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OTTOMAN TURKISH TEXTILES

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It might be argued that ever since the Industrial Revolution Western man has lost his everyday consciousness of textiles as fine art. That which was formerly very expensive, the product of arduous and skillful labor at a hand loom, was then replaced by cheaper mass-produced cloth turned out by the thousands of meters from the power looms of England, the Continent and the United States. An intriguing index of this change in thought is seen in Western literature and painting, which, in moving away from an emphasis on woven accouterments of 18th-century royal and aristocratic society, gradually lost their emphasis on the textures, colors and richness of intricately patterned fabrics, with their connotations of wealth, power or ritual.

In an earlier time, when cloth was woven by hand and constituted a major luxury item in European trade, beautiful and expensive woven stuffs were highly valued, and their creation occupied a high place among the arts. From very early medieval times, among the most highly prized luxury objects in Europe were the textiles imported from the Islamic East. With our current emphasis on the role of the Islamic rug in Europe, we sometimes ignore the large numbers of colorful textiles from Islamic lands which found their way to Europe over the centuries, to be used as ecclesiastical and royal vestments or simply as decorations for the homes of the European nobility and merchant aristocracy.

In 1301, Dante Alighieri, in attempting to describe the body of the monster Geryon, encountered in Canto XVII of the *Inferno*, compares it to the richness of Oriental textiles:

> never did Tartars or Turks make cloth
> with more colors, groundwork, and broidery . . .[1]

We have little idea of the actual appearance of this Mongol or Turkish cloth, but by the following century the first dateable Turkish textiles appear on the European scene with the rise of the Ottoman Empire. The great trading ships of Venice plied the waters of the Levant between the Ottoman capital of Istanbul and Italy during this time, and despite frequent wars between Christendom and the Turks, the Eastern trade not only carried a large number of Turkish textiles into Europe but fueled an artistic interchange which led to exchange of designs and techniques between East and West.

The textiles referred to by Dante would appear to be those woven under the Mongols in Iran, or under the Seljuk Turks in Anatolia; very few examples of the weavings from these times remain for study, and some of the most important are objects of controversy in dating. By contrast, the textiles woven under the successors of the Seljuks in Asia Minor, the Ottoman Dynasty, have survived in large numbers, although intensive study of these Ottoman textiles has, to this date, appeared only rarely in published form.[2]

[1]Parts of the present article were originally prepared for a paper entitled "Ottoman Textiles" given at the Textile Museum on January 12, 1972. The quotation from Dante is taken from the J. A. Carlyle translation of the *Inferno;* cf. *The Divine Comedy*, Modern Library Edition (New York, 1950).

[2]A list of the most important recent literature is given in the author's

Fig. 1. Detail from a miniature in late 16th-century manuscript of Ahmet Feridun Pasha's "Nüzhet al-asrar," Topkapı Palace Museum, H. 1339.

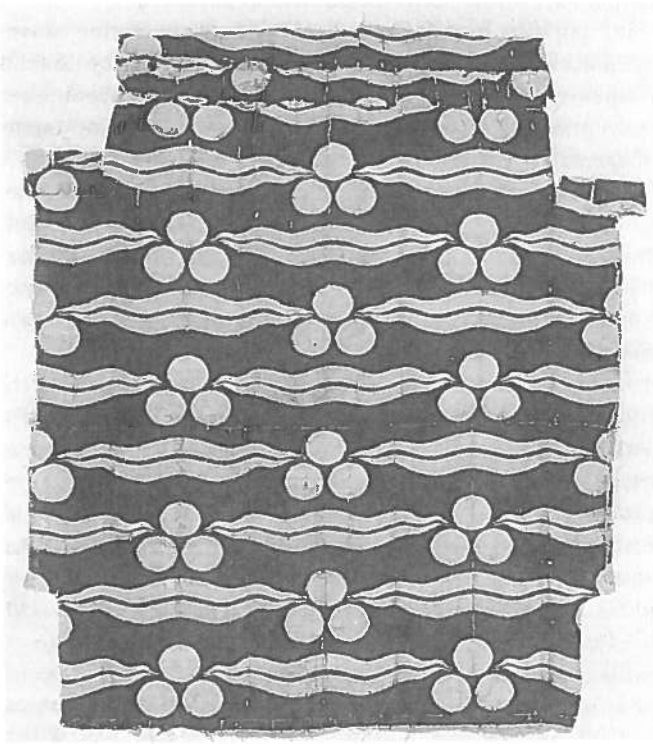

Fig. 2. T.M.1.78, velvet, Ottoman, late 15th century, woven in Bursa.

The Ottoman Turks were in the 15th and 16th centuries not only the major power in the Islamic world of the Middle East but were, in addition, a major Mediterranean and European power. The Ottoman government with its efficient and centralized bureaucracy, centered in the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, was not only the administrative center for a far-flung empire, with its outposts in Europe and Asia, but formed the nucleus of patronage for Ottoman art as well. This culture, as one would expect from the rich mixture of influences and national traditions converging in a cosmopolitan capital city astride two continents, with its varied heritage of Islamic and European historical inputs, was synchretic in nature, wide in scope and was based in the 16th century on an economic system which concentrated enormous resources in the hands of a small elite which formed the upper echelons of the Ottoman Ruling Institution.

The Ottoman court, in the tradition of Islamic courts since early Islamic times, included a salaried staff of artists directly subsidized by the state itself. The artistic output was twofold: the artists created designs on paper, either as finished manuscript illustrations or as models for other media, while artisans working under court supervision translated these designs into stone-carving, ceramics, metal and textiles. The final artistic product was therefore not a grandiose work from the hands of the artist himself but the translation of the design from paper into other media, the execution of which often required an enormous expenditure of labor. Given the centralized nature of the court design atelier, one might expect to see a wide range of media using the same sorts of designs. In compensation, as it were, for the anonymity of the designers themselves, the art historian can see stylistic trends developing simultaneously in many media, some of which might serve as dating for others.[3]

Another potential source of dating material for Ottoman textiles, one hitherto relatively unexploited, is the not infrequent representation of Ottoman textiles in European paintings. Long recognized as important in the dating of Islamic rugs, European paintings also frequently show fairly accurate depictions of Islamic cloth from the 14th century onward. An intensive study of the representation of silk textiles in *trecento* Italian painting by Brigitte Klesse remains to date the only major effort in this direction,[4] but there are reasons to believe that a similar study of 15th-century Venetian painting may lead to major changes in our present views of the dating of many Ottoman Turkish fabrics. The well-known frescoes in Siena by Pinturicchio similarly cast some new light on the early 16th-century Turkish costume and open up the possibility that some

review of T. Öz, *Turkish Textiles and Velvets* (Istanbul, 1950) and A. Geijer, *Oriental Textiles in Sweden*, (Copenhagen, 1951), in the *Textile Museum Journal*, Volume III, No. 2, (December, 1971), pp. 38-42.

[3]Application of this method of analysis is undertaken in great detail in the author's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "The Ceramics of the Mosque of Rüstem Pasha and the Environment of Change" (Harvard University, 1970).

[4]Cf. Brigitte Klesse, *Seidenstoffe in der Italienischen Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Bern, Stämpfli & Cie. 196).

fabrics presently dated to the later 16th century may, in fact, be substantially earlier. A similar study of textile representations in Turkish miniature paintings, with their well-known realistic tendencies, seems likely also to produce interesting results.[5]

The export of Turkish fabrics to the West and the customary presentation of ceremonial *kaftan* robes to Western envoys by the Ottoman sultans, provide another point of departure in dating Turkish woven fabrics. The Swedish scholar Agnes Geijer was able to show, through church records and through garments which incorporated Turkish textiles along with dateable German needlework, a convincing series of dates for some Turkish textiles in Swedish collections.[6] Ernst Kühnel's study of a court robe presented to an envoy of Frederick the Great of Prussia by an 18th-century Ottoman sultan has resulted in the re-dating of a number of Ottoman robes once believed to be of a 14th-century date.[7]

The writings of European travelers in the Ottoman Empire from the 15th century onward chronicle the importance of these textiles and costumes in the court etiquette of the time. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, ambassador from the Holy Roman Empire to the court of Süleyman I, for example, writes:

> . . . look at the sea of turbaned heads, each wrapped in twisted folds of the whitest silk; look at those marvellously handsome dresses of every kind and every colour; time would fail me to tell how all around is glittering with gold, with purple, with silk, and with velvet . . . With all of this luxury great simplicity and economy are combined; every man's dress, whatever his position may be, is of the same pattern . . . in Turkey the tailor's bill for a silk or velvet dress, even though it be richly embroidered, as most of are, is only a ducat.[8] (Fig. 1)

The serious collecting of Turkish textiles both as luxury objects and as decorative art having begun in the West at a fairly early date, it is not surprising that large numbers of these highly prized textiles are today found in museums throughout the world. While the boldness and large scale of their designs did not make them suitable for the more tightly-fitted European styles of costume, they were preserved as decorations for altars and table-tops and as liturgical vestments. Whole bolts were even used as wall-hangings. The *kaftans* or robes of honor presented to Western envoys did not conform to European fashion, and hence were preserved as curiosities when they might otherwise have been worn out or discarded, and today are occasionally found in museum and private collections. George Hewitt Myers, the founder of the Textile Museum, was like many collectors of his day, fascinated by the early Ottoman textiles; his almost uncanny preference in many cases for small fragments of great historical and technical importance over larger and more expensive show-pieces makes the Museum's collection an interesting point of focus for dealing with some of the problems associated with Ottoman art of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.

Fig. 3. Robe attributed to Mehmet II (reigned 1451-148); Topkapı Palace Museum, No. 3228.
Illustrated in T. Oz, *Turkish Textiles and Velvets* (Ankara, 1950), Plate V.

The Turkish textiles in the Museum's collection were originally woven for a variety of uses. In addition to being incorporated into voluminous *kaftan* robes, they were used to cover the pillows which formed an important component of Ottoman furniture (hence the Western terms "ottoman," "divan," "sofa," and "Turkey-work"), as covers for the symbolic sarcophagi or *sanduka* placed in Ottoman mausolea above the underground burial places of princes and holy men and as decorative panels or banners, to be hung on walls of houses or used as colorful adjuncts to parades and processions.

Probably among the earliest of the Museum's Turkish pieces is a small fragment of what may have been a child's garment (Fig. 2), with designs in silver-gilt thread and a dark maroon velvet ground. Together with two other tiny fragments in the Museum's collection showing similar motifs, this very brittle and finely woven velvet, of a type called *chatma*, dates in all probability to the 15th century and was evidently woven in the Ottoman silk-producing city of Bursa. The ornament is one of three balls and a wavy double line; called *chintamani*, the motif originated in China but became a favorite design on Turkish textiles as early as the reign of Sultan Mehmet II (1451-1481), the conqueror of Constantinople (Fig. 3). Turkish scholars have

[5]Cf. Tahsin Öz, *op. cit.*, for a preliminary application.
[6]Cf. Agnes Geijer, *op. cit.*
[7]Cf. E. Kuehnel, "Erinnerungen an eine Episode in der Türkenpolitik Friedrichs des Grossen" in *Oriens* V (1952), pp. 70-81.
[8]Cf. C. T. Forster and F. H. B. Daniell, *The Life and Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, (London, 1881), Volume I, p. 155. By "embroidered" [*palmatae*] Busbecq evidently means "ornamented;" the technique of ornamention we know today as brocade.

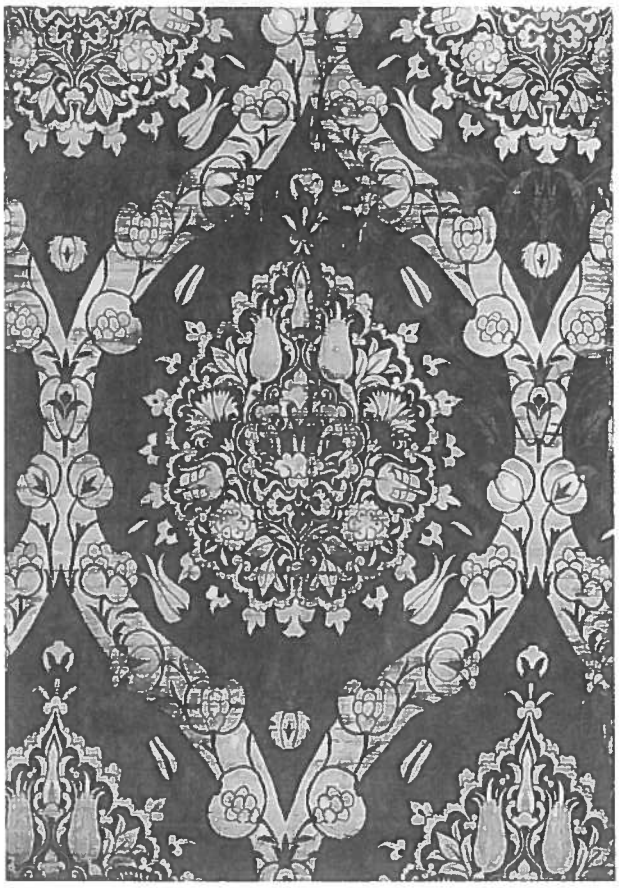

Fig. 4. T.M.1.57, silk brocade, Ottoman, 17th century, back of a *kaftan*.

Fig. 5. T.M.1.70, detail of silk brocade, Ottoman, 2nd half, 16th century.

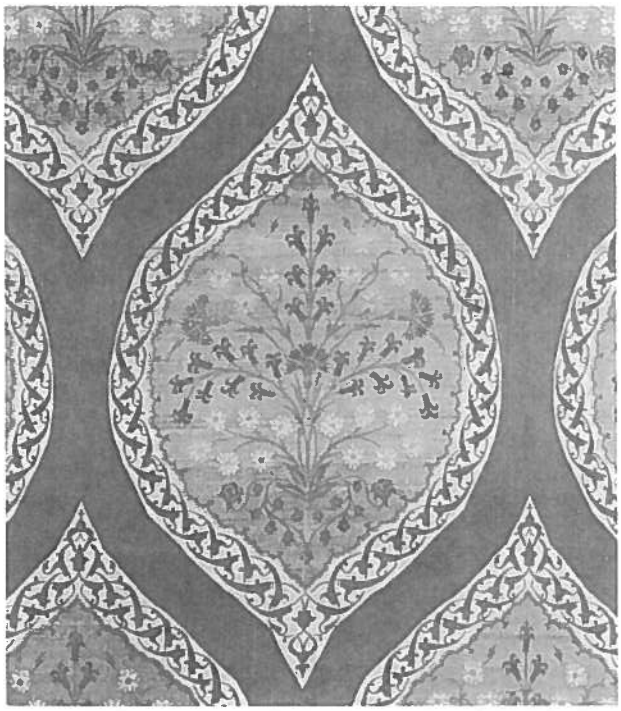

Fig. 6. T.M.1.50, detail of silk brocade, Ottoman, 2nd half, 16th century.

demonstrated through various court documents and inventories that velvets of this design were being woven in Bursa during the second half of the 15th century.[9] Using the evidence of dated textiles in the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, we find that the early Bursa *chatma* is very finely woven, displays a deep maroon luster and preserves a stiffness and a brittle quality unlike the looser and more supple 16th-century velvets. This design, through its association in miniature painting with the costume of the legendary Iranian hero Rustam, may have carried strong masculine connotations and remained a favorite motif in Turkish textile and ceramic design as late as the 18th century.[10]

The high quality of these early Ottoman velvets is mentioned again and again in Ottoman documents of the 16th century; as production increased after 1500, the temptation to debase the quality of fabrics increased as well. Extant documents of Ottoman judicial enquiries into the textile industry reflect an attempt to re-impose the "old standards" of such early velvets as a paradigm of quality.[11]

The Textile Museum's collections include a number of textiles woven in what is perhaps the most common of Ottoman textile designs, a cartouche or losenge in repeat on a ground which is often undecorated (Figs. 4-8). The origins of this design in Ottoman weaving are not securely

[9]Cf. Öz, *op. cit.*, p. 26. Photograph published courtesy Topkapı Museum.

[10]The so-called "Tekfur Saray" ceramics of the eighteenth century employed the design frequently; well-known examples include the fireplace in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the revetments of the mosque of Hekimoğlu Ali Pasha in Istanbul.

[11]Cf. Öz, *op. cit.*, p. 48 ff.

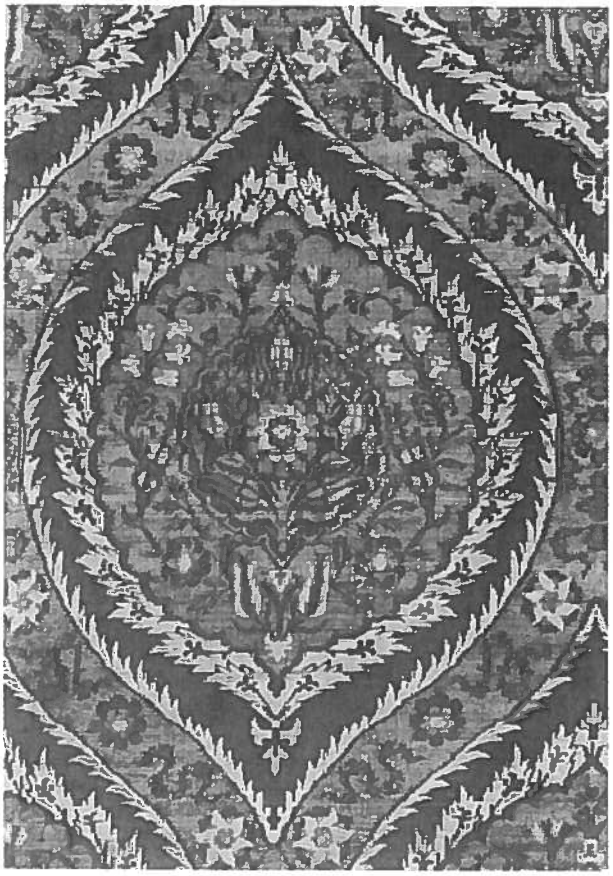

Fig. 7. T.M.1.58, detail of silk brocade, Ottoman, ca. 1600.

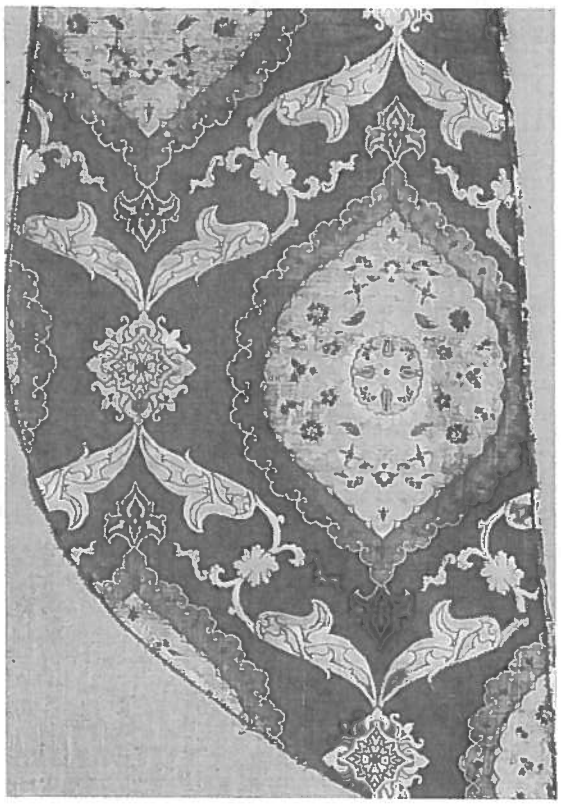

Fig. 8. T.M.1.46, fragment of silk brocade *kaftan*, Ottoman, 2nd half, 16th century.

established, and we do not see many textiles of this type dateable to before the second quarter of the 16th century. A textile in the Islamisches Museum in West Berlin (Fig. 9), showing the same basic type of design, has been firmly established as being from Mamluk Egypt, probably of the 14th century.[12] One might be tempted to view the design as a sort of war booty of Sultan Selim I upon his capture of Cairo in 1517, paralleling the oft-mentioned theory of the origins of Ottoman court carpets. However the basic elements of the design are apparent on the robe of the Ottoman prince Cem (Djem) as portrayed by Pinturicchio in the Siena frescoes around 1505 (Fig. 10). In addition, similar but not identical designs are known in Venetian velvets of the second half of the 15th century.[13]

Most of the Museum's pieces show an ascending design (Fig. 6); that is, the textiles in question have a top and a bottom, usually indicated by an upright leaf, a vase or a floral spray. Bolts of such fabrics were indeed woven as if they were tile wall panels (Fig. 11) meant to be seen from one angle only. The vast majority of these textiles are of a brocaded weave, with the ground usually a satin woven in the direction of the warp; in addition to colored silk, silver-gilt or silver metal thread is occasionally incorporated into the brocaded elements of the design. The technique is evidently that referred to in Ottoman documents as *kemha*, a brocaded fabric of several colors.

Most of the Museum's brocaded textiles with cartouche designs can be safely attributed, generally on stylistic grounds, to the second half of the 16th century. The court artists of the time created designs of this type for a wide variety of uses; tile revetments, wall painting and rugs frequently show similar ascending cartouche designs. Involving as it does a single element which is repeated over and over again the cartouche design was well-suited not only for textiles but for the modular wall decorations. The slightly earlier pieces (Fig. 5) are less elaborate but more finely drawn, and the tiny stylized flowers are incidental to the larger leaf-palmettes and cloud-bands forming a standard part of an international Islamic style in the early and middle 16th centuries. In what appear slightly later pieces (Figs. 4 and 6) the floral motifs become bolder, often dominating the design. Stylized roses, tulips, hyacinths, carnations and peony buds create a more exuberant and less refined feeling, while the spaces between the cartouches lose their narrow monochromatic band character and are filled with a rich variety of forms, among which the traditional *rumi* or split-leaf arabesque is perhaps the most distinctive (Fig. 8).

Scholars have traditionally assigned works of good basic design but inferior technical execution to the limbo of the 17th century, reasoning that an overall decline in the level of technique in Ottoman art observable in that century

[12]Published most recently in the catalogue *Museum für Islamische Kunst Berlin* (Berlin, 1971), No. 527. Photograph published with the kind permission of Dr. Klaus Brisch.

[13]Cf. J. H. Schmidt, "Turkish Brocades and Italian Imitations," in *Burlington Magazine* 64 (1934).

may serve as a means of dating individual objects out of context. We have already mentioned, however, that the maintenance of quality was a recurring problem in the 16th century; evidently, the pressures to produce goods quickly for high profits on a free market were frequently in conflict with the efforts of the state to ensure a brisk foreign trade through the maintenance of a high level of quality, in the face of competition from Italian and Syrian textiles. Further aggravating the problem of quality was the existence of a dual system of pricing; the state fixed a rigid price which did not change in the face of cost-inflation, while the free market offered greater rewards to the weaver and at the same time avoided state inspection of quality. For this reason, we should not be surprised to see certain examples of 16th-century weaving where the drawing and the execution of detail is less than satisfactory (Fig. 7), or where the colors have lost their spirit. On the other hand, the Museum's collection includes a *kaftan* fragment, which in its wide range of colors (including red, green, blue, white and a stunning yellow) and crisp draughtsmanship must definitely be judged among the finest of the Museum's Ottoman textiles (Fig. 4); due to the crowded nature of the design and the modifications in the basic repertoire of forms such as the now very short and fat cloud-bands, this work can with confidence be ascribed to the 17th century.

Generally speaking, however, the textiles produced in the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th belong to a fairly coherent stylistic group, and one must suspect that attributions of many Ottoman textiles to one century or the other on the basis of quality reflects a long-term bias in the study of Islamic art in favor of the positive magic of a 16th-century date.

These pieces of brocaded *kemha* are perhaps the most striking and certainly the most familiar of Ottoman textiles; the technique was mastered to such a degree and the range of designs and colors was so sufficiently wide that virtually any design produced by the pen of a court artist could be reproduced in textiles providing there were sufficient economic motivation. As might be expected, the essentially modular system of repeating a basic design over and over again was used in most of the brocaded *kemhas* with the exception of a few well-known garments of the sultans in the Topkapı Palace.[14] However, the symmetrical aspects of the repeating designs, which in the cartouche textiles are rather simple, became occasionally more complex. Among the most unusual of the Museum's Ottoman textiles is a fragment of *kemha* lavishly decorated with silver-gilt threads (Fig. 12), which shows the impact of a more free and uninhibited group of designs in the second half of the 16th century. In repeat we see an undulating vine, from which spring in botanically illogical but artistically coherent fashion elaborate, decorated leaves with deeply serrated edges, and two types of golden tulips. Liberation from a

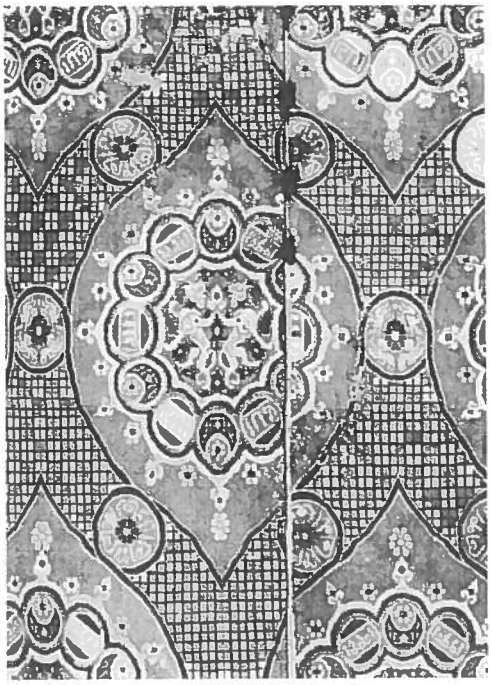

Fig. 9. Fragment of a silk garment, Egypt, 14th century; Islamisches Museum, West Berlin, Inv. I.3191a, 56 cm x 31 cm.

Cf. *Museum für Islamische Kunst, Katalog 1971* (Berlin, 1971), No. 527 (pl. 73).

Fig. 10. Detail of fresco by Pinturicchio in the Piccolomini Chapel, Siena, depicting the Turkish prince Cem, painted ca. 1500-10.

[14]The kaftans numbered 12/164 and 2/303 are perhaps the most striking of these. Cf. Öz, *op. cit.*, illus. 20-21.

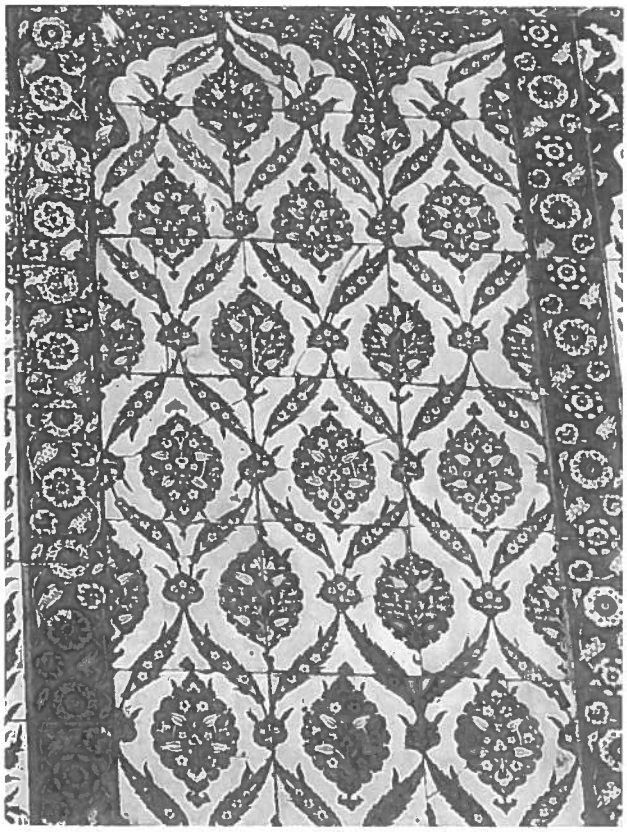

Fig. 11. Panel of tiles; Istanbul, mosque of Sultan Ahmet I, ca. 1615.

Fig. 12. T.M.1.68, silk brocade with metal thread, Ottoman, 2nd half, 16th century.

single vertical axis of symmetry produces a lively and animated surface of three dimensions, due to the interweaving of a thicket of blue, red, green and golden forms on a rich red satin ground. Some of the curved leaves are decorated with tiny palmettes which appear to have been stenciled in red and blue on the golden ground, while others show fanciful spiraling flowers and tulip buds. We can date textiles of this type with some confidence on the basis of comparison with Ottoman paintings on ceramic tile adorning a number of dateable Istanbul buildings. The design came into fashion sometime in the early 60s in Istanbul, and continued into the last quarter of the century (Fig. 13). An interesting testament to the vitality of this leaf design is seen in a late 17th-century brocaded textile in the Museum's collection which attempts to repeat the earlier design with a lesser degree of success (Fig. 14). The curved leaves and palmettes also formed the decoration of many Ottoman court carpets, although these were generally far more symmetrical and stately in their design and lack the liveliness and linear qualities of the brocaded fabric.[15]

Two other fragments in the Museum's collection illustrate another type of design, which, on the basis again of comparison with ceramic decoration, may date to the second quarter of the 16th century. One (Fig. 15), while lacking the vitality of the later example cited above, presents on a sumptuous golden ground a series of undulating vines interspersed with fanciful artichoke-like forms, and sprays of red and blue stylized tulips. These "artichokes" or "pomegranates" appear frequently on ceramic wares which were once thought to have been made in Damascus but which are now generally attributed to the Ottoman city of Iznik, near Bursa, in the second quarter of the 16th century (Fig. 16). Once again we have strong evidence that the designs of the finished artistic product, whether a ceramic plate, a wall tile or a textile, came from a common source.[16]

There is some confusion over the naming of these brocaded fabrics in which a larger part of the ground of the design is woven with large amounts of metallic thread in a tabby weave. It is possible that these are the so-called *seraser* fabrics mentioned in various Ottoman documents and inventories, which seem to have commanded a much higher price than the brocaded *kemhas*.[17] If, as Busbecq remarks, the price for a richly decorated robe was only a ducat, the higher price of *seraser* would be explained largely by the cost of the precious metals woven into it. Another example, this time with yellow and green designs on a silver ground consisting of grey silk thread with metallic thread interspersed at regular intervals, also formed part of a *kaftan;* large three-lobed palmettes of the "artichoke" type appear

[15]For a complete survey of the court carpets, cf. Charles Grant Ellis, "The Ottoman Prayer Rugs," in *Textile Museum Journal*, Volume II, No. 4 (December, 1969), pp. 5-22.

[16]Cf. Arthur Lane, "The Ottoman Pottery of Isnik," in *Ars Orientalis* II (1957), pp. 264-270. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of Miss Godman.

[17]Cf. Tahsin Öz, *op. cit.*, p. 72; see also Reşat Ekrem Koçu, *Türk Giyim Kuşam ve Süslenme Sözlüğü* (Istanbul, 1969), p. 204.

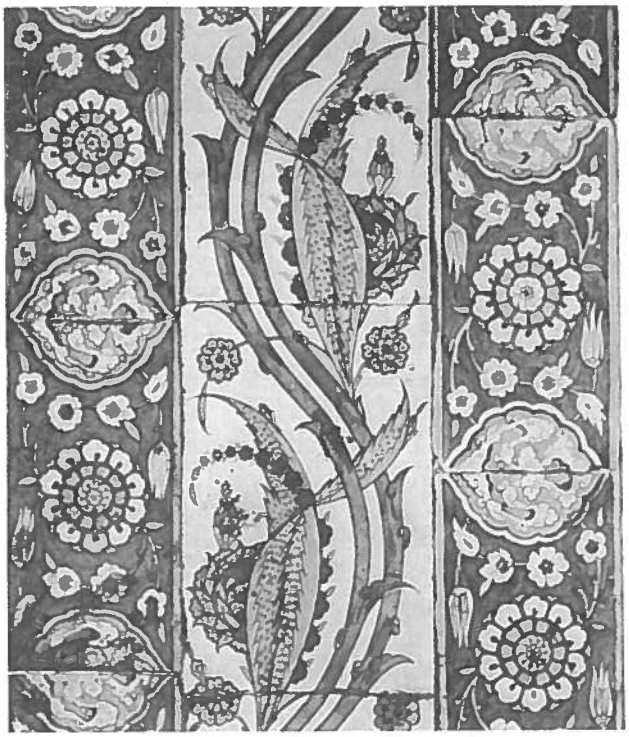

Fig. 13. Panel of tiles, ca. 1560, from the mosque of Rüstem Pasha in Istanbul.

Fig. 14. T.M.3.345, silk brocade, Ottoman, later 17th century.

again (Fig. 17). The large palmettes would be seen in complete form on the back of the garment, while the two sides of the front, when closed and fastened, would again create one single ascending row of triple-lobed forms.

The Museum owns several very fine Turkish velvets of the 16th or 17th centuries, among which perhaps the finest is a fragment, apparently from a *yorgan* or cover, which in its original form seems to have consisted of a field of elaborate floral cartouches enclosed in a border composed of similar cartouches (Fig. 18). Small areas with silver thread appear as accents in the tulip flowers, while the rich contrast of wine-red and pearl-grey velvet gives the designs an impact and a straightforwardness not found on the more delicate, linear and many-colored brocaded *kemhas*. The design is one used on larger panels of velvet such as couch covers or bed-covers, and there are Ottoman rugs woven in Ushak with remarkably similar designs[18] (Fig. 19). In velvet

[18]The Mihrimah Mosque in Usküdar formerly contained large numbers of these rugs with the cartouche design, probably dating to the later 17th century.

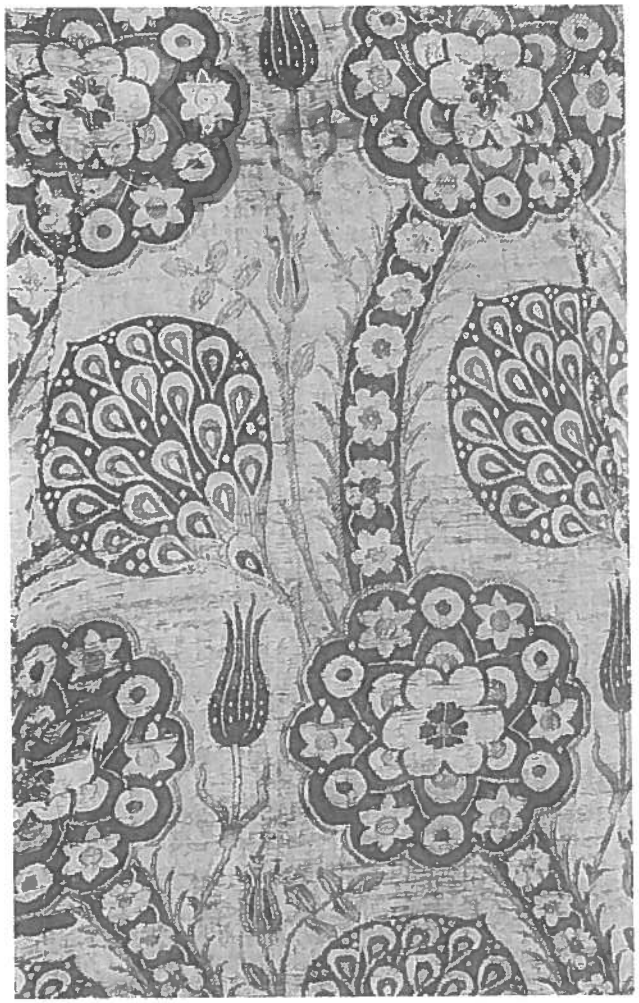

Fig. 15. T.M.1.47, silk brocade with metallic thread, Ottoman, 2nd quarter, 16th century.

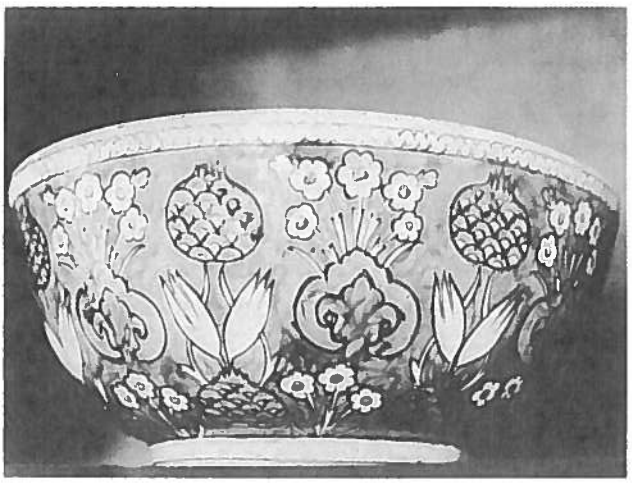

Fig. 16. Ceramic bowl from Iznik (Nicaea); Ottoman, 2nd quarter, 16th century; from the Godman Collection, Horsham, England.

production the Ottomans competed with the Venetians and the Flemish weavers; in some cases, velvets from Italy and the Ottoman Empire are virtually indistinguishable in design.[19] The existence in Ottoman velvets of motifs of Italian origin shows the spirit of competition for European markets, while many of the Italian velvets, in company with some of the Italian majolica pottery of the time, show technical and stylistic debts to the Ottoman products. Occasionally in the vast collections of the Topkapı Palace one comes across a *kaftan* made of Italian velvet,[20] while the

[19]Cf. J. H. Schmidt, *op. cit.*

[20]Kaftan No. 2/201 (unpublished) is the finest of these.

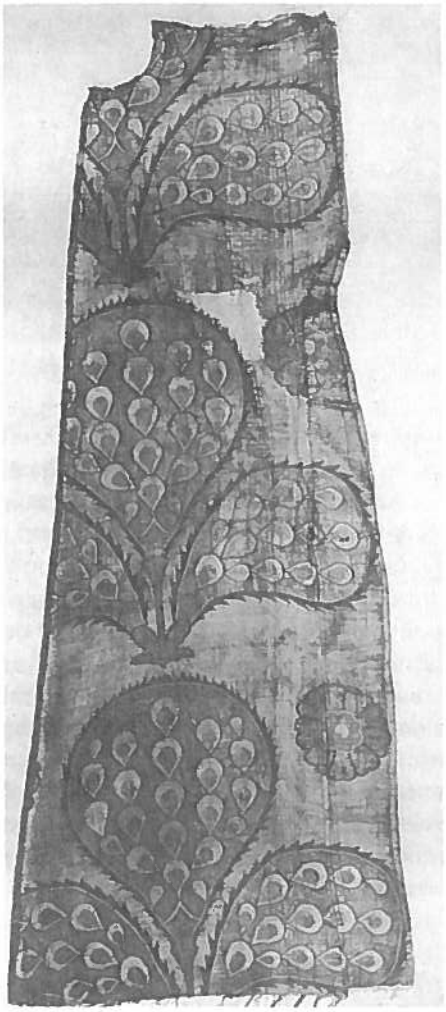

Fig. 17. T.M.1.60, silk brocade with metallic thread, Ottoman, 2nd quarter, 16th century.

Fig. 18. T.M.1.55, silk velvet textile with metallic thread, fragment of a cover, Ottoman, 2nd half, 16th century.

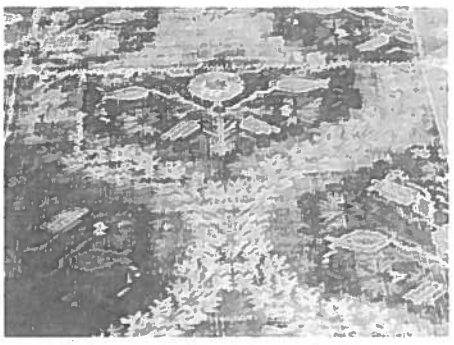

Fig. 19. Detail, Ottoman rug from Ushak, 17th century, formerly in the Iskele Mosque in Usküdar.

vast numbers of Ottoman velvets in Italian collections attest to the extent of export via the industrious Venetian shipping concerns of the time.

The most commonly encountered Ottoman velvets are the numerous pillow faces or *yastık*, produced over many centuries in the Ottoman domains, first at Bursa and later evidently at Üsküdar, directly across the Bosporus from Istanbul. They range from relatively stark forms to the effusive elaboration of a medallion surrounded by curving leaves, two small "artichokes" and four silver carnations (Fig. 20). The genre remained popular in later centuries even when the designs had become Europeanized; a 19th-century pillow face from Üsküdar (Fig. 21) follows its illustrious ancestor, although the woven ground is left bare, symptomatic of the bankruptcy of the Empire in which the use of precious metals in textiles was now punishable by law.

The fabrics from the Museum's collection examined heretofore belong to well-established types and are found in relatively great numbers in the collections of the world's museums. One Ottoman fabric in the Textile Museum's collection, however, is of a highly unusual type, woven in an interlocking tapestry weave (Fig. 22). Such a technique is usually known only in the stouter and necessarily coarser Turkish village and nomad rugs called *kilims*. Rare examples of this technique as used in court products are the well-known silk tapestry-woven hangings from Kashan, of which the Textile Museum possesses a fine example. The incidence of court weavings in this technique among the Ottomans is even more rare. The Museum's piece is a fragment of what was evidently a couch cover; similar examples of this type of cover, with its border extending around one long and two short sides of the piece, are known in velvet, and the Benaki Museum in Athens possesses an example illustrated by Tahsin Öz which is complete[21] (Fig. 23). That the Textile Museum's fragment is, indeed, Ottoman there can be no doubt, as the design is composed of elements now quite familiar from the *kemha* fragments already examined. A border contained within guard stripes composed of eight-pointed stars set in red hexagons exhibits a meander of red and blue palmettes—the former set in a white ground continuous with the meandering vine, while the latter are set simply against a yellow silk ground liberally interwoven with silver-gilt thread. In the "field," larger and smaller palmettes are flanked by curved, serrated leaves in which sprays of red hyacinths are plainly seen. The use of metallic thread in both the yellow and white silk ground gives the entire fabric the luster of gold and silver, while the fineness of the design renders the rectilinear nature of the tapestry weave itself relatively unobtrusive. A close examination reveals, however, that all of the curves in the design proceed in a series of right-angle zig-zags. Woven with green, white, black, dark yellow, pale blue and red silk together with metallic thread, the cover is an unqualified artistic success, but the technique was ill-suited to the free and curvilinear

Fig. 20. T.M.1.54, silk velvet with metallic thread, pillow cover, Ottoman, ca. 1600.

design. One might therefore attribute the rarity of fabrics such as this to a preference for the more fragile but more versatile *kemha* technique, one which was lighter and better suited for use in garments. On the basis of the elements of the design we have noted, a date in the third quarter of the 16th century would seem most probable for this unusual and beautiful fabric.

The question of usage of fabrics would seem to be an important one for Ottoman textiles as it is for other textile traditions as well. Clearly the finest *kemha* and *seraser* fabrics were used for costumes and for ceremonial costumes at that; the *kaftan* robes had broad surfaces unmarred by tailoring, which exhibited the designs to advantage. The velvets were a bit hardier and were used for cushions and covers as well as for garments. Toward the end of the 16th century, as the price of gold rose higher and higher in the Ottoman Empire, its use was evidently restricted more and more to costumes, until it was finally forbidden for use in textiles altogether in later times.[22] The high price of gold and silver in later times also probably accounts for the fact that very few fragments left from the tailoring of the great

[21]Cf. Öz, *op. cit.*, Volume II, pl. 94.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 52.

Fig. 21. T.M.1.81, silk velvet, pillow cover, from Usküdar, 19th century, Ottoman.

16th-century robes have survived; they were probably burnt to recover the precious metals.

There were sumptuary laws and conventions within the Ottoman Empire from early times which defined the costumes not only of the state officials but of various religious and ethnic groups within the Empire. Although the same basic types of undergarments of cotton or, rarely, linen, were worn by everyone, the outer garments and the various turbans and other headgear to be worn by each group were well established.[23] It seems beyond reasonable doubt that virtually all of the fragments from the Museum's collection examined to this point were intended for secular use, either as costume, as furniture decoration or as decorative hangings for walls or for parades and similar ceremonies. There are several Ottoman fragments in the Museum's collection, however, which bear inscriptions attesting to a religious usage.

Anyone familiar with the austere Islamic prayer service might well wonder at the place of elaborately decorated textiles in the Islamic religion; Islamic clergy do not constitute a priesthood in the Western sense, and this fact coupled with the absence of theatrical ritual as found in the Christian churches would seem to leave little place for the decorated altar cloths and clerical vestments of Christianity. It might be said that the theatrical aspect of ritual in Islamic countries is confined in large part to the secular sphere. The only connection of such ritual with the Islamic service formerly revolved around the appearance of the Sultan at the Friday prayer. The lavish decorations of the mosque were merely a setting for the simple Muslim prayers. Even the beautiful prayer rugs were, in fact, floor decoration for a building in which all men approached God on an essentially equal footing. Two classes of textiles, however, have direct connection with religion beyond those details of costume, generally a special turban, which indicated clerical garments. These are the banners carried in processions or in war invoking the blessings of God on His soldiers and the textiles which from early Islamic customary usage were associated with tombs of rulers and holy men. Such textiles in Ottoman times were largely decorated with calligraphy, which by its association with the Word of God had always occupied first place among the arts in orthodox Islamic thinking.

Of the three pieces in the Museum's collection bearing such decoration with religious inscriptions, the one illustrated (Fig. 24) belongs to a well-known group with calligraphic designs set out in a zig-zag fashion, thought to have come into Western collections toward the end of the last century from certain tombs in the Ottoman Empire.[24] The inscriptions are quite interesting as one of them provides an insight into the actual use of the textile in the Ottoman tomb. The largest letters, in elongated *thuluth* script, spell out the Islamic Profession of Faith: "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet." The zig-zag band below the Profession again praises God: "Glory to God and His Muhammad; Glory to God the Highest." A wide band contains small cartouches containing invocations: "Oh Merciful! Oh Kindliness! Oh Glory! Oh Sovereign!" The narrow band directly above the Profession of Faith contains an inscription from the Koran, Sura II, Verse 144:

> We see the turning of thy face (for guidance) to the heavens; Now shall we turn thee to a Qibla that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque.[25]

The *Qibla* is the wall of a building, such as a mosque or tomb, which faces the Sacred Mosque in Mecca, toward which all Muslims face during prayer. This passage in the

[23]Cf. R. E. Koçu, *op. cit.*

[24]Cf. the Introduction by A. J. B. Wace to Öz, *op. cit.*, Volume I.

[25]Translation by A. Yusuf Ali, in *The Holy Koran: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Lahore, *s.d.*). I am deeply indebted to my colleague Professor David Biddle of the University of Massachusetts for help in reading the inscriptions. The inscription is often found in the *mihrab* or prayer niche in Turkish mosques.

Fig. 22. T.M.1.38, fragment of a cover, interlocking tapestry weave, silk, with metallic thread, Ottoman, 2nd half, 16th century.

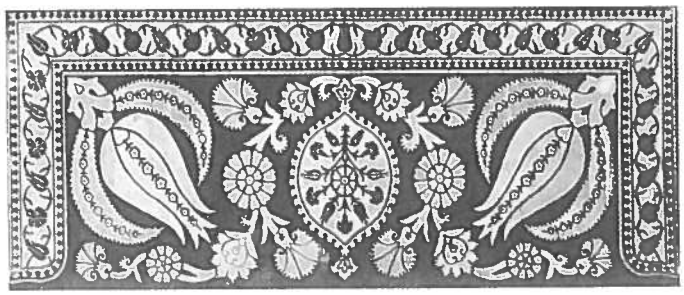

Fig. 23. Velvet cover from the Benaki Museum, Athens, No. 455, Ottoman, ca. 1600.

Reproduced in T. Öz, *Türk Kümaş ve Kadifeleri*, Vol. II (Istanbul, 1951), Pl. 94.

Koran may be seen as influencing the Muslim burial custom of placing the coffin parallel to the *Qibla*, with the head turned to the right toward the Sacred Mosque. The inscription becomes interesting when we realize that such textiles as this were placed on the symbolic coffin in the room above the underground burial place, a reminder to the faithful of the injunction of God's word in the Koran.

The study of Ottoman textiles is still in a very early stage, and the technical and stylistic bases of development in Ottoman weaving art are as little-understood as the economic and social factors contributing to this development. The textiles examined in this brief and selective essay form a number of tiny mosaic fragments out of which a fuller understanding of Ottoman textiles will eventually emerge. But as experience, as visual delight, the small fragments examined leave few questions unanswered, presenting us with a tradition of weaving of great beauty and significance, an indication of the colorful and stimulating Ottoman artistic production during the Empire's great period in history.

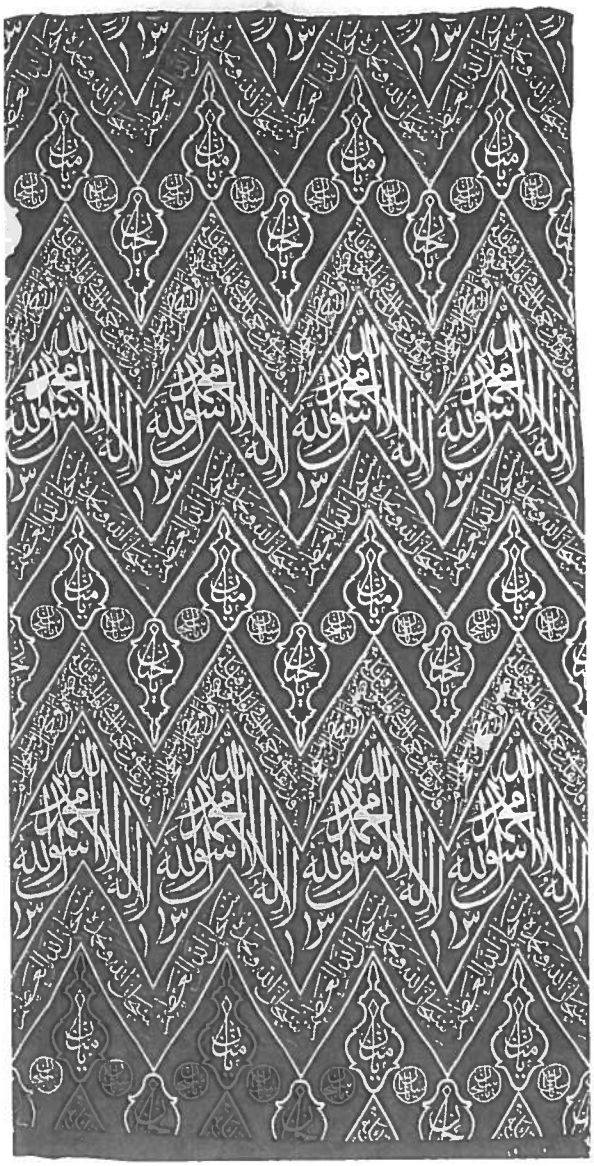

Fig. 24. T.M.1.84, satin tomb cover with calligraphic design in brocaded twill, Ottoman, 16th century.

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