript is very little known and, to the lecturer's knowledge, has never appeared in relevant literature. It is a very early copy of the historical text Mujmay al-tavarih, composed by an anonymous writer. The manuscript is dated by its colophon to 1352 A.D. Toward the end of the book, in a geographical section, there are seven illustrations, all of them apparently contemporary to the codex. Although they show a strong compositional naivete, they can be compared to Ilkhanid painting of the first decades of the century and probably developed along a provincial line. This Ilkhanid mark becomes evident especially if we look at details of the landscape. There is only one descriptive illustration in the manuscript, while the other six have a different appeal since they depict famous monuments and buildings throughout the Islamic world. They represent one of the earliest illustrations of Islamic monuments in the Persian world; at least as far as book illustration is concerned.

While the Ilkhanid style of painting was on its way to extinction in the 1350's, something else happened in the very years the Mu'nis al-Ahrar was copied and illustrated. An illustrated double page from a manuscript now in Istanbul, which is firmly dated by its colophon in the year 739/1339, depicts the entrance and the interior of a barba (hermetic temple). It is evident that the elongated human figures outside the entrance, as well as their gestures, have little in common with Ilkhanid painting and point decidedly to the later, Jalayirid style.

The 1330s and 1340s can be regarded as the most fascinating years in the 14th century for the presence of both courtly and provincial Ilkhanid painting, of the peculiar Iqtiṣâd style and of the birth of the Jalayirid mannerism. The latter seems to originate from nowhere, and one would be inclined to accept al-fitteram the 16th century statement of Dost Muhammad that it was one individual, master Ahmad Musa, who changed the style of Persian painting so dramatically. Dost Muhammad, however, added that Ahmad Musa was active under the Ilkhanid Abu Sa'id, and thus that this painter was well acquainted with court-style Ilkhanid painting. Was he really able to create a new one, perhaps going to work for the Jalayirid Hasan Buzurg in Baghdad? Whatever happened we do not know presently, but it is striking to notice that the two styles coexisted for a short period of time. The "veil from the face of depiction"-to use Dost Mūhammad's very words-was lifted in these very years although it still lingered over the faces of a great declining tradition.
Embrodery in Ottoman society was produced both domestically, by women working at home, and professionally in workshops. The "Professionals" who were mainly men, were organised, like every other profession into very strictly-run craft Guuils. These Guilds regulated such aspects as quality control, training, prices and so on. It was professionals, for example, who almost certainly made and embroidered the gorgeous but heavy velvet dresses known as 'kaftans'. Similar style 'kaftans' were made and worn by wealthy brides in Turkey and also in the cities of Aleppo and Damascus in Syria, as well as in Palestinian towns of Jerusalem and Jaffa, and even as far away as urban Morocco and Algeria. Court costume in the Balkans and southern Russia developed from this style and such Ottoman influenced embroidery can be found as far afield as northern Nigeria and Mauritania.

In the Turkish kaftan style the embroidery, which is floral in motif, is known as bindali, meaning "a thousand branches" and garments embroidered in this manner are called bindali.

The kaftan with this type of embroidery seems to have been a development of Khil'at or robes of honour that the Sultan presented to "worthy" citizens. Ambassadors and important foreign visitors at Bayram or Eid celebrations. Dignitaries among other peoples of Central Asia also followed the same custom.

It was customary there for the recipient then to distribute most of them amongst his servants, who usually sold them back to the Agent of the person who had given them.

The most common of all domestic embroidered cloths are those known as towels or napkins - which is one translation of the Turkish pesker, and they were amongst the most constantly used articles in any home, both formally and in a domestic sense.

The traveler, Charles White in his three volume book Three Years in Constantinople, or Domestic Manners of the Turks published in 1844, writes that great use is made of textiles in the home and specifically mentions napkins. He also noted that the Sultan honoured individuals by bestowing on them gifts, which were always given wrapped in an embroidered cloth, in the same manner as when letters or teas went to the medical man. This presentation of gifts, fees, letters wrapped in beautiful embroidered cloths most likely descended, at least partially from the regal traditions of the Byzantine empire, when the Emperor would present or throw an embroidered scarf to the winning charioteer at the Hippodrome in Constantinople. One of the earliest references to such Hankerchiefs is a letter written in 1560 by the Hapsburgh Emperor Ferdinand I's ambassador to Constantinople, Ogier Busbye. He mentions the Archery competitions held, probably in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, and states that the winner was presented by the Sultan with an embroidered cloth "such as we use to wipe our faces". Provincial governors and other high officials also received presents of embroidered scarfs or handkerchiefs in much the same way that Elizabeth Ist of England gave embroidered gloves to deserving courtiers. Similarly Tibetans and other Himalayan people present, and still do present scarfs on important or social occasions - the greater the occasion the better the scarf.

The use of the handskerchief or mendil was introduced into Ottoman society from Byzantium where it had been a cloth associated with religious rituals or services. Its secular function in Ottoman society was that it could be carried and as such offered an opportunity for display and decoration. It can sometimes be seen in paintings being held by the Sultan. It was woven from linen or cotton and ranged in quality from the finest lawn to a coarse cotton.

The Ottoman Turks, who were of Central Asian origin, began their period of expansion in about 1339 and with the capture of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, they consolidated their position and the effects began to spread through a wide area, with the arts reflecting the changes. The first Ottoman Sultan, Mehmet the Conqueror, is said to have been a somewhat austere person, who lived and dressed simply, without the luxuries and fine clothes that quickly became so popular with later Sultans. Nevertheless, very early on in society in general, it became the fashion to decorate and embroider absolutely everything, be it an article like pesker, or a Battle flags, boots, quivers or the tents they lived in during their campaigns. If these tents were taken as war booty, they were viewed with stunned admiration by their captors.

As for towels and napkins, they are basically of the same pattern, that is a single width of handwoven cotton or linen and are usually about 40 to 50 centimetres wide by 100 cm long. They are generally white or off-white except for the snuff hankerciehs which are a dark brown - for obvious reasons. There is an embroidered panel at each end. Apparently there are examples of coloured and patterned ground cloth with the embroideries at either end. The "towels" would most commonly be decorated with silk embroidery, which sometimes includes quite a bit of "skoium" or gold and silver wrapped thread. It was in the late 19th century that this use of gold and silver thread in an otherwise beautiful piece of work became too heavy for the fine cotton and so it tended to spoil and come to bits too easily.

The best "towels" were used to present something that was being offered to a guest, so no dish would be passed without it being held in a decorated cloth. Before and after a meal guests would be offered water in which to dip their fingers and then an embroidered cloth to dry them on.

A very important feature of Turkish life at all levels was the Turkish Bath and it was one that spread all over the empire. Until the late 19th century bathing facilities, with the necessary amount of hot and cold water, were not to be had. Every town had a Turkish Bath which provided part of the service run by the Municipality. Some were even designed by the great Ottoman architect Sinan and other well known architects of the period. Many were built on sites of Byzantine bath houses which continued the tradition bought from the Romans.

There were separate days for men and women and particularly for the women. Baths were centres of social life. Women gathered to talk and exchange gossip as well as eat and bath, and it was where, traditionally, marriages were arranged.
Islamic Treasures in the Wallace Collection

The Wallace Collection has sometimes been described as the best kept secret in London. This is a pity because today it houses the cream of what were once the most fabulous private collections of works of art in the whole of Europe.

Hertford House contains over 700 Old Master paintings, 500 pieces of furniture, similar numbers of ceramics, bronzes, and other sculptures, miniatures, medieval antiquities, items of precious metal, over 250 historic clocks, glass, horns, jewels, illuminated manuscripts, over 1,000 items of European arms and armour, and the fabulous Oriental Armoury; nearly twelve hundred pieces specifically chosen for their Eastern opulence and exotic beauty. One small part of the museum, the Islamic arms and armour, is truly a collection to be proud of.

The Wallace Collection, is named after Sir Richard Wallace, but it was actually his father, Lord Hertford, Fourth Marquess of Hertford, who collected the vast bulk of the Oriental Armoury. Lord Hertford spent most of his life in France, his arms collection being acquired mainly in Paris during the last ten years of his life, from 1860 to 1870. It is likely that his aim was to furnish a Smoking Room in the prevailing Orientalist taste of the late 19th century. With no legitimate heirs, it was his illegitimate son, Richard Wallace, who became the inheritor of his father's fortune in 1870; after his death in 1890, it was left to his widow, Lady Wallace, to bequeath the Hertford House collection.

It was Richard Wallace, later knighted by Queen Victoria in recognition of his great works of charity, who was responsible for moving the entire collection, including the arms and armour, from Paris to the family's principal house in London, where it has remained to this day. Lord Hertford, though always something of a recluse, had in fact already exhibited a large part of his Armoury collection (249 pieces, to be precise) in France, in the Paris Musee Retrospectif exhibition of 1865.

The Collection is rich in Indian, Middle-Eastern (especially Persian) and Ottoman weapons, with comparatively little at all from the Far East. Swords and edged weapons in general seem to have been especially prized. Several examples from the collection include the Indian horse's head, a Turkish sabre, an Arab sword, a Cairene sword and a five-bladed dagger.

Some of Lord Hertford's most prized possessions were not really of Eastern origin at all, but it is open to doubt whether he ever knew, or indeed, really cared. This group...
included a “presentation” sabre. This superb silver-gilt Mamluk sabre is in fact French, made by Pirmet of Paris. It was presented by the Council of Amsterdam to a Cossack officer in 1813, in gratitude for his action in saving the city from the ravages of a French Napoleonic army. Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign had made such styles of sword the very height of fashion throughout Europe.

Another piece is an enamelled “Katar” dagger. This richly enamelled gold “Katar” dagger is not actually Indian, but English, made in London, and decorated perhaps by the enameller William Craft at the end of the 18th century, presumably for presentation to an Indian potentate.

The Demidoff Sabre, a rather Ottoman-looking sabre, is actually Austrian, made in 1846 for a Russian emigre, Prince Anatole Demidoff, of San Donato in Florence. His collection comprising all manner of works of art (just like the Wallace Collection today, in fact) was sold at auction in Paris in 1870. Lord Hertford by this time was virtually on his deathbed, but with little else to live for but his art collection, he bought heavily at the sale.

There is only one illustrated page from the original 1870 catalogue of the Demidoff Sale. It contains a mixture of Islamic and Renaissance European arms; most of the items on this page are in the Wallace collection today. Three daggers from the Demidoff sale are depicted, including one of the finest pieces in the Demidoff Sale, the “hunting knife” of Tipu Sultan, Tiger of Mysore in Southern India.

Tipu Sultan, was and still is a figure of considerable charisma; ruler of one of the most powerful of the independent Indian states, it was inevitable that his own ambitions would sooner or later come into conflict with those of the British, at whose hands he eventually died, during the storming of his palace-fortress at Seringapatam in 1799. Tipu’s sword was his personal shamshir (so inscribed in gold) bearing his badge, a tiger damascened in gold upon the surface of the fine 17th-century blade.

Like the Demidoff collection, the fabulous art collection of the Comte de Pourtales-Gorgier, sold in 1865, is also in the body of the Wallace Collection. An exceptional example of that collection is the Persian dagger, signed and dated 1496-97. The blade is both inlaid and encrusted with gold, in a design of foxes and hares amidst arabesques, leaves, and flowers.

Also in the Wallace Collection is the cuirass of Fath Ali Shah Qajar. This blade was in fact made for Fath Ali Shah Qajar, Shah of Persia from 1798 to 1834; the only reason one knows this is because it is inscribed.

One of the most interesting pieces is an Indian Mughal dagger c. 1620. This is one of only two such daggers in the world today; the other of course is here in Kuwait, in the al-Sabah collection. It is largely due to the work carried out on the dagger in the al-Sabah Collection, that we in London know what little we do about the one in the Wallace Collection. Dating from the early decades of the 17th century, around 1620 or thereabouts, this is another weapon of undoubted Royal provenance, perhaps one held in the hand of Jahangir himself, or his son and future heir, Shah Jahan.

A fine mace in the Wallace Collection is not 17th century Polish, as originally catalogued; it is in fact 15th century Mamluk. It even bears the name of its maker, Mustafa B. Jamal, damascened in gold on the head.

Even more embarrassing was the case of the pure gold English 17th century neck-chain. It’s silver-gilt, Indian and almost 19th century!

The Wallace Collection which started as a single man’s fascination with objects of art and personal delight is now available for the delight and appreciation of us all.
Dr. Anatol Ivanov, from the Hermitage spoke regarding the revived interest in Islamic amulets and seals. Dr. Ivanov has been working for the past 20 years on a Catalogue of Islamic Seals and Amulets in the State Hermitage collection, which consists of 660 seals and 160 amulets, but due to poor documentation over the past two hundred years, the provenance of many of these objects is unknown. It is, perhaps, due to this difficulty that Dr. Ivanov has devoted so much time to studying this increasingly popular subject.

Much of our knowledge about Islamic seals is associated with the works of Dr. Ludvik Kalus who published four catalogues on the subject.

A special group for the study of seal impressions in manuscripts was formed at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Institute. The purpose of this group was to discover libraries in which owners of manuscripts had made impressions of their seals. The group published the result of their work in The Asiatic Museum project: 1 Data - base on Muslim seals and in a new magazine entitled: Manuscripta Orientalia which will be published in English in St. Petersburg.

When considering the beginning of Islamic sfragistic as an independent branch of Islamic art studies, one must remember that before the publication of L. Kalus’ catalogues, the study of Islamic seals was in a state of neglect.

The lecturer then noted groups of objects which must be included in Muslim sfragistic. Among these were: seal matrices; bullae; seal impressions on paper; cameos; and amulets.

Seal matrices, with inscriptions in negative to be printed on different materials, were made from different stones or metals. They are seal impressions on special glass or lead. The first, are reflected in the Sassanian tradition of the use of seals. Islamic clay bullae are very rare.

Seal impressions on paper, are principally on documents. Bullae are seal impressions, but bullae are impressions of early seals and are few in number while we know impressions on paper from the 14th century. Seal impressions on documents are important because each document gives the time and place of its composition. The documents and dated seals allow us to understand the change in the art of seal-making.

The lecturer noted that cameos are not widely spread in Islamic lands, but that specimens from
Mughal India are known.

The fifth group of objects are amulets. Of course, amulets are very closely connected to seals in that they are made from the same type of material—they are also made from hardstones or metals, but their inscriptions appear in positive. The contents and the use of amulets are absolutely different from that of seals. The use of seals is mostly related to material life whilst the use of amulets is connected to spiritual life in Muslim Society and to magic interpretation of Chapters and Verses of the Qur’an.

At present, in his publications, Dr. Ludvik Kalus divided seals (and the history of seal-making) into two large periods: the “classical period” ranging from the seventh to the 13th centuries and the “post-classical period”, ranging from the 14th to the 20th centuries. Inscriptions in Kufic script are characteristic of the “classical period” and inscriptions in other scripts, e.g. naskh, thuluth and nastaliq, are characteristic of the “post-classical period”.

The naskh and thuluth scripts were in use a few centuries before the 13th century and they appear on different objects. We can admit that some seals were inscribed in naskh (at first) before the 13th century. Here the lecturer noted four seals: a seal, inscribed in naskh with the name of Akmag ibn Isma’il, found in Bukhara and dated from the 10th century; a seal, also inscribed in naskh with the name Ilch’ir, found during the excavations at Paikend in the 10th century level; and two seals, inscribed in naskh with the names of the prophet Muhammad and the 12 Imams, found in Gurgan together with coins dated from the beginning of the 13th century. Therefore, these two seals must be dated from the 12th to the 13th centuries. That is practically all the archaeological material of which we dispose and it is very sad, that during excavations very few Islamic seals have been found.

The forms of seals from the “classical period” are
Seals are usually inscribed with the person's name, followed by the name of his father and in rare instances, the name of the grandfather. As for nisbas, they are very rare, in the early as well as in the later material. However, there are two seals of this type in the Hermitage collection, one is inscribed Ahmad ibn Muhshin as-Saffar and the other, Ahmad ibn... (the name of the father is undeciphered) ar-Rikhali or ar-Rijali, unfortunately, nothing is known about these two people.

There are not any official titles on these early seals with the exception of one official seal, that of the Fatimid Khalif az-Zahir (1001 - 1036 AD), in the Hermitage collection.

Many inscriptions are of Shi’ite nature, some include the names of the prophet and ‘Ali and others the names of the prophet and the 12 Imams, but it is not known to which century and area these Shi’ite seals belong. Their purpose and function is also unclear.

The classification of seals on the basis of the character of letters in Kufic script must be based on Kufic coins. The work of the seal-maker and engraver of coin-punches was very similar in that they both carved the inscriptions in negative. Therefore, one can assume, that seals and punches were cut by the same persons. In the later periods, the similarity in the script and composition of inscriptions on coins and seals is obvious, while the composition of inscriptions on Kufic coins and Kufic seals is absolutely different.

The "post-classical period" begins in the 14th century, as proposed by Dr. L. Kalus. It is during this century that changes occurred in script, forms and decoration of seals. This new trend in seal-making, is first known of on Iranian soil. While the lecturer noted that he does not know about seals of the Mamluk state or the Chaghatay state of Central Asia in the 13th and 14th centuries, he did note that when the Timurid state was established, the style of seal decoration in Central Asia and Iran was the same.

When we began to study Iranian seals of the 14th century, we stood on firmer ground, because we were familiar with the first dated seals from that century as well as the impression of seals on documents. We know of 11 seals which were made in the 14th century, six of them are dated. One seal, that of Miranshah, son of Timur, was made in 802 AH / 1399-1400 AD. Five other seals, also known from impressions, can be attributed to the 14th century because of the names of their owners, namely the Iranian Mongol Sultans Muhammad Oldjaitu and Abu Said and Sultan Uways from the Djalanirid dynasty and others.

We therefore have a good base for the study of Iranian seals from the 14th century. These are mostly of rectangular form, the script is naskh, thuluth and angular Kufic, bordering the rim is one line and by the end of the 14th century, two lines and there is no ornamentation between the letters of the inscription. There are as well seals of other forms which have a high probability of being attributable to the 14th century, some are decorated with Persian verses. It is impossible to say, what the leading form of seals was in the 14th century.

When we began to look at documents with seal impressions from the 15th century, we observe that the leading form of seals was round. Such forms of seal we know from the letters of Timur to the French King Charles VI, this being one of the earliest examples.

The seals of the 15th century, the so-called Timurid seals, are mostly round, inscribed in thuluth and with unornamented backgrounds. It is interesting to note that we know of many jade seals of this century. The surface of these seals is very often divided into two parts, with an Arabic expression in the upper half and the name of owner in the lower half. This is the leading trend of decoration we know of, with some excep-
Three of these exceptions can be noted. The seal of Gowhar-shah, wife of Shahrukh, son of Timur, is of dark green jade and almond-shaped. This is the only seal which has survived from the seals of the Timurid dynasty. It is in the Hermitage collection. There is also a seal inscribed with Persian verses and the name of the owner at the center (al-Abd Asad ibn Muhammad). The third is a green jade seal, inscribed (Banda-ye Dergehye Shaib Muhammad Shams ad-Din). A typical 15th century seal with an exception, the gold scroll on the background of the inscription. This scroll is typical of Iranian seals of the second half of the 16th century, but this seal must be dated to the end of the 15th or early 16th century.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Safavid dynasty began to rule Iran. This political event was also reflected on seals. Changes appeared in the composition of inscriptions on the surfaces of seals and compartments were introduced. Two new Shi‘ite inscriptions on seals were also introduced. A little change occurred in the script, the inscriptions became tighter (or firmer) and we know of the last “angular Kufic” during this period. As for form, it remained mostly round at the beginning of Safavid rule.

Real changes in seal-making, during the Safavid period, began in the second part of the 16th century. As in the 14th century, changes occurred in the form of a seal, the script of the inscriptions and the background decoration. The form of seals became oblong and this became the leading form in the 17th century. The type of script changed to nastaliq, but the biggest changes occurred in the decoration of the background of the inscriptions, on which appeared the scroll with leaves. There were no ornaments on the seals of the 14th to the first half of the 16th centuries.

New changes began in the first part of the 18th century. The background scroll divided into two or more little scrolls, the letters of the inscriptions became large and the oblong forms of seals disappeared and the leading form became rectangular in the second part of the 18th to the 19th centuries. The inscriptions usually consisted of the names of owners without any titles and there were very few nisbas. We know from historical sources that there were 11 state seals for different documents in Iran in the 17th century. But no such seal exists in modern collections.

Two typical Iranian seals of the 19th century, one with Persian verses dated 1247 A.H., illustrate the main features of seals of the 19th century: rectangular form, two lines near the rim, nastaliq script with large letters and many little scrolls with flowers on the background.

The second type of seal is very peculiar, it is one of a group of seals made for foreigners. This type of seal was made in Iran (or Turkey) for Europeans, whose names were inscribed in Arabic letters.

As to Central Asian seals from the seventeenth century, the lecturer singled them out on the basis of names which were unpopular in Iran, e.g. Ish Muhammad or Muhammad Yunus and where the title of nobility Beg appeared. These seals feature flowers on the background (without scrolls, as in Iran) or plain backgrounds. We know very few Central Asian seals of the 17th century. Most of the known seals are from the 19th century, which feature near the rim a narrow band with little crosses or dots.

Amongst the Central Asian seals of the 19th century are the state seals—the seals of Khans of Khiva, which were captured by the Russian army in 1872. The inscriptions consist of the names of the Khans only (sometimes there are inscriptions in verses). The style of decoration is absolutely similar to other seals of this region, but the Khans’ seals are made from gold.

It is only at the end of the 17th century that one sees a Turkish style of decoration; flowers on the scrolls are larger and sometimes different than the ones on Iranian seals and the rectangular form with cut edges was possibly the most popular and leading form in Turkish seal-making. The language of the inscriptions was Arabic, Turkish and Persian, sometimes in verse.

One additional group was mentioned: Indian seals. Very few Indian seals appear in published collections (only 8 examples at the Ashmolean Museum, none in the Bibliothèque Nationale and two in the Hermitage’s collection). These examples are dated from the 18th to the 19th centuries. The author noted that while he has not seen actual Indian seals from the 17th century, he has seen seal impressions of that century and noted that Indian seals have some particular flowers on the background and the script is large and bold.

The lecturer noted that he is inclined to say that amulets should be excluded from Islamic sphragistic, of course, it is a questionable problem, because amulets are connected with seals by material and technique, but noted that he was very glad, that Islamic sphragistic has become a special branch of Islamic Art studies.
The Appearance of Persian on Islamic Works of Art

by Bernard O’Kane

Professor Bernard O’Kane lectured upon the appearance and spread of Persian on Islamic works of art. An abstracted version of this lecture is presented here, although the DAR looks forward to publishing the complete text of Professor O’Kane’s detailed and fascinating lecture in the near future.

While the spread and development of Persian literature has been the subject of many studies, the varying uses and importance of Arabic and Persian on all works of art and the reasons of changes in the balance of power between them have yet to be the subject of any study. There were several stages in this development, which happened at different rates of different media.

Four sections can be identified. It was introduced in the first period, roughly between 1050-1150 on architecture, usually secular in nature, by Turkish dynasties on the periphery of the Islamic world.

In the second period, approximately in the century beginning 1150, architectural examples are still very few and are also peripheral, but craftsmen working in metal, textiles and particularly in lustre pottery, use a new more legible script to produce products that would hold greater appeal for the bulk of their market by including Persian inscriptions.

In the third period, from 1250 to 1350, the focus turns back to architecture, although this is possible a reflection of the shift of the lustre potters to tilework. Here Sufism, Islamic mysticism, is one of the main motivating factors behind the change.

The fourth period, from around 1350 to 1500, shows a fast accelerating trend in incorporating Persian in architecture and especially metalwork, with the increased involvement of society at all levels with Sufism as a critical factor. Unlike the previous stages, Persian poetry now frequently calls attention to itself by framing within a cartouche.

The lecturer began by discussing the geographical spread of Persian, giving the literary background then examining the evidence for the use of Persian on works of art within the first of the periods mentioned above. It has been suggested that the use of Persian might have begun with the Samanids and Buyyids. They have left some monumental inscriptions, some metalwork and a rich legacy of inscribed pottery and textiles. Perhaps surprisingly, given the efforts of these dynasties to foster Persian culture, all of the inscription on them are in Arabic. This even applies to the inscriptions in which a Buyyid ruler commemorated his visits to Persepolis, the Achaemenid capital, in an attempt to buttress his legitimacy by alluding to his Iranian heritage.
An early example may be a silver cup which has good wishes in Arabic and two verses in Persian proclaiming that the holder of the cup will have good fortune. It is in Khorazm, the territory of the Qarakhanids, that we find the earliest securely datable occurrence of Persian, on a mausoleum built around 1055. The second surviving architectural example, also in Qarakhanid territory, is a caravansarai (Eastern inn with a central court) between Bukhara and Samarkand. This is datable to before 1078, and has a partially deciphered inscription over the entrance in rhyming Persian which mentions the ruler and compares the building to paradise. The third, a palace, was erected in 1112 by the Ghurid and Turkish sultan Masud III at the capital of his empire, Ghazni in Eastern Afghanistan. This is one of the earliest Iranian palatial buildings to have survived and its Persian inscription was one of the longest.

Moving on to the second period, roughly 1150 to 1250, the Persian inscription was traced on a tomb tower in Nakhchivan, dated to 1186. The strength of Persian literary tradition in Seljuk Anatolia is shown by the very names of the Sultans, such as Kay Ka'us, Kay-Khusru and Kay-Qubad, which were drawn from one of the Iranian heroes of the Shahnama.

A famous piece of metalwork, a bucket dated to 1163, has an inscription in Persian giving the name of the patron, the caster, the inlayer, the designer of the decoration, the date, and the place of manufacture, Herat in Western Afghanistan.

The confidence of the craftsman is seen in the poetry which graces a ewer made in 1186 in Herat, which contains five quatrains in Persian. The effusive pride of the maker in his work is echoed in a silk textile, probably also dating from the 12th century. In lustre pottery of the early 13th century, on the other hand, we find that Persian verses occur more often than in any other medium, either sharing the epigraphic program with Arabic, or even occasionally appearing alone.

In Iranian pottery of the following centuries, however, epigraphy is relegated to a minor role, if it exists at all. For these centuries architecture and metalwork will provide the best evidence of the interplay of Arabic and Persian.

The number of buildings with inscriptions in Persian, mostly poetic, which have survived may help clarify general trends. We have seen two from the 11th century. There are three from the 12th, 5 from 13th, 10 from the 14th and 22 from the 15th. With metalwork, the trend shows an even greater increase in the 15th century.

The lecturer then examined some of the most sig-
significant examples of this transformation in the third stage, when Persian inscriptions are found on architecture in Central Iran, and the influence of Sufism becomes more apparent, noting the palace at Takht-i-Sulaiman built in 1227 by the Mongol ruler.

The fourth stage, from ca. 1350-1500, which can also be seen as a quickening of pace of the third, was illustrated first by one of a series of monuments dating from the second half of the 14th Century in a necropolis beside Samarqand. There are several Persian verses on the portal and the interior of mausoleum, dated 1372, in addition to other inscriptions in Arabic. The first appearance of Persian poetry in the 15th century seems to have been on the Fereat citadel, built in 1418 by the Timurid ruler, Shah Rukh, who had made the city his capital. A madrasa in Mashhad in Northeast Iran, built by an Amir in 1439, is one of the few remaining Timurid buildings where an extensive epigraphic programme is still largely intact. This helps us to evaluate the relative importance given to Persian and Arabic at this time.

The Masjidi Shah, also in Mashhad, dated 1451 is another example.

The placing of the Persian couplets within cartouches may have been a sign to the passerby that poetry was to be expected. While the Persian poetry on the drums of these two buildings is difficult to read from the ground, that on the portals was much more legible, and the cartouches may have been a way of signifying to the possibly less literate passerby that this was so.

A Khanaqah (residence of sufis) near Isfahan, dated 1452, shows a different emphasis in its range of inscriptions on the entrance portal. Here, the main foundation inscription is in Persian, although in its upper margins it has a Quranic inscription.

Another instance of this is in the Friday Mosque of Nishapur, where the foundation inscription consists of Persian poetry. It is not certain if the present location of the stone slab on which this has been written is the original one, but its seems designed to stand alone. It may be noted that this is the first Persian foundation inscription we have encountered in a mosque and that it appears without reference to other Arabic inscriptions.

One final, far flung, example of this period is the Tiled Kiosk, a pavilion of the Topkapi Saray in Istanbul that was erected by the Ottomans in 1471. Its foundation inscription is entirely in Persian, still the preferred Ottoman literary language, and like many previous examples compares the building to Paradise.

How can we explain the increasing appearances of Persian poetry on architecture and other artifacts at this time? The patronage of culture was in fact one of the main props to legitimacy for any medieval Islamic ruler, and poetry was still regarded as the cultural undertaking par excellence, stemming from its prestigious function in the Islamic urban setting and as the determining factor in the assessment of a dynasty’s ultimate worth.

We have seen how the use of Persian on works of art started with Turkish dynasties on the periphery of the Iranian world. It first appeared in quantity on pottery which was more widely distributed than other artifacts. Gradually, in the following centuries, under the influence of Sufism with its growing number of adherents, it predominated on those media such as pottery and metalwork which regularly carry inscriptions, and acquired an increasingly important role on architecture.
In *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (1902), Bernard Lewis states that, for Ottomans, "the idea of an alliance with Christian powers, even against other Christian powers, was strange and, to some, abhorrent." In reality, alliances with Christian powers were a natural and inevitable aspect of Ottoman policy from its earliest days. Ottoman soldiers first crossed into Europe, after 1350, as allies of either the Byzantine Emperor John Cantacuzenos or the city of Genoa. Thereafter, the Ottoman Empire rarely lacked Christian allies. Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople in 1453, was an ally and trading partner of Florence. Far from alliances seeming "strange" or "abhorrent" to the Sultan, on occasion he discussed policy with, and was entertained by Florentines in the cosmopolitan district of Pera, across the Golden Horn from Istanbul itself. He had long been at war with Venice. However, after peace in 1479, Ottoman-Venetian relations became sufficiently relaxed for the Sultan to ask the Doge to find him a competent painter; hence Gentile Bellini's portrait of the Sultan, painted in Istanbul in 1480, today in the National Gallery in London.

The Ottoman Empire was not only a great military power, whose territory stretched from Algeria to...
Armenia, and from the Danube to the Gulf. It also ruled an area of immense economic and religious significance to Christian powers. Constantinople became one of the capital cities of Europe, in the words of a later French diplomat, the Vicomte de Marcellus, “a centre of minuscule and complicated negotiations such as do not exist in other political headquarters”. Constantinople embassies were considered so important that they were a nursery of future foreign ministers (such as Hoepken of Sweden, Vergennes of France, Thugut of Austria).

An embassy in Istanbul however, could be perilous. If the Sultan was displeased by a foreign government’s declaration of war, or evidence that it was surreptitiously helping an Ottoman enemy, its ambassador might be humiliated, or imprisoned in the fortress of the Seven Towers by the Sea of Marmara.

However most ambassadors remained unharmed in the capital during embassies which could last very long indeed. With no European power, however, did the Ottoman Empire have closer relations than with France. They shared the common bond of hostility to the House of Austria. When Francois I King of France was captured by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the battle of Pavia in 1525, he sent a letter pleading for help to Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566). The first permanent French ambassador, Jean de La Forest, arrived in Istanbul in 1536. Thereafter the French ambassador had precedence over others; his muster, at first called “king of the province of France” in Ottoman documents, was soon addressed as Padishah, “great emperor” like the sultan. The French ambassador personally instructed Ottoman artillery during the war against Persia in 1548-50, and organized joint Franco-Ottoman naval operations against Spain in the Mediterranean in 1551-5.

France was not the Ottoman Empire’s only Christian ally. Since before 1453 Poland had enjoyed closer diplomatic ties with the Ottoman Empire than with France or England. In 1533 the two monarchies signed a treaty of “perpetual friendship and alliance”. In the seventeenth century, despite several wars, including King John Sobieski’s intervention to raise the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman Empire became a model for Polish nobles. Ottoman costume became part of Polish national dress. In 1676 the principal reason for the Ottoman declaration of war on Russia, a crucial stage in the exposure of Ottoman weakness to its neighbours was the desire to end Russian interference in Poland.

The meetings of ambassadors and Grand Viziers, in the Poteri or a private kiosk, appeared to be a collision between two worlds: they wore different costumes, spoke different languages and followed different religions. In reality, through their respective interpreters they spoke a common language of power, profit and monarchy. In 1669, when the French ambassador asked the Ottoman Empire not to recognize William III as King of England, the Grand Vizier Fazil Mustafa Pasha replied that it was absurd for Ottomans, who had so often deposed their own monarchs, to dispute other nations’ rights to do so.

By the eighteenth century, alarmed by the increase in Russian power and the instability of the Ottoman Empire, many powers saw the Ottoman Empire a European necessity. In 1829 when Britain and France, not for the last time, were about to send fleets to protect the Ottoman Empire from the Turkish army, the Duke of Wellington stated what most European statesmen had come to believe: “The Ottoman Empire exists not for the benefit of the Turks but for the benefit of Christian Europe.”

Court ceremonies were critical tests of power and influence, and the favourite subject of “embassy pictures”. They naturally stress the honours paid to the ambassador. The ambassador is shown dining alone with the semi-royal “absolute deputy” of the Sultan, the Grand Vizier, at his table in the Divan hall; or, accompanied by a few senior officials and wearing Ottoman robes of honour, enjoying the supreme honour, presentation to the Sultan in his throne room.

In accordance with France’s role as the Ottoman Empire’s most constant ally, French ambassadors most frequently commissioned pictures of the city. More than is generally recognised, Istanbul was a magnet to European artists. In the 1670s the Marquis de Nointel maintained a “picture factory” at the French embassy. One artist, Rhomboud Faidherbe, was posted in the street to watch the Sultan and Grand Vizier, so that he could paint them from memory.

The principal embassy artist was Jean-Baptiste Vanmour. Born in Valenciennes, he arrived in Istanbul in the suite of the French ambassador, the Marquis de Ferriol, at the age of twenty-eight in 1699 and remained there until he died in 1737. Clearly in love with the city, he wrote of his desire to m’instruire aind de toutes les particularités qui concernent les moeurs et usages des Turcs. He was permitted to accompany ambassadors to their official reception in Topkapi palace, and his large narrative pictures of the Sultan and the Grand Vizier and their suites, signed and dated 1711, of the reception of the French ambassador in 1724 and of the Dutch in 1727, were much admired for their vivacity and naïveté. Many of Vanmour’s pictures were commissioned by the Dutch ambassador Cornelius Calkoen and, having remained together as a collection by the terms of his will,
now hang in the Rijksmuseum.

The number of embassy pictures was due not only to ambassadors' desire to commemorate their careers but also to European's curiosity about an exotic multi-national city, which was, before 1700, the largest city in Europe.

The most impressive cycle of embassy pictures, however, owes its existence not to the French but to the Swedish embassy, Sweden and the Ottoman Empire, alarmed by the rise of Russia, signed a treaty in 1740.

Only Istanbul inspired so many "embassy pictures" over so long a period. Either consciously or unconsciously, they filled the gap left by the lack of pictures (as opposed to calligraphy, illuminated manuscripts or icons) commissioned by Muslims or Christians. By the seventeenth century Ottoman custom inhibited either the Sultans or the viziers from commissioning or purchasing pictures. The frequency with which the Christian Phanariots who served the Porte and the Ecumenical Patriarchate were deprived of their wealth or their lives did not encourage them to form picture collections. In Istanbul only ambassadors did so. Thus the clearest visual record of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Istanbul can be found not in the city itself but in 'Turkish rooms' in Swedish manor houses, Austrian castles, and French châteaux, belonging to ambassadors' descendants.

The last great embassy artist came from Baden, Antoine-Ignace Melling, who arrived in Istanbul in the mid 1780s in the suite of the Russian ambassador Count Bulgakov, subsequently worked for the British and Dutch ambassadors. Melling was "attached for several years to Hadidje Sultan [the favourite sister of the reforming Sultan Selim III] as artist and architect". He redesigned its interior and built neoclassical kiosks on the Bosphorus for the princess and her brother the Sultan.

Melling's patronage by the Sultan and his sister was one sign of the growing interest in Western painting in the Ottoman palace itself. After the massacre of the janissaries in 1826, the empire finally began a process of radical modernization. Preoccupied by their growing opportunities for intervention in Ottoman affairs, the embassies lost their role as centres of artistic patronage. The Sultans themselves, as in the days of Mehmed the Conqueror, became the principal patrons of western artists in Istanbul.