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Imperial Collections of Topkapı Palace on Display: The Imperial Treasury, the Sacred Relics Collection, and the Ottoman Museum of Antiquities

Abstract

This study examines three imperial collections housed within sultanic pavilions at Topkapı Palace during the late Ottoman era. Originally constructed in the 15th century during the reign of Mehmed II (the Conqueror) for the sultan's personal use, these pavilions underwent significant functional and symbolic transformations over time. The Fatih Kiosk, once a private space where the sovereign collected and contemplated his collection of valuables, was repurposed as the Ottoman Imperial Treasury. The Privy Chamber, which was once the ruler's bedroom and throne room, became the Chamber of Sacred Relics, where Islamic relics were safeguarded and venerated. Meanwhile, the Tiled Pavilion, a garden kiosk situated in the palace's outer gardens, was converted into the Ottoman Museum of Antiquities in the late 19th century. These three royal pavilions were opened up for visits during the 19th century for diverse audiences holding different collections. By analysing the spaces, objects, audiences, and visiting rituals associated with these collections, this article explores Ottoman strategies of collecting and display. Reading these collections as proto-museal institutions, this research argues that the intertwined methods and discourses of exhibiting established the foundations of Ottoman and Turkish museology.

Keywords: Ottoman museums, sacred relics, antiquities, archaeology, Topkapı Palace, Fatih Sultan Mehmed

1. Introduction

Topkapı Palace, previously known as *Saray-ı Cedid-i Amire* (New Imperial Palace), was built in Istanbul by Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446 and 1451–1481) after the conquest of Constantinople during the second half of the 15th century, and it remained the main seat of the Ottoman Empire for more than four centuries, until the 19th century. The palace, located at the tip of the Seraglio and surrounded by sea and land walls, was formulated reflecting the strict hierarchy and protocol of the Ottoman court. Its internal courtyards, aligned successively from more public to more secluded, opened into each other through monumental gates, and each courtyard was assigned different functions.[1]

Topkapı Palace remained at the core of the Ottoman ruling system and housed the imperial household until its abandonment by the imperial family by the mid-19th cen-

1 For a more detailed discussion of Topkapı Palace and its role in the Ottoman ruling system, see Necipoğlu 1991.

tury. Scrutinising what happened to the royal complex after its abandonment, I survey the symbolic, functional and architectural transformations that took place in Topkapı Palace during this turbulent period. Thus, in my doctoral research, I discuss the role of the imperial palace in response to the military, bureaucratic, cultural, and political transformations taking place in the late Ottoman Empire and how the palace took part in Ottoman reforms as a venue and also as an agent of modernisation.

My previous research particularly focused on the gradual museumification of the palace throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and analysed how the imperial collections, especially the Imperial Treasury, were opened for touristic visits and displayed to foreign visitors performatively.[2] In this article, I included other treasures and collections of Topkapı Palace in my discussion to have a more complete and comparative perspective on the politics of collecting and display in the late Ottoman context. Apart from the Imperial Treasury, the Sacred Relics, and the Ottoman Archaeological Museum, the collections are comparatively analysed. Portraying and studying different display techniques adopted by the Ottomans for these diverse collections, the article aims to shed light on the underlying narrative behind these different yet interlaced, 'exhibitionary orders.'[3]

This article will focus on the three most ancient pavilions of Topkapı Palace, all of which date back to the 15th century: Fatih Kiosk, the Privy Chamber, and the Tiled Pavilion (Figure 1). The functions of all three sultanic pavilions, initially built by Mehmed II (Fatih /the Conqueror), have changed over the centuries, and they ended up housing various royal collections and treasures. By the 19th century, these three pavilions – and the collections within – were being visited by diverse audiences, and different display techniques were adopted that conveyed multiple and simultaneous narratives of modernity, tradition, authority, heritage, and dynastic continuity.

I argue that these collections, as proto-museal settings, formed the foundations of the Topkapı Palace Museum today.[4] Topkapı Palace was declared a state museum by the legislation of the Grand National Assembly in 1924, months after the foundation of the Turkish Republic. The conversion of the former Ottoman palace into a state museum was an official manifestation of the empire's death warrant. Today, the Topkapı Palace Museum is the most visited in Turkey, attracting over four million tourists annually. From a museological point of view, I argue that the current diverse – and sometimes contractionary – exhibition methodologies and narratives are reflections and adaptations of late-Ottoman display strategies. In this paper, I seek to understand the dynamics and politics of collecting and display in the late Ottoman context, focusing on the collections held at the Imperial Treasury, the Chamber of Sacred Relics, and the Ottoman Imperial Museum.

2 Özlü 2022, 153–92.

3 Mitchell 2004.

4 Proto-museums are accepted as early versions of museums, displaying certain collections without strict organizational, spatial, or scientific boundaries.

Figure 1. The Tiled Pavilion, Privy Chamber, and Fatih Kiosk (from left to right, clockwise) shown on an air view of Topkapı Palace (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1918, D-DAI-IST-3929)

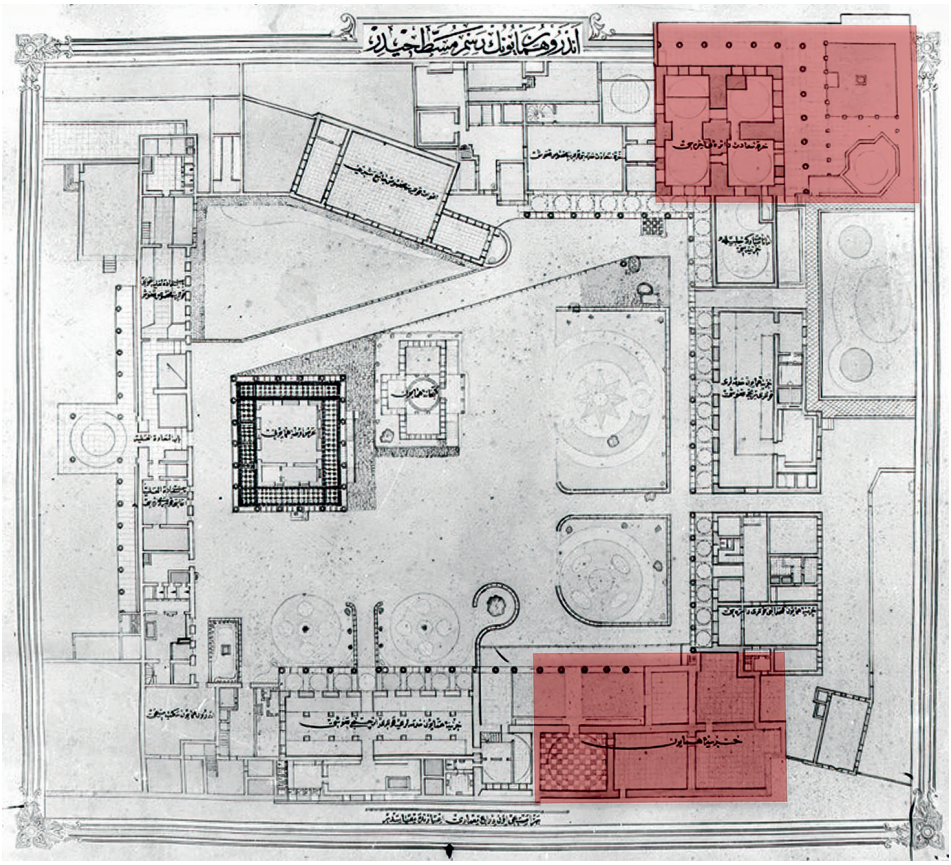
I analyse these spaces of display from a perspective of contemporary museum theory to elaborate on the underlying politics of imperial heritage. I aim to raise various questions in relation to space, collection, audience, display techniques, and narrative:

- Space: Where was the collection displayed? What were the architectural characteristics?
- Collection: What was on display? How was the collection formed?
- Audience: Who was visiting the collection? Why?
- Display: How were they displayed and presented to the audience?
- Narrative: What was the underlying discourse that the Ottomans aimed to convey: modernity, tradition, heritage, glory, richness, difference, superiority, dominance, or all?

2. Fatih Kiosk / Imperial Treasury

Fatih Kiosk (*Fatih Köşkü*) was built by Mehmed II at the Southern corner of the third court of Topkapı Palace. *Enderun Avlusu*, or the courtyard of the pages, is the most

Figure 2. Fatih Kiosk (bottom) and the Privy Chamber (top) shown on the plan of the Enderun Court (Abdurrahman Şeref, 1911)



sacred part of the palace, where the sultan lived with his male servants (Figure 2). The royal pavilion was built as a space for the ruler and composed of four connected chambers at the ground level and three units at the basement level. The chambers opened into each other, and the corner loggia was a semi-open space, overlooking the sublime view of the Sea of Marmara. According to the historical and architectural analysis conducted by Gülru Necipoğlu, Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, Sedad Hakkı Eldem, and Feridun Akozan the Fatih Kiosk was built for the sultan's private use and also to preserve his personal collections and treasures.[5]

In this sublime pavilion, the sovereign could rest, spend time, have guests, and contemplate his invaluable treasury collection, which ranged from relics to erotica,

5 Ayverdi 1973; Eldem and Akozan 1982; Necipoğlu 1991.

Figure 3. Fatih Kiosk and the Corner Loggia (Courtesy of Cengiz Kahraman)

jewellery to paintings, manuscripts to clothing.[6] The structure was initially attached to the Grand Bath (*Enderun Hamamı*) of Mehmed II and the kiosk included niches, hearths, hidden stairways to the basement, a toilet, and a balcony in its chambers, which proved its residential function, apart from being a princely treasury (Figure 3). Perhaps the building could be interpreted as the private *Wunderkammer* of Mehmed II. Meaning 'room of wonder' in German, *Wunderkammer* refers to a space in which royal treasures were housed. The early-modern practice of displaying these chambers and 'cabinet of curiosities' is accepted as the origin of museums.[7]

In the Ottoman context, Fatih's princely pavilion lost its residential function over the centuries and transformed into a treasury-depot, and started being referred to as the Inner Treasury *(Hazine-i Enderun)* and was eventually renamed the Imperial Treasury *(Hazine-i Humayun)* by the 19th century. The accounts of Ottoman court chroniclers mention that Ottoman sultans, together with the treasury pages, paid occasional visits to the Inner Treasury on special occasions. During these exclusive visits, a certain protocol and ritual for unsealing the treasury door and the display of the treasury were performed.[8]

6 Özlü 2018; Özlü 2022, 153–92; Raby 1982, 3–8; Raby 1983, 15–34.
7 Bennett 1995.
8 Hızır İlyas h.1276/1859; Hafız Hızır İlyas 2011, 143–4.

The Ottoman Imperial Treasury and its legendary riches remained a mystery for many centuries, but eventually, it was opened to foreign visitors by the mid-19th century. It was first opened for ambassadors of the great powers (France, Russia and England), later for diplomatic envoys, then for distinguished guests and esteemed European visitors. Eventually, by the last quarter of the 19th century, any Western tourists, who could afford to pay the entrance fee, could have access to the Imperial Treasury.[9]

During the reign of Abdülhamid II (r.1876–1909), access to the Imperial Treasury and the palace grounds was somewhat standardised. The tourists had to follow an established protocol and pay a certain amount to receive a *firman* (imperial decree) that granted access to the palace grounds. The palatial tour included not only the Imperial Treasury but also certain parts of the palace, its inner courts, and sultanic pavilions. My previous article from 2023 gives details about this tour and the self-orientalist spectacles that were performed for the European gaze. Therefore, in this paper, I focus solely on the exhibitionary practices that took place during the visits to the Imperial Treasury and explain the performative acts of display that mimicked the ancient palace rituals.

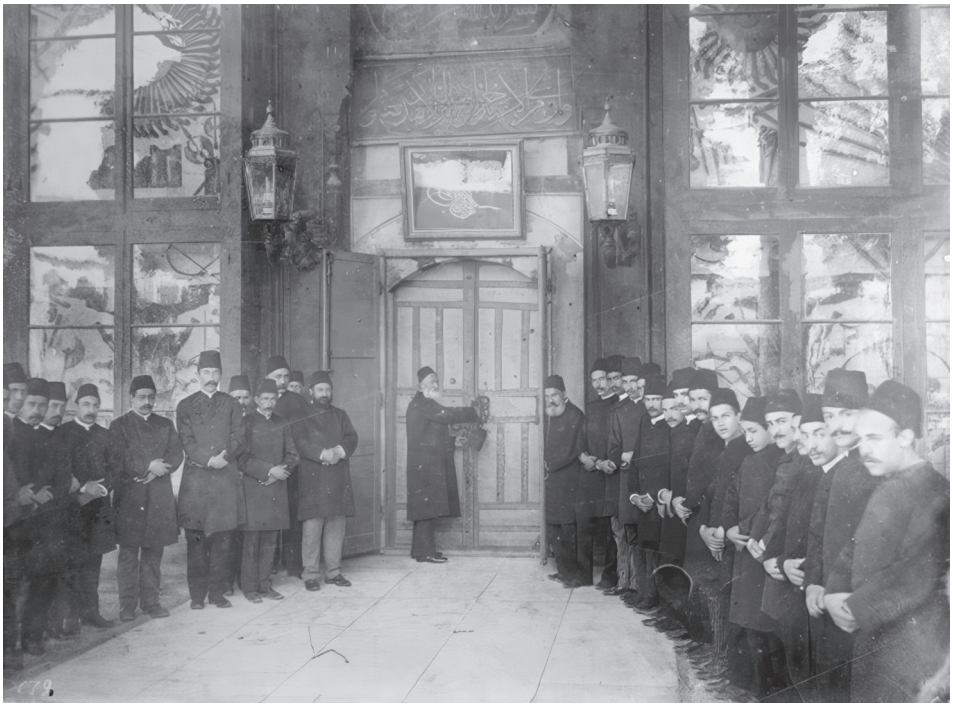
The Imperial Treasury, inner courts, and other sultanic pavilions of Topkapı Palace, including the Baghdad Kiosk and the Mecidiye Kiosk, were part of the touristic itinerary. The Imperial Treasury, however, was the final destination and the pinnacle of the tour, the most curious and desired part of the palatial visits. The display of the treasury was the last attraction, and it was shown to foreign tourists according to a specific protocol. The group was first invited towards the colonnaded entrance gallery of the imperial treasury and kept there waiting for the Chief Treasurer. Once he arrived with his entourage of treasury pages and palace servants, the Chief Treasurer unlocked the seal of the treasury gate with a certain rite as depicted by J.C. Robinson in his article at *The Times* (Figure 4):

> A high official, the keeper of the Imperial Treasury, and a staff of no less than 30 sub-officers and attendants, were assembled at the unlocking of the door. This is in itself was a picturesque, formal ceremony, apparently of prescriptive usage. The officers and attendants ranged themselves in two lines facing each other and leading up the to the doorway, and a green velvet bag containing the massive keys was passed along to the principal official, who in a solemn manner took out the keys one by one, and apparently compared and verified them in the presence of a couple of co-adjutors.[10]

According to Pierre Loti, once the doors were opened, the Chief Treasurer and the treasury pages took their positions inside the treasury chamber. After entering the first chamber of the Imperial Treasury, visitors were able to have a glance at the collection under the surveillance of the palace officials, walking from one hall to another, without adequate time or light to examine the rich and crowded collection. Only three chambers were open for visits: The Domed Chamber known as *Vezne-i Hümayun*, the Royal Chamber (*Divanhane*) and the Corner Loggia. The group was herded swiftly from one chamber to another, briefly being able to observe them all.

9 Özlü 2022, 153–92.
10 Robinson 1885.

Figure 4. Seal Breaking Ceremony performed in front of the Imperial Treasury (Istanbul University, Rare Books Collection)



What was on display in the Imperial Treasury? Almost everything that had some kind of tangible or intangible value for the Ottoman dynasty.[11] The items the sultans and sultanas once used, wore, slept in, ate at, gifts, things they found interesting, valuable, or worth keeping, from jewellery to thrones, costumes to cups, coins to paintings,

11 An inventory of the Inner Treasury from the time of Bayezid II (1496) states that robes, caftans, swords, chessboards, incense burners, belts, sheets of paper, elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, shark teeth, arrows, Qur'ans in Kufic script attributed to Ali, pillows, floor spreads, prayer carpets, bed sheets, books, table spreads, shoes, and valuable carpets were stored in the chambers upstairs (*bala-yı hizane-i amire)*. Objects stored downstairs (*zir-i hizane-i amire)* included ceramic wares from İznik and China, Qur'ans kept in mother-of-pearl chests, objects of silver and gold, bed sheets, belts, cushions, books and illustrations, pitchers, metal cups, chandeliers, turbans, velvet, silk, brocade, and wool textiles, sheets of paper, archival documents and historic calendars, astrolabes and astronomical instruments, musical instruments, bows and arrows, chessboards, backgammon sets, incense, lapis lazuli, rosary beads, carpets, and chests full of miscellaneous objects. Another inventory register from 1505 also mentioned chests full of manuscripts, maps, architectural plans, and revenues from imperial gardens in addition to the aforementioned items. Öz, *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi arşivi kılavuzu*, faksimile 21, TSA. D.4; Necipoğlu 1991, 137; Necipoğlu 2013, 315–50.

clocks to China porcelains, fabrics to parchments, arms and armour, gifts, boxes, glassware, silverware, and more. Anything of value for the Ottoman sultans was accumulated in the treasury chambers and shown to visitors in custom-made display cabinets. According to the Treasury Register of 1878, around 4,800 objects were deposited in the Imperial Treasury and displayed inside and outside of the windowed cabinets.[12]

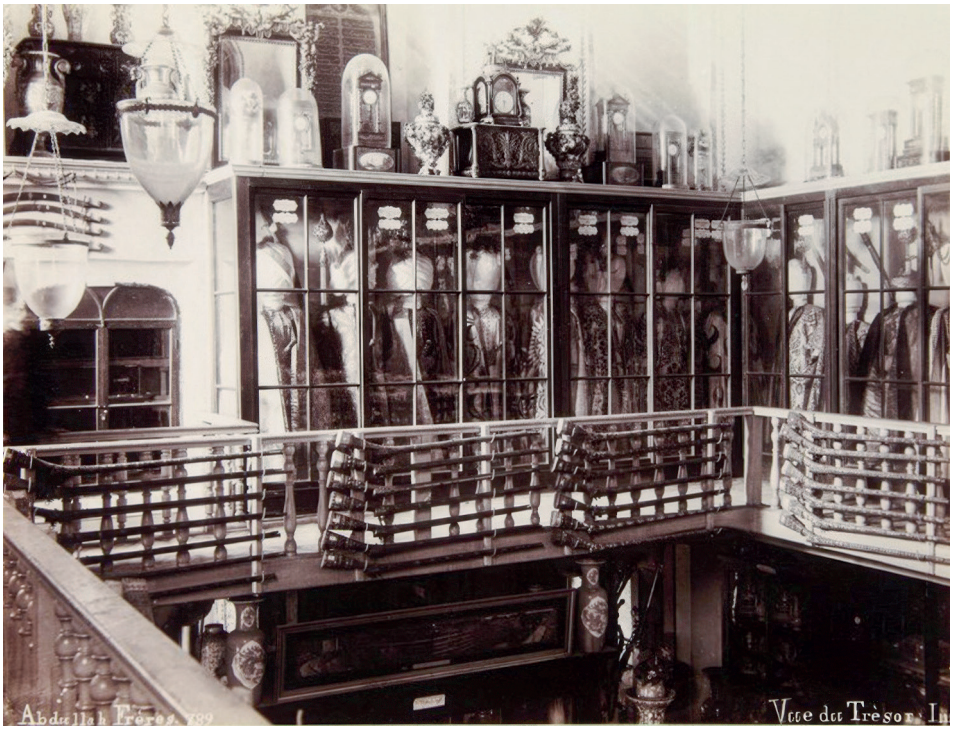
The principal piece of the collection was the so-called Persian Throne, placed at the centre of the first chamber in an octagonal cabinet. The piece was labelled as the throne belonging to Safavid Shah Ismail that was brought to Istanbul by Sultan Selim I as a war trophy, which manifested the military superiority of Ottomans over Safavids, if not the artistic.[13] Hundreds of precious objects, paintings, thrones, porcelains, clocks and more were also displayed on the gallery floor of the first chamber. The main attraction of the second chamber, where several jars of ancient coins, numerous clocks, arms and armour belonging to warrior sultans were on display, was the ceremonial robes of Ottoman sultans displayed in chronological order, from Mehmed II to Mahmud II (Figure 5). It was recorded that Mahmud II's modern military attire, representing his enforced clothing reform, was also on display.[14]

The overall impact of the treasury was some sort of disappointment mixed with wonder and admiration. For instance, an article in *Constantinople Illustrated* depicts the treasury as 'a barbaric display of [...] things of greatest value, intrinsic and historical, mixed in an ignorant and dirty fashion with a heap of modern riff-raff.'[15] The visit to the treasury frequently triggered the preconceptions of the visitors for reproducing the Orientalist narratives. Susan E. Wallace, for instance, compared the contents of the treasury with Sinbad's valley or Aladdin's cave: 'Diamonds… diamonds everywhere, thick as in Sindbad's valley and Aladdin's enchanted cave. There is such profusion of precious things that after a while one begins to feel they are imitations.'[16] Similarly, Eugène Gallois praised the richness of the collection and depicted the Imperial Treasury as 'curious rather than beautiful' and compared its decor to a scene from *The Thousand and One Nights*.[17] Robertson defined the three chambers of the treasury as an 'enchanted open sesame cave from which there might per chance be no exit.'[18] These hackneyed Orientalist narratives reflected both the identity and the expectations of the Western travellers. The Ottoman Imperial Treasury was exclusively open to foreign visitors and Ottoman subjects were denied entry up until the declaration of the Second Constitution in 1908.

The display techniques implemented at the Imperial Treasury utterly contrasted with those of modern museums of the period. The Ottomans had been experimenting with collecting and displaying antiquities since the 1840s and established a state-of-the-art

12 Bayraktar and Delibaş 2010.
13 These labels were, in fact, misleading since this throne, spoliated from the Mughal court by Nadir Shah, was actually gifted to the Ottomans during the 18th century.
14 Grosvenor 1900, 729–30.
15 No author 1886b, Part I, 1886.
16 Wallace 1898, 57–8.
17 Gallois 1903, 55.
18 Robinson 1885.

Figure 5. Ceremonial robes of Ottoman sultans, displayed chronologically in the second chamber of the Imperial Treasury (Istanbul University, Rare Books Collection)

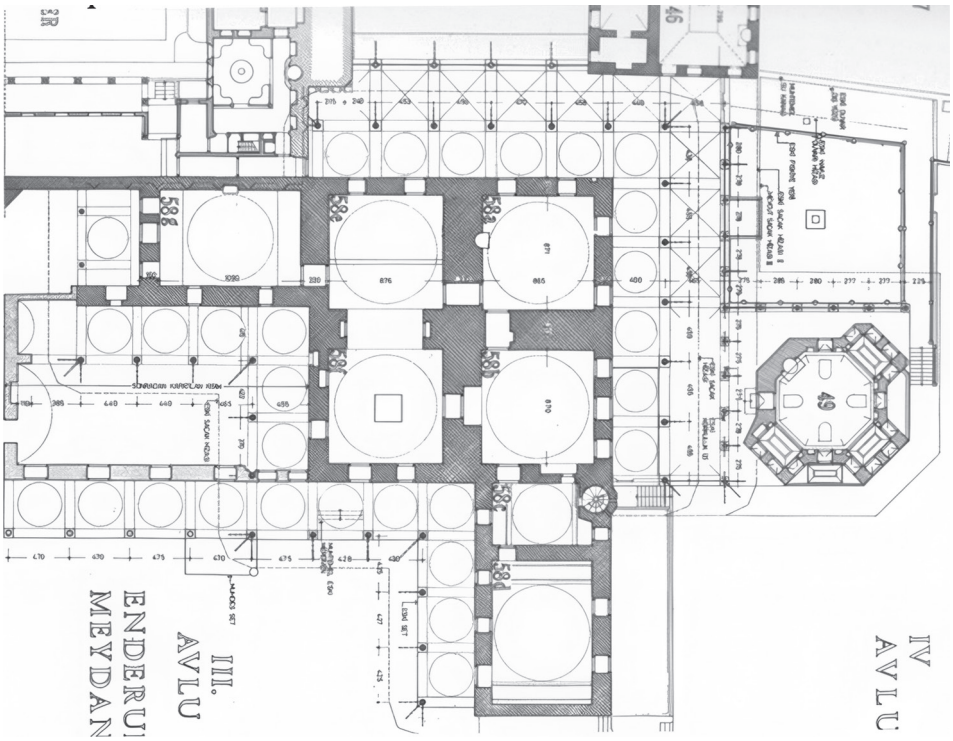


archaeology museum by the end of the 19th century. Therefore, taxonomy and display techniques of modern museology were not foreign to the Ottomans. However, in the Imperial Treasury, these were purposefully neglected. (Dis)organization of the collection, poor lighting conditions, lack of or illegibility of the labels, the dust and dirt covering the display windows, and discomfort while trying to observe the collection under the surveillance of palace officials within a limited time frame were among the most common complaints. I argue that the whole display setting performed in the imperial treasury was purposefully designed to mimic the old palace rituals, and a sense of authenticity and oriental splendour was consciously re-formulated. I tend to define this approach as the 'performing the oriental self' for the foreign gaze.

3. The Privy Chamber / Sacred Relics Collection

The Privy Chamber (*Hass Oda*) was also built by Mehmed II at the Northern corner of the Enderun court, right across from the Fatih Kiosk (Figure 2). The royal structure is strategically positioned between the Enderun court and the Harem quarters, overlooking the hanging gardens of the palace. The Privy Chamber was built as an imperial

Figure 6. Plan of the Privy Chamber (S. Hakkı Eldem and F. Akozan)



pavilion and was originally used as the ruler's primary residence, throne room, and royal bedroom. It is composed of four domed units on the ground floor, sitting on four vaulted chambers underneath (Figure 6). The pavilion was surrounded by colonnaded porticos on both sides. Entrance from the Enderun court and the Harem was through the *Şadırvanlı Sofa* (hall with a water fountain) and *Arzhane*, the chamber of audience, was positioned adjacent to this hall. The Throne Room, or the sultan's bedroom, was located at the Northernmost corner, having vistas towards the busy ports of the Golden Horn and the hills of Pera. The Throne Room was the most significant chamber and had the highest dome among the four chambers. It had direct access to the Marble Sofa, which included a marble pleasure pool and was used for audiences during the summer (Figure 7). With its prime location and impressive architecture, the Privy Chamber manifested Mehmed II's vision of powerful yet secluded rulership.

According to Necipoğlu, Ottoman sultans used the Privy Chamber as their main living space, under the service of their male pages, namely *Hasodalılar*, until the late 16th century. After his conquest of Egypt, Selim I (r.1512–1520) brought the Islamic sacred relics from the Mamluk court in 1517, placing the Holy Mantle of the Prophet Mohammad inside a niche within his bedroom. While the majority of the relics were kept at the Imperial Treasury, the most sacred items were preserved in the sultan's pri-

Figure 7. Marble Sofa and the dome of the Throne Room (Nilay Özlü)

vate space. Therefore, the Privy Chamber became the venue for keeping some of the holy relics while perpetuating its residential function for the ruler.

Until the mid-16th century, the Imperial Harem was not part of Topkapı Palace and the female household of the dynasty remained in another palace known as *Saray-ı Atik* (Old Palace) in Beyazıt. Enderun court remained the main living space of the Ottoman rulers until the reign of Süleyman I (r. 1520–1566), when certain female members of the dynasty moved to Topkapı Palace. Eventually, the Imperial Harem was established entirely in Topkapı. Murad III (r. 1574–1595) extensively remodelled and enlarged the Harem of Topkapı Palace and built a new Privy Chamber under his name in the Harem section of the palace. Ottoman rulers gradually moved their living space towards the Harem, leaving Enderun for more ceremonial and symbolic functions. In this new formulation, the Privy Chamber in the Enderun adopted a new role for keeping the sacred relics, and the privy pages became responsible for protecting and conserving the holy collection.

The collection of sacred relics was inaugurated during the reign of Mehmed II, who collected Islamic as well as Christian relics. His successor and son, Beyazid II, later dispersed his collection, but the idea of collecting sacred relics and keeping them in Topkapı Palace persisted. Selim I, after his conquest of Egypt, appropriated the sacred relics that were believed to belong to Prophet Mohammad and the four caliphs. These relics of ultimate religious value have passed to the Mamluk dynasty from the Abbasids and then to the Ottoman dynasty as the emblems of Caliphate. A certain number of relics were also sent from Mecca to Istanbul after the Ottoman control of the holy lands and during the renovation of holy shrines in Mecca and Medina in 1611, and the holy banner was brought to Topkapı Palace from Damascus in the late 16th century.[19]

Later on, the collection was enriched via constant acquisitions, gifts, and military campaigns. For instance, some of the relics kept at Medina were sent to Istanbul during WWI.[20] The sacred relics collection at Topkapı, whose number reached 605, were believed to legitimise the Ottomans' claim to the Caliphate. While some of the holy relics were initially kept in the Imperial Treasury, later during the time of Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839) they were transferred to the Treasury of Sacred Relics (*Emanat Hazinesi Dairesi*) and preserved within. Among the collection of sacred relics, there are mainly five categories:

- Objects believed to belong to Prophet Mohammad
- Swords and objects belonging to the four caliphs, disciples, and other religiously significant persons.
- Qur'ans (139 in number, now preserved in Topkapı Palace Museum Manuscripts Library), religious texts and manuscripts
- Items brought from Ka'ba
- Various objects of value for the display of these relics

19 Necipoğlu 1991, 151.
20 Özlü 2024, 83–113.

The first group of items were believed to belong to the Prophet and included relics such as the Holy Mantle of the Prophet Mohammad (*Hırka-i Şerif*), his tooth broken during the war of Uhud (*Dendan-ı Saadet*), holy hair from his beard (*Lihye-i Saadet* or *Sakal-ı Şerif*), the footprints of the Prophet (*Naks-ı Kadem-i Şerif*), Holly Banner of the Prophet Mohammad (*Sancak-ı Şerif*), his bow (*Kavs-ı Saadet*) and stick (*Asa-i Nebevi*), letter attributed to the Prophet Mohammad (*Name-i Saadet*), the seal of the Prophet (*Mühr-ü Saadet*), and his swords.[21]

The sacred relics collection was enriched through acquisitions and gifts. The inventory and content of the treasury were recorded in treasury registers. It is also interesting that there was a constant circulation of relics in the Ottoman realm, and some relics were sent to certain provinces for religious and political propaganda.[22] For instance, it is known that the sacred beard of Mohammad or the holy cover of Ka'ba (*Kisve-i Şerif*) were sent to various religious shrines for display.[23] Therefore, the Privy Chamber gradually transformed into a semi-sacred place where the Islamic relics were collected, preserved, visited, and venerated.

As the Privy Chamber started being used less as an imperial residence and more as a shrine for Islamic relics, it started being referred to as the Chamber of the Sacred Relics. It became a tradition for Ottoman rulers to visit the holy relics every year during the holy month of Ramadan. Apart from Ottoman dignitaries, members of the Imperial Harem – the mother, wives, sisters, children of the sultan, and prominent members of the Harem – also attended these ceremonies. These visits were organised with strict protocol, and the preparations started days earlier.

Hassodalılar (Corps of the Privy Chamber), being the most prestigious group of servants in the imperial palace, were responsible for the preparations. As a part of this politically significant religious ceremony, the Prophet's Holy Mantle was immersed in rosewater, and dried over incense. This water was believed to possess healing powers and part of it was poured into small bottles and distributed to attendees of the ceremony and given as gifts to Ottoman grandees.[24] This religious and sensory ceremony was performed with ultimate care and registered in protocol books. Every detail is mentioned in these protocol registers, such as the names of the dignitaries attending the ceremony, their attire, the order of the visit according to the ranks of the visitors,

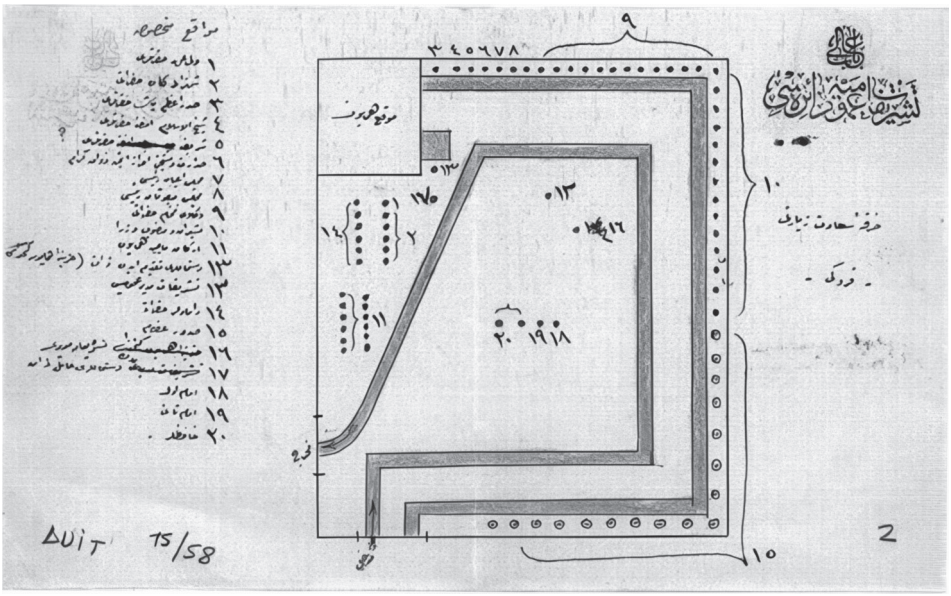
21 Aydın 2011.

22 A remarkable document from the Ottoman State Archives mentions that the palace would no longer be sending sacred beard to provinces, as only a limited number of beards remained in the chamber of sacred relics. BOA DH.HMS.28.14, 1911.

23 BOA A.MKT.MHM.24034 (1279 Ra 21 /18 September 1862). BOA BEO.3575.268076 (26 CA 1327 / 2 Haziran 1325 / 15 June 1909); BOA DH.İD.33.60 (1 Ş 1330 / 14 July 1914). There are numerous documents on the circulation of the Prophet's beard (*lihye-i şerif)* in the Ottoman Archives. Selected sample documents are: BOA DH.MKT.2555.131 (13 November 1901); BOA DH.İD.33.60 (14 June 1914). Valide Sultan of Abdülaziz, Pertevniyal also sent a *Sakal-ı Şerif* to Kaşgar Muslims and the tomb of Abdülkadir Geylani at Baghdad. See Akyıldız 2016, 333.

24 Necipoğlu 1991, 151.

Figure 8. Protocol register showing a diagram of the protocol during the annual visits to the Holy Mantle in the Privy Chamber (Ottoman State Archives BOA.İ.DUİT.15)



the position of the guest during the ceremony, to whom the holy water was given, the amount of tips distributed, and other details were minutely recorded.

Some books of ceremonies include diagrams showing the order in which the dignitaries were supposed to line up at the Privy Chamber to kiss the mantle in front of the sultan (Figure 8).[25] During the ceremony:

> the sultan would open the silver throne, the seven wrappings and the gold casket with a golden key, take the mantle out, dip its fastenings into a bowl of water and then put drops of this water into vessels, which in turn would be given away as presents. During the time of Mahmud II, the mantle started being touched with some specially prepared scarves [known as *destimal*] with religious poems [*mani*] inscribed on them, and these scarves were then distributed as gifts for his guests attending the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, during which the Qur'an was recited continuously, the sultan personally put away the Holy Mantle.[26]

Before the 19th century, while the sultan was still living in Topkapı Palace, the visits to the holy relics were conducted in seclusion, taking place within the palace grounds with the attendance of palace officials and servants. However, after the relocation of the Ottoman dynasty to newer and more modern palaces away from the Seraglio, the

25 For instance, see BOA.İ.DUİT.15; KK.D.676; KK.D.696.
26 Atasoy 1998.

visits gained an official tone and became public spectacles. The annual visit of the sultan to the Chamber of Sacred Relics was performed as a public procession, from his new palace in Dolmabahçe or Yıldız to Topkapı, the palace of his ancestors. Especially during the reign of Abdülhamid II, these grandiose processions gained a political role, manifesting the power and piety of the sultan and emphasising his role as the Caliph and protector of all Muslims around the world. The sultan was accompanied by Ottoman notables, palace officials, the sultan's family, religious elites, and high-ranking military officials. Hakan Karateke defines imperial ceremonies as performances of a symbolic nature and asserts that 'the ultimate purpose of these symbols and actions is to draw popular attention to the ruler and create an aura of sovereignty and authority around him.'[27]

The annual visits to the Chamber of Sacred Relics, which took place on the 15th day of Ramadan, were also announced in the newspapers, and strict precautions were taken to protect the route the sultan would pass through. The number of attendees to this prestigious ceremony also increased and a wide range of Ottoman notables were invited to the ceremonies by the late 19th century.

Renowned author, poet, and statesman Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, who had attended the ceremony four times, mentions in his memoirs that each and every time, the ritual intensified his religious sentiments and deepened his faith. According to Uşaklıgil, a minor change in the order of the protocol had quite profound political implications.[28] For instance, a person's order in the line or his position in reference to the sultan, was accepted as a public manifestation of their political role and virtue. These visits were explicitly of a formal nature, and the ceremony was open only to Ottoman Muslim notables. Even though Topkapı Palace was opened for foreign visitors, as explained in the previous section, during the 19th century, the doors of the Chamber of Sacred Relics and the holy relics collection remained closed to foreigners and non-Muslims until the end of the empire. For example, in 1855, the insistent demand of the Austrian dignitary to enter the Chamber of Sacred Relics while visiting other parts of Topkapı Palace was denied, and the refusal created a small-scale diplomatic scandal.[29] According to another document dated 1858, the demand of a Muslim Russian military officer from Crimea to visit the Chamber of Sacred Relics was denied due to the fact that the holy chamber was solely open to the visit of the dynasty and only on special days.[30]

After the declaration of the Second Constitution, the Chamber of Sacred Relics was opened to visits for certain Muslim notables apart from the month of Ramadan.[31] A document dated 1909 mentions that tickets were printed for those invited to the ceremonial visits to the Chamber of Sacred Relics during the fifteenth of Ramadan.[32] However, even during the Second Constitutional Era, the holy chamber was kept closed to

27 Karateke 2004.
28 Uşaklıgil 1965, 123–8.
29 BOA HR.SYS.205.8 (19 S 1272 / 31 October 1855).
30 BOA HR.MKT.270.91 (12 Ca 1275 / 31 December 1858).
31 BOA İ.HUS.176.56 (1327 / 1909).
32 BOA BEO.3642.273091 (1327 N 13 / 28 September 1909).

Figure 9. Mehmed Reşat's visit to the Holy Mantle after his accession to the throne in 1909 (Atatürk Library, Postcards Collection)

non-Muslims. For instance, a permit was given to German scholar Cornelius Gurlitt to conduct research in all parts of Topkapı Palace, except for the Chamber of Sacred Relics and the palace archives.[33] Only after the declaration of Topkapı Palace as a state museum during the Republican era did the Chamber of Sacred Relics, the Privy Chamber, and the collection open for tourist visits.

Hence, it can be concluded that even though Topkapı Palace and some of its royal collections were opened for foreign visits during the 19th century, the collection of sacred relics continued to keep its formal ceremonial role in Ottoman dynastic tradition (Figure 9). The visits to the chamber of sacred relics were part of Ottoman court decorum and were explicitly of a political and religious nature. The nature of the visits, their audience and the ceremonial practices were quite different from the display of the Imperial Treasury collection. The religious and political significance of the collection was perpetuated during the 19th century, and even more so, these annual visits of the sultan to the Holy Chamber gained a public character and became popular spectacles, legitimising his status as the ruler and Caliph of the Muslim world.

33 BOA BEO.3741.280510 (19 R 1328 / 31 March1910); BOA İ.MBH.2.13 (19 R 1328 / 31 March 1910).

Figure 10. The Tiled Pavilion in Topkapı Palace (Nilay Özlü)

4. The Tiled Pavilion / Museum of Antiquities

Similar to the Fatih Kiosk and the Privy Chamber, the Tiled Pavilion or *Çinili Kiosk* is among the royal pavilions built by Mehmed II during the 15th century. However, unlike the other two that were located in the Enderun court, the Tiled Pavilion was built in the outer gardens of Topkapı Palace. The sultanic kiosk is believed to be one of the three garden pavilions commissioned by Mehmed II. These three garden kiosks were believed to reflect different architectural styles: one in Greek (Byzantine) style, the other in Ottoman, and the third in Persian style.[34] Only the Tiled Pavilion, which reflected the Persian or Karamanid style, remains to this day (Figure 10).

The garden pavilion was built as a pleasure kiosk where the ruler could entertain himself in nature, away from the strict protocol of the inner palace, enjoying poetry recitals, hunting, or watching competitions and games. The two-story-high pavilion was built in brick and masonry and adorned with beautiful blue tiles inside and outside. The pavilion's architectural decoration and its cruciform plan with four iwans and a central dome reflected its Persianate character. There was once an artificial lake in front of the building reflecting its monumental Northern façade. Its southern façade facing the palace was defined with a colonnaded portico. The original timber columns were

34 Necipoğlu 1991.

replaced with marble ones after the fire of 1737 and its roof was also renovated during that time.[35] The blue tiles defining the entrance portal and the Quranic script inscribed on tiles on the façade are among the most striking features of this beautiful kiosk.

Following the example of the Tiled Pavilion, the garden kiosk as an architectural typology, became common in Topkapı Palace and the succeeding sultans erected several other pleasure kiosks in the outer gardens and the fourth courtyard of Topkapı Palace. While the Tiled Pavilion was built as a royal kiosk, it lost its prestigious role over time and was used for multiple functions, including a prison or a residence for high-ranking palace officials. Especially after the move of the Ottoman dynasty to new palaces by the 18th century, the outer gardens and garden pavilions of Topkapı Palace were left in desolation and became idle. Following the military reforms initiated by Mahmud II, the outer gardens of Topkapı Palace were occupied by numerous military organisations, including barracks, a military hospital, drilling fields, ammunition depots, and armouries. The Tiled Pavilion had also become a military depot (*Harbiye Anbarı*) by the 19th century.

The life of the monument came to a sudden twist, when the Ottoman government decided to move the antiquities collection from St Irene to the Tiled Pavilion. In fact, the former Byzantine church of St Irene, located in the first court of Topkapı Palace, has also been used as an armoury since the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. However, during the Tanzimat era, in 1846 with the order of Sultan Abdülmecid (r.1839–1861), a double collection of antique weapons and antiquities (*Mecma-i Asar-ı Atika* and *Mecma-i Esliha-i Atika*) was established in the atrium of the former church and occasionally shown to tourists as a part of Topkapı Palace tours. Later, in 1869, during the reign of Abdülaziz, the antiquities collection at St. Irene was renamed the Ottoman Imperial Museum (*Müze-i Hümayun*). With the enrichment of the collection, thanks to the Antiquities Law of 1869, which aimed to control and possess antique remains discovered within the empire, the need for a new space solely dedicated to antiquities arose. Hence, in 1873, the Ottoman state decided to move the antiquities from St Irene to the Tiled Pavilion, keeping the collection within the precincts of Topkapı Palace.

The renovation of the Tiled Pavilion and the move of the collection took several years and eventually the Tiled Pavilion was inaugurated as the Museum of Antiquities (*Asar-ı Atika Müzesi*) in 1880, during the reign of Abdülhamid II. During the opening ceremony, the Minister of Education, Münif Pasha, emphasised the importance of the museum as a marker of progress and civilisation. He also stated that many archaeological findings from the Ottoman lands adorned European and American museums. However, he argued, with the opening of this museum, Europeans would finally change their opinion about the Ottomans and accept them as members of the civilised world. He ended his speech by noting that the Tiled Pavilion itself should be

35 Eyice 1993, 337–41.

Figure 11. The Tiled Pavilion as the Museum of Antiquities (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, D-DAI-IST)

considered an antiquity from the era of Mehmed II, and the building was purposefully selected for this task.[36]

Even though the historic and artistic qualities of the Tiled Pavilion were praised by Münif Pasha, the 15th-century kiosk underwent significant architectural alterations during its conversion into a museum.[37] During this process, its authentic architectural features were ruined. For instance, the original marble staircase was removed, and a new double marble staircase was built in front of the ancient pavilion. Some of the original tiles were also damaged; glazed tile bricks on the façade were whitewashed; the original door was replaced; hearths were walled over; niches were filled out; original flooring was replaced with marble, and iron railings were placed at its entrance gate (Figure 11).

The aim was to convert the historic pavilion into a modern museum to house the antiquities collection. However, the museum collection remained rather disorganised under the direction of German historian, archaeologist, and painter Dr. Philipp Anton

36 Gürol Öngören 2012, 79; Kural Shaw 2003.
37 Cezar 1971, 241–2.

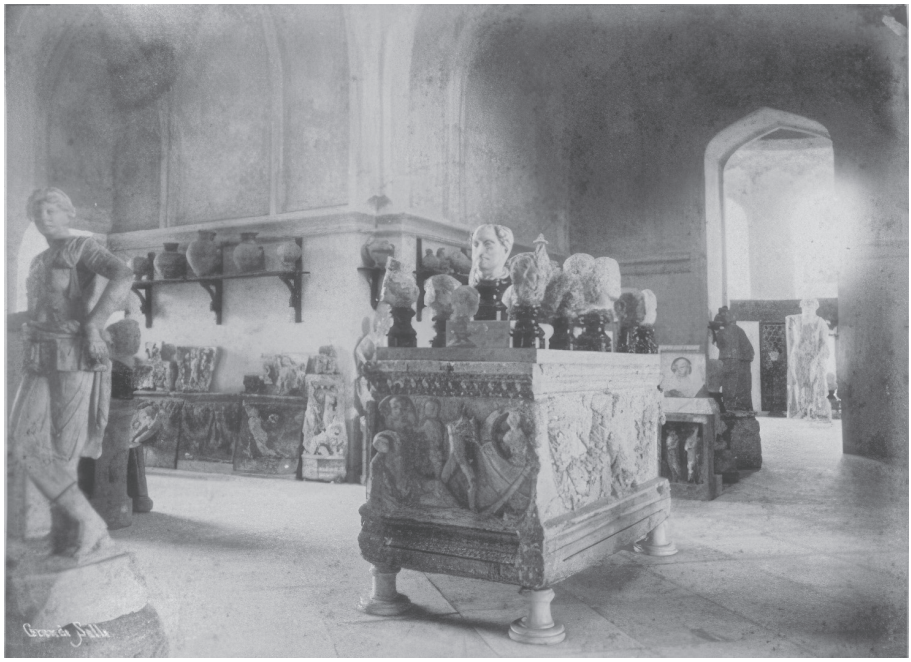
Déthier.[38] Déthier was criticised by *Century Illustrated Magazine* for having 'no idea of the way in which a museum should be managed' and making the museum inaccessible to scholars.[39] Just a year after the inauguration of the new museum, in 1881, Déthier passed away, and Osman Hamdi, a member of the museum committee and the son of the former grand vizier Edhem Pasha,[40] was appointed as the first Ottoman-Muslim director of the Imperial Museum.[41] Educated in the Paris *École des Beaux-Arts*, Osman Hamdi was an Ottoman intellectual, painter, bureaucrat, and representative of the Ottoman elite, having close relations both with the Ottoman ruling circles and the European intelligentsia.[42]

As the new director of the museum, Osman Hamdi aimed to put the archaeological collection in the Tiled Pavilion in order. As he had no formal education in archaeology, he invited French archaeologist Salomon Reinach to Istanbul to help with 'remedying the deficient arrangement, (…) but also of drawing up a summary catalogue' of the museum, which was 'despair of any antiquary' order.[43] According to Reinach, who published a catalogue of the collection in 1882,[44] the antiquities in the Tiled Pavilion were in complete disorder.[45]

Another French archaeologist, André Joubin, who was invited to Istanbul in 1893 to help reorganise the collection in the Tiled Pavilion, also criticised the arrangement of the museum and complained about its erratic condition. He compared the display of the collection to a 'shop at the Grand Bazaar.'[46] After Joubin's reorganisation, the collections in the Tiled Pavilion were spatially classified according to their geographical origins.[47] This new arrangement marked the beginning of a new era for Ottoman museology that emulated and adopted the modern techniques of display (Figure 12). The arrangement and categorisation of archaeological objects in the Tiled Pavilion under

38 Cezar 1971, 242.
39 Peter 1893, 546.
40 The former Grand Vizier Edhem Pasha was the Ottoman Ambassador to Vienna at that time and one of the most influential figures of the time.
41 Cezar 1971, 254; Ürekli 1997, 134.
42 For in-depth information regarding Osman Hamdi Bey, see Cezar 1971; Eldem 2010; Ersoy 2003 and 2011; Rona 1993.
43 Caillard 1900, 136–7.
44 Reinach 1882.
45 Eldem 2010, 444.
46 André Joubin was a French archaeologist who came to Istanbul for an archaeological post and took part in the reorganisation of the Imperial Museum under the direction of Osman Hamdi between 1893 and 1894. Reports from André Joubin to the French ambassador about his post in Constantinople could be found at the Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes, 25 March 1893, no. 97–107 / 9 June 1893, no. 110 –111.
47 Eldem 2010, 154–5; Gürol Öngören 2012, 80; Şapolyo 1936, 45–6. The two front rooms of the Tiled Pavilion were dedicated to archaeological findings from Palmyra and the Himyarite Kingdom, Greco-Roman antique pieces were displayed in the central hall, one of the back rooms was dedicated to antiquities from Cyprus, and the other room held the objects from the Bronze age, while the cloisters were filled with Byzantine antiquities.

Figure 12 a–12b. Chambers of the Tiled Pavilion organised as the Museum of Antiquities (Istanbul University Rare Books Collection)



the direction of Osman Hamdi reflected an awareness of scientific taxonomy and was meant to demonstrate the modernisation and progress of the empire.

An article from *The Times* praised Osman Hamdi for the new order of the museum but also criticised the size of the Tiled Pavilion sarcastically:

> I have seen a few exceedingly fine specimens in the little museum close to the Seraglio, which is now being put into excellent order by Hamdi Bey. This, by the way, is the 'Imperial Museum' of Constantinople, though it could be put bodily inside the Elgin Room of the British Museum.[48]

In the following years, the Ottoman Imperial Museum flourished and became one of the most celebrated archaeological institutions of Europe. It is not an exaggeration to assert that, under the direction of Osman Hamdi, the foundations of modern museology and archaeology in Turkey were laid. The museum became known worldwide, especially after Osman Hamdi took part in archaeological excavations himself. His discovery of 26 Sarcophagi in Sidon in 1887 was a turning point in the history of the museum. After this ground-breaking discovery, Sultan Abdülhamid II approved the construction of a new museum building, which was erected right across the Tiled Pavilion. An article from *The Independent* in 1888 announced the construction of the new museum building:

> So greatly has the collection increased that Chinili Kiosk is no longer large enough to accommodate all the pieces. Hamdi Bey has therefore obtained a settlement of £2,000 from the Sultan toward the erection of a new building which is now in process of construction.[49]

The new and ambitious building was designed by Ottoman Levantine architect Alexandre Vallaury in neoclassical style, and was completed in three phases (Figure 13). The First wing was completed in 1891, the second in 1903, and the last in 1908. The Ottoman Imperial Museum, with its rich collection, state-of-the-art display units, universally acclaimed neoclassical architecture, beautiful and rich library, modelling, and photography studio, became a manifestation of modernity and civilisation, competing with its European counterparts. For instance, *The New Mediterranean Traveller* guidebook praised the Imperial Ottoman Museum:

> This Museum, housed in the buildings called the 'Chinili Kiosk' in the Old Seraglio grounds, is of large importance and interest. It contains many archaeological treasures, notably the Sidon sarcophagi, the finest in the world, and the tablets and other finds of recent excavations in the Euphrates Valley.[50]

However, unlike the European museums, which attracted a significant number of visitors, the audience of the Imperial Museum was quite limited. Hidden behind the high walls of Topkapı Palace, the museum was out of public sight and reach. It was, in fact,

48 No author 1886.
49 Prince 1888, 16.
50 Lorenz 1922, 147.

Figure 13. The new building of the Ottoman Imperial Museum (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, D-DAI-IST)

practically closed to Ottoman visitors.[51] Although no visitor records have been found so far, it is likely that the museum was not a point of attraction for the local population. An article published in *Şehbal* newspaper in 1913 pointed out that the Imperial Museum was solely dedicated to archaeology, thus it was open only to the use of foreign visitors, rather than the Ottomans. However, it is not fair to say that the museum welcomed all tourists. On the contrary, only a small number of foreign visitors could have access to it, especially during its early years. According to the museum catalogue published in 1893, the museum was open especially for foreign researchers and scholars interested in conducting archaeological research. Hence, unlike its European counterparts, the Ottoman museum positioned itself as a restricted scientific institution rather than an educational establishment for the wider public. In fact, similar to the aforementioned imperial collections at the Fatih Kiosk and the Privy Chamber, the antiquities collection at the Tiled Pavilion remained exclusive to certain guests. Selected visitors could have access to these royal pavilions, following a certain pre-set protocol. In this respect,

51 Çelik 2016; Eldem 2019, 259–85.

Figure 14. Islamic Arts Collection in the Tiled Pavilion (Halil Edhem, Das Osmanische Antikenmuseum in Kostantinopel)

even though, all three imperial pavilions were designed to house different collections designated for diverse visitor groups, their exclusive nature was mutual and pertained their character as princely collections, rather than museal institutions with educational purposes.[52]

With the completion of the new antiquities museum, the building formed a U-shape encircling the Tiled Pavilion and cutting its visual, physical, and symbolic connection with Topkapı Palace. All the archaeological collections within the Tiled Pavilion were transferred to the newly completed sections of the museum, and by 1907 the Tiled Pavilion was dedicated solely to the Collection of Islamic Arts (Figure 14).[53] Hence, a certain connection between the objects on display and the museum space was established. The Tiled Pavilion housed the collection of Islamic Arts until the foundation of the separate Islamic Arts Museum (*Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi*) in 1914 in the Süleymaniye complex. The Tiled Pavilion was evacuated during WWII, then reopened as the Fatih

52 Artun and Akman 2006; Preziosi and Farago 2004.

53 The Islamic Arts section of the Ottoman Imperial Museum was first established on the second floor of the new museum building and the collection was enriched by gathering numerous items from various parts of the empire, opening its doors to visitors in 1894. See Eldem 2016.

Museum in 1953, and today it houses the collection of Turkish Çini tiles and ceramics as part of the Istanbul Archaeological Museums.

5. Conclusion

As explained in the previous sections, the imperial pavilions of Topkapı Palace were organised to display various imperial collections during the second half of the 19th century. The Imperial Treasury, housing the personal treasures of the Ottoman sultans that were accumulated since the 15th century, was opened to Western visitors and shown to these privileged groups following a certain route and rite. From getting an entrance permit (*ferman*) to their access to the palatial grounds, and from a hosting ritual at Mecidiye Kiosk to their arrival at the Imperial Treasury, every detail was meticulously organised and pre-planned. This performative display was organised, reenacting the ancient palatial traditions and creating an authentic scene, which triggered the Orientalist conceptions of the European tourists visiting the Seraglio and hitherto hidden treasures of the Ottoman sultans.

A similar strict protocol was also enacted in the Privy Chamber, which housed the Holy Mantle of the Prophet Mohammad and other sacred relics. However, the audience for this religious ceremony was utterly different. Under the auspices of the sultan, only Muslim Ottoman dignitaries, and members of the imperial family could attend the annual visits to the Chamber of Sacred Relics. Apart from its religious sentiments, attending to this ritual was of utmost political significance in the Ottoman court decorum, and the order and position of each attendee was previously designated and recorded. Special invitations were printed and souvenirs were handed to those attending this consecrated state event. According to Selim Deringil, these annual imperial visits to the Chamber of Sacred Relics turned into a public spectacle during the time of Abdülhamid II and the display of the holy relics became an 'invented tradition.'[54]

Ottoman Antiquities Museum, on the other hand, was the ultimate product of the 19th century, manifesting Ottoman modernisation and its place in the civilised world. After the antiquities collection was moved from St. Irene to the Tiled Pavilion, and under the direction of the museum director Osman Hamdi, the museum was organised as a scientific institution, following European norms of taxonomy and techniques of display. However, unlike the European museums, which aimed at educating and civilising a wider population, the Ottoman Antiquities Museum was not accessible to the Ottoman public, not even to many foreign tourists. Only a selected group of archaeologists and scholars could have access to it. Therefore, rather than functioning as a public museum, it was positioned more as a scholarly institution of research and prestige.

I argue that the three collections housed in the royal pavilions of Topkapı Palace during the late 19th century established the foundations of Turkish museums. The doors of Topkapı Palace finally opened for the Ottoman public, after the fall of Abdül-

54 Deringil 1983; Deringil 1993, 3–29.

hamid II and the declaration of the Second Constitution in 1908. Even then, the Privy Chamber remained inaccessible to the wider public, while the Imperial Treasury became a popular attraction. These three collections manifested diverse narratives, they were open to distinct audiences, and all three collections adopted different display strategies, communicating distinct discourses of power, tradition, heritage, and modernity. However, after the collapse of the empire and six months after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, in 1924, Topkapı Palace was declared a state museum with the order of Gazi Mustafa Kemal. After its official museumification, all the collections were put under the direction of the Museum of Antiquities (*Asar-ı Atika Müzeleri*). As a result, diverse collecting practices and different narratives of display were flattened and assembled under a single institution.

Even though the aim of the nascent Turkish Republic was to unify these diverse collections under a single discourse of modernity and secularism, multiple and entangled narratives of display are still evident today in Topkapı Palace Museum, the Istanbul Archaeological Museums, or the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts. The Topkapı Palace Museum collection conveys alternative and sometimes conflicting discourses of modernity, secularism, glory, nostalgia, patriarchy, and religion. While the Treasury Section is a celebrated representation of the past glory and superiority of the Ottoman Empire, the Sacred Relics Collection conveys a religious message and is primarily venerated by believers of Islam. The Museum of Archaeology, on the other hand, continues to position Turkey as an integral part of European and world civilisation and attract a tiny portion of society.

Today, Topkapı Palace Museum is visited as an architectural monument embracing numerous palimpsest spaces and rich decorative elements from the 15th to the 19th century. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and accomodated diverse historic collections reflecting the splendour of the Ottoman dynasty. It is also a religious site holding Islamic sacred relics and an academic source thanks to its rich manuscript library and palace archive. The museum attracts a variety of visitors, including students, tourists, scholars, architects, believers, bureaucrats and politicians, each with their own purpose and routine. Each audience has different visiting rituals and encounters different museal narratives. I argue that these multiple discourses and display rituals originated during the late Ottoman era, when different parts and collections of Topkapı Palace were opened up to diverse audiences.

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