

2. Detail: Bayezid I "The Thunderbolt"
Routs the Crusaders at the Battle of Nicopolis

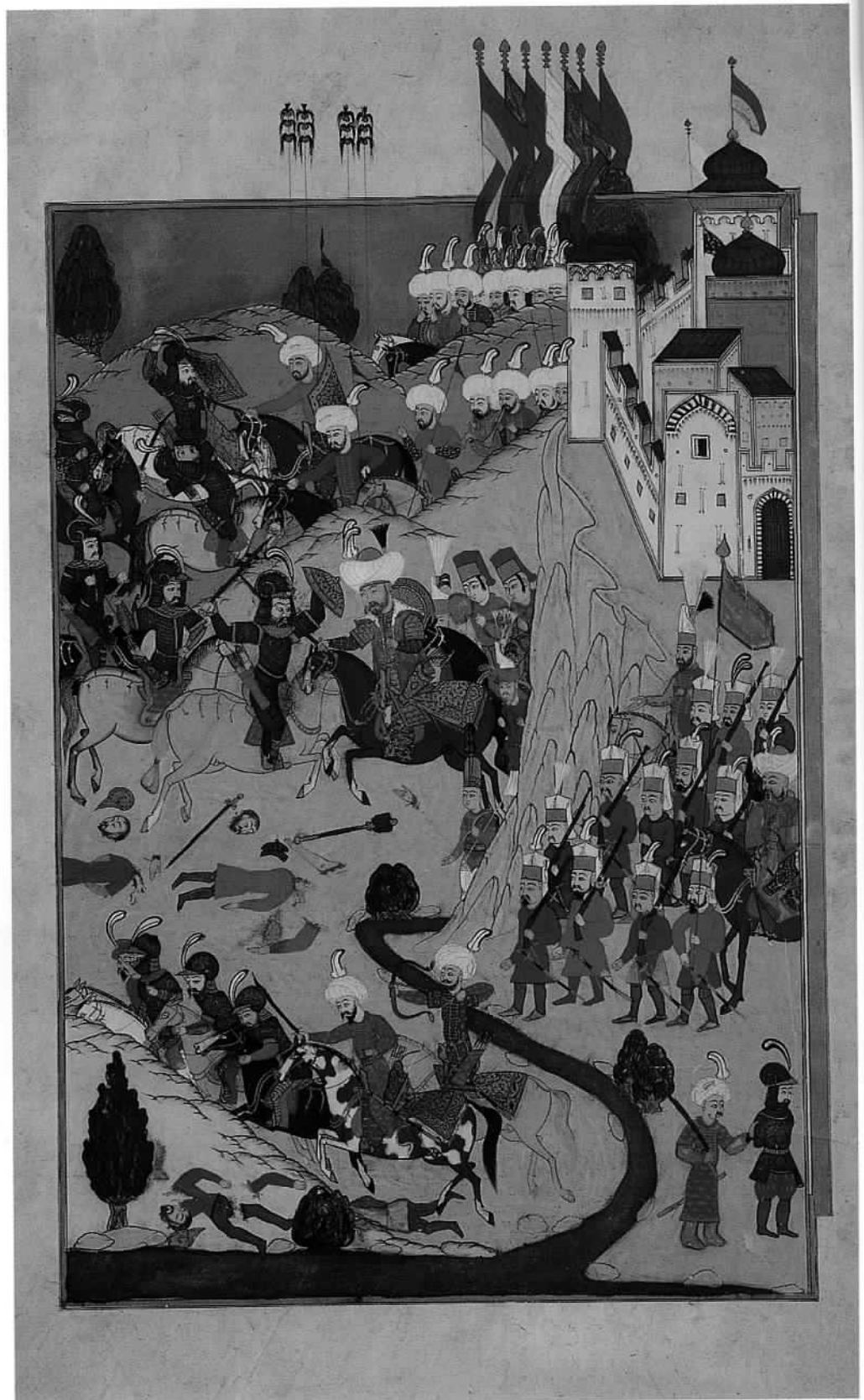
Ottoman miniature painting from a manuscript of the *Hüner-nama* of Loqman in the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul (H. 1523); Turkey, ca. 1584

Ink and opaque watercolors on sized paper

Dimensions: 47.1 x 28.7 cm

Courtesy of the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts, Jerome Wheelock Fund, 1935.13 (New York venue only)

Ottoman court painters produced many illustrated histories of the dynasty glorifying the accomplishments and personal bravery of the sultans, in which various events were vividly depicted in a realistic manner reflecting the costumes and events of the time of painting. The most lavish Ottoman patron of arts of the book was Murad III (ruled 1574–95), who commissioned the famous manuscript from which this painting was removed. The painter Osman, or one of his school, has shown the Turkish sultan in the thick of battle, vanquishing an army of armored Hungarian and French crusader knights. Among the latter was Enguerrand de Coucy, chief protagonist of Barbara Tuchman's well-known historical work *A Distant Mirror*, where the battle of Nicopolis is described in great detail. WBD



Images of Turks and the European Imagination

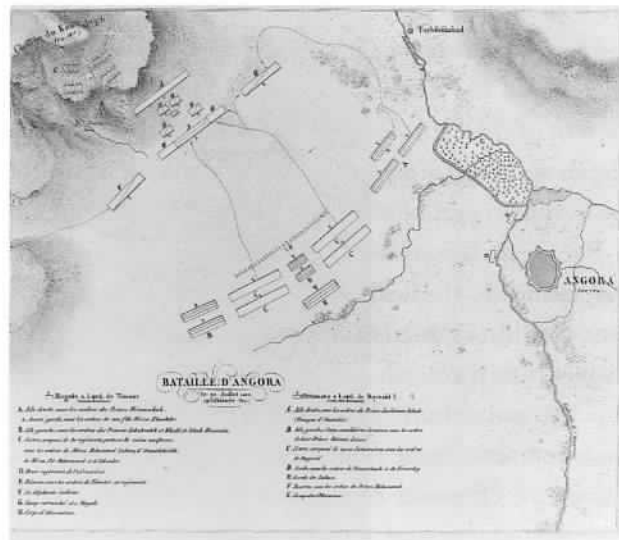
WALTER B. DENNY



The Ottomans and Europe

On July 20, 1402, on a plateau north of Ankara, the present-day capital of the Republic of Turkey, the Tatar army of the Central Asian conqueror Timur, known to history as Timur the Lame, or Tamerlane, met the army of Turkish, Serbian, and Türkmen troops commanded by the Ottoman Turkish sultan Bayezid I in one of the epic battles of history.¹ By the end of the day, Bayezid, deserted by his Türkmen nomadic allies, found himself Timur's prisoner. According to some accounts, he was confined to an iron cage by his captor, subject to the ridicule of Timur's troops, and was made to watch his Serbian wife, Despina, and his daughters forced to wait upon Timur and his court as servants, an almost unspeakable humiliation for a fifteenth-century monarch in either East or West. Some chroniclers say that the sultan finally killed himself by dashing his head against the bars of his cage. Whatever the actual circumstances of his captivity and death, within eight months, Bayezid, who three years before had virtually annihilated the flower of European chivalry in his epic victory over the French and Hungarians at Nicopolis in Bulgaria, was dead. The story of his defeat, carried back to Europe, became one of the central elements of the centuries-long European fascination with the Ottoman Turks, a fascination that oscillated between the poles of deadly fear and admiring emulation, an important part of the culture of the European West from the late Middle Ages onward.

The Ottoman Empire had arisen after 1299 from a tiny frontier principality between Muslim and Byzantine territories in northwest Asia Minor, where the Turkic chieftain



3. Battle of Ankara, 1401

Map from the J.-J. Hellert atlas accompanying his French translation of Joseph Freiherr Von Hammer, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches as Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris: Bethune & Plon, 1844)

Dimensions: 54.6 x 38.1 cm

Courtesy of the Harvard Map Collection, Nathan Marsh Pusey Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MAP-LC Dr440.H23 pf

The great German oriental scholar von Hammer's multi-volume history of the Ottoman empire is one of the towering monuments of nineteenth-century scholarship and was translated into French by J.-J. Hellert, who published it with a sumptuous atlas, including plans of some of the major battles from Ottoman history. This engraved schematic battle plan, typical of the nineteenth century, showing the elements of both armies as neat rectangles, depicts Timur's troops to the south and Bayezid's army to the north, with the sultan's vantage point atop a hill, shortly before his tribal Türkmen avant-garde deserted to Timur's side. Defended to the bitter end by his loyal Serb cohorts, the Ottoman sultan was finally overwhelmed and captured. WBD

Osman (a name that eventually mutated into *Ottoman* in the west) founded a dynasty that eventually expanded its territories to become a major European and Middle-Eastern power and that endured into the third decade of the twentieth century. In the early fourteenth century, the Ottomans crossed the Dardanelles into Europe and embarked on conquests in the Balkans that were to make them a dangerous threat to Europe over the next four centuries. This threat culminated in the Turkish sieges of Vienna in the early sixteenth and late seventeenth centuries and virtually turned the Mediterranean into an Ottoman lake by the late sixteenth century. The Ottoman military danger was felt keenly in Europe; Ottomans occupied the heel of Italy in the late fifteenth century and used the French port of Toulon as a naval base in the sixteenth. Playing a major role in the balance of European power through their treaties with France, the Ottomans engaged European armies and navies in a series of important battles throughout what we now call the Renaissance and Baroque periods, until the rout of their army before Vienna in 1683 by a combined Hapsburg-Polish army led to the dramatic contraction of the European part of their empire.

Europe's relations with the Ottomans were not, however, limited to the field of battle. A vigorous trade in artistic and luxury goods between the Ottomans and their neighbors to the north and west left an impact on European art and culture. The abundance of European religious vestments made from Ottoman silk, European imitations of Ottoman ceramics and metalware, and the European adoption of aspects of Ottoman costume and weaponry all attest to the breadth and depth of the Ottoman impact on Europe.² The earliest fascination of Europe with its Eastern neighbor is best seen, however, in the realm of literature. Travel accounts of visitors to the Ottoman capital of Istanbul and other Ottoman cities of the East, with their descriptions of customs and costumes of all kinds, from the earliest days of the printed book, became best-sellers; and their illustrations, in woodcuts, engravings, and later in etchings, lithographs, and photographs, helped to mold the European image of the Turk.³ Stories taken from historical events, such as the humbling of the mighty Sultan Bayezid by Timur, or the revolt of another Bayezid, the young son of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (ruled 1520–66), against his father in the mid-sixteenth century, inspired great European playwrights such



4. Bajazet I, son of Murad, fourth Emperor of the Turks in the year 1390, from an Original Picture in the Saraglio

by C. Du Bosc, England, eighteenth century

Engraving

Dimensions: 17 x 11 cm

Courtesy of the family of Edwin Binney, 3rd; Edwin Binney, 3rd
 Collection of Orientalist Prints

In the age of universal rule by royal dynasties, Europeans' fascination with their Turkish neighbors and enemies to the east included an intense interest in the lineage of the Ottoman dynasty. The Du Bosc engraving is apparently a very liberal interpretation of an image from a dynastic history of the Ottomans, advertised as "from an Original Picture in the Saraglio." In fact, by the eighteenth century a few copies of various Ottoman illustrated genealogical manuscripts—such as the *Taj ut-Tevarih* (Crown of Histories) and the *Silsilenâme* (Book of Chains), which served as the bases of such engravings—were already found in European libraries and curiosity collections. WBD



Photographic Services ©President and Fellows of Harvard College, Harvard University

5. *Assault on a Castle*
attributed to Bihzad

Unfinished Timurid miniature painting from an historical manuscript,
Herat, ca. 1475–1500

Ink, gold, and opaque watercolors on sized paper

Dimensions: 41 x 29 cm

Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art
Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Bequest of Abby Aldrich
Rockefeller, 1960.199

Painted in Herat under the reign of Timur's descendant Husayn Bayqara in the twilight of the dynasty's reign, this well-known unfinished painting depicts the siege of a city, while the head of the besiegers, in a separate scene, enjoys an outdoor meal at the upper left. Although the various activities of the siege are in part composed of stock images from Timurid battle scenes, this painting, due to its unfinished state, gives startling insights into the technique of miniature painting in Timurid times, with its various specializations among artists and the sometimes unusual sequence in which under-drawing, background, costumes, and faces were painted. WBD



Photograph courtesy: Schloss Eggenberg Museum

6. Sultan Bayezid held prisoner by Timur in an iron cage
 Painting ceiling, Schloss Eggenberg, Graz, Austria
 Painted by Carl Franz Caspar or Andreas Raemblmayer ca. 1672

as Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) and Jean Baptiste Racine (1639–1699) to recast the Ottoman tales of pride and humiliation, and the tragic struggles of father against son and brother against brother, in masterpieces of their own dramatic traditions. After the watershed years of the late seventeenth century, when the Ottoman military threat began to wane, the European image of the Turk broadened, especially in the realm of musical drama, to include images as diverse as the wise and compassionate Pasha Selim in the German libretto of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782), or the vain and foolish Mustafa, Bey of Algiers, in the lighthearted Italian of Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813).

The Tamerlane-Bayezid Story in Europe

In the early 1670s, Fürst Johann Seyfried von Eggenberg (1644–1713), an Austrian nobleman, commissioned an Austrian artist to complete a cycle of paintings on the ceilings of the family residence of Schloss Eggenberg, near Graz. The subject was the story of Timur and Bayezid (see No. 6), and particularly the episode of Bayezid's humiliating captivity; the painter has shown the Turkish Sultan paraded before Timur's troops in a cage.⁴ The painting—which is peopled with a variety of individuals in historically accu-

rate costumes, including the figure of a *deli*, or Ottoman irregular warrior, with his headdress composed of eagle's wings—represents a story that at this time was well known to any educated European, and had particular relevance in central of Europe. Graz, the capital of Austria's Steiermark (Styria) province south of Vienna, had an acute experience of the Ottoman menace in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and by 1670 the reinvigorated Ottomans were again posing a threat, which was to culminate in the 1681 campaign against Vienna that ended in their calamitous defeat. Since the time of the crusades, Europeans, fearful of the Islamic threat and prompted by large-scale wishful thinking, had promulgated the legend of Prester John, a Christian monarch of enormous wealth and power who lived in the Orient and who might one day vanquish the Muslims who had overrun the Holy Places in the Middle East and who threatened Christendom on the continent of Europe itself.⁵ Although neither a Christian nor in any way an ally of Europeans (he was, like Bayezid, a Sunni, or orthodox, Muslim), Timur appeared in the European imagination as a kind of substitute for Prester John, an unanticipated but appreciated deliverance from the feared Ottoman enemy in the early fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century, Timur's early-fifteenth-century deliverance of the Europeans might have served as well to justify

the alliances both informal and formal concluded by various European powers, especially Poland and England, with the Shah of Persia, the Ottomans' Shi'ite Muslim enemy on their eastern borders. Certainly the European memory of a savior from the East, and the story of the Ottoman Sultan's humiliation, would have been an appropriate theme for the decoration for the palace of an Austrian nobleman as he and his contemporaries watched the eastern enemy preparing for yet another foray against Austria.

At the time of the painting on the Graz ceiling, the story of Timur and Bayezid was familiar to German-speaking central Europeans through one of the most popular universal history books of day, the *Historische Chronica* by the seventeenth-century German orientalist and historian Johann Gottfried Ludwig, which, although originally published in the 1630s, was reprinted and even expanded by other authors in the eighteenth century. In England, while the Timur-Bayezid story was given its most vivid retelling in *Tamburlaine the Great*, the late-sixteenth-century play by Christopher Marlowe, the story lived on in Nicholas Rowe's popular *Tamerlane*, published and frequently performed in early eighteenth-century London (around the time of Handel's opera *Tamerlano*), and revived as late as 1815 by the famous English actor Edmund Kean. A more fanciful Gallic embroidery on the historical theme, probably inspired by Michel Baudier's history of the Turks published in Paris in 1625, is to be found in the play *Le Gran Tamerlan et Bajazet* (The Great Tamerlane and Bajazet) by Jean Magnon, published in 1648, replete with intrigues of Bajazet's imagined wife and daughter Orcazie and Roxalie. Like most versions of the story, Magnon's ends with the Bayezid character committing suicide, this time with a dagger. The inspiration for the eighteenth-century Italian libretto of Handel's *Tamerlano*, with its characters of Asteria, Andronico, and Irene, was likewise a seventeenth-century French play, Jacques Pardon's *Tamerlan, ou la Mort de Bajazet* (Tamerlane, or the death of Bajazet). The popularity of the story in France at the time can be inferred from the almost simultaneous appearance, in 1650, of the novel *Ladice, ou les victoires du Gran Tamerlan* (Ladice, or the victories of the Great Tamerlane); wondrously enough, the anonymous author claims in his preface to have been inspired by a Persian book, translated by an Englishman whom he had encountered in Holland.⁶

While Handel's great opera *Tamerlano*, with its pioneering tenor role of Bayezid/Bajazet, is becoming increasingly well



7. Mr. Edmund Kean as Bajazet

by R. Lloyd, published by M. & M. Skelt, London, 1816

"Penny plain" engraving

Dimensions: 23.4 x 18.8 cm

Courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection, Nathan Marsh Pusey Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Around the time Handel wrote his *Tamerlano* in the early eighteenth century, Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane* (1701), a free adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's great Elizabethan play, was enjoying a huge success in London; a large part of Handel's opera-going public was therefore probably quite familiar with the broad outlines of the historical story on which the opera libretto was based. A less successful revival at Drury Lane in 1815 of Rowe's play, with the famous actor Edmund Kean in the role of Bayezid, was recorded in this "penny plain" print. (Those with more ample means might have bought a "tuppence colored" version.) This print by R. Lloyd, published by Skelt, was also published by Lloyd himself; the depiction is probably based on an illustration by Cruickshank, taken from the 1815 edition of Rowe's play, published by John Fairburn in London. The actor's blackened face, elaborate curved scimitar, bejeweled turban with its large aigrette ornament, and the crescents that embellish the aigrette and the undercoat, clearly show the stereotyped nineteenth-century European image of an oriental potentate. WBD



known among opera lovers, fewer will remember that in the realm of Italian opera, Vivaldi and Scarlatti had already written on the subject, and it was Agustino Piovane's well-tested Italian libretto on the subject of Bayezid and Timur that served as the basis for Handel's librettist, Nicola Haym. In the world of Italianate opera in London in 1724, the general requirements of a successful plot required a love interest—in this case, the complexities of Asteria (Bajazet's daughter), Andronico (her lover, prince of Byzantium), Tamerlano (enamored of Asteria), and Irene (princess of Trebizond, and betrothed of Tamerlano). Handel's Bayezid dies by taking poison, a choice both logistically less demanding than Marlowe's suicide by head-bashing and filled with more musical opportunities than Magnon's suicide by dagger. In Haym's telling of the story, and in Handel's magnificent music, the complex themes of pride and humiliation, love and jealousy, dynastic loyalties and the dictates of the heart climax in possibly one of the greatest death scenes in operatic history, and certainly the first such scene of this power ever written for the tenor voice. Handel's Bajazet, in his tragic

8. *Omnium Turcarum Imperatorum Effigies*

Anonymous, Rome, 1586 (one sheet depicting the first thirteen Ottoman sultans, including Bayezid I).

Engraving

Dimensions: 34.6 x 44.7 cm

Courtesy of the family of Edwin Binney, 3rd; Edwin Binney, 3rd Collection of Orientalist Prints

This early Italian single-sheet engraving depicts all the Sultans of the dynasty up to 1586. Several images were "borrowed" from easily identifiable Italian sources, while others appear to be the product of the artist's imagination. With the eventual accession of Mehmed III in 1596, the blank frame in the copper plate could have been engraved with yet another portrait, and a new edition of impressions printed and sold. WBD

nobility and affection for his daughter, presents a noble and human image of the Islamic ruler that may be seen as a forerunner of Mozart's passionate, yet wise and compassionate Pasha Selim.

Visualizing Turks in Europe: Signs and Symbols

As mentioned, the standard visual image of the Turk in the European mind was formed primarily through the illustrations of travelers' accounts from early times onward. The turban, the standard Arab form of headdress, adopted by Muslims in many countries, was the primary iconic sign of a Muslim, and hence a Turk, in European representations from early times. By the fifteenth century, we can detect in the art of Italy, and of Venice in particular, "orientalist" images based on distinctive modes of dress—including turbans and other headgear—from two distinct parts of the Muslim world, both adversaries and trading partners of the Venetian Republic: the Mamluk domains of Egypt, and the Ottoman domains of Asia Minor and the Balkans.⁸ The Ottoman Turks adopted as their own a very particular kind of turban, known as a *saryk* (from the Turkish, which means "wrapped"), which consisted of yards of snow-white linen, cotton, or silk wrapped around a conical felt cap. By the early eighteenth century, Ottoman fashions had changed, and a different kind of turban, known as the *kavuk*—this time wrapped around a much more elaborate flat-topped felt hat—had become the standard form of Ottoman headdress and was frequently depicted by European artists. European artists working with orientalist themes varied extensively, however, in their devotion to realism, and a large group of orientalist costume prints, many depicting theatrical personages or costumes from court ballet, show their elegant and languid sultans and sultaneses wearing a variety of floppy turbans and voluminous kaffans whose relationship to actual Ottoman dress is rather remote.

The use of a crescent moon (*hilal*) on certain Turkish military flags and banners gave that form an Islamic and Ottoman significance in European iconography that led at times to the absurd depiction of Muslims in European anti-Muslim propaganda as worshipping the crescent moon. The symbol of the crescent became conflated in Ottoman times with yet another very distinctive symbolic form sometimes given the name *chintimani* in the literature. The



9. *Ambassadeur de Perse* (Persian Ambassador).
By Jean-Baptiste Vien, France, eighteenth century.
Engraving

Courtesy of the family of Edwin Binney, 3rd; Edwin Binney, 3rd
Collection of Orientalist Prints

chintimani form, which originated in the ancient Buddhist iconography of India and Central Asia, may have entered the repertoire of Turkish artistic forms as early as the eighth century, when certain settled Turkic kingdoms of Inner Asia had adopted the Buddhist religion. The form consists of three eyelike circles with smaller circles within them, often forming a crescent as a result, frequently shown with another design of parallel tapered wavy bands. Thus, while in its original form chintimani was a well-defined Buddhist oceanographic element depicting three "auspicious jewels" or pearls (the three dots) either accompanied by flames or tossed on the waves of the sea (the wavy bands), by later times in the Islamic world, the form, which appears in Islamic art as early as the ninth century, seems to have become a generalized symbol of good luck and Turkic origins.⁸ As such, it appeared in Turkic nomadic carpets, on fourteenth-century coins minted by Timur himself in his capital of Samarkand (today in the Republic of

nobility and affection for his daughter, presents a noble and human image of the Islamic ruler that may be seen as a forerunner of Mozart's passionate, yet wise and compassionate Pasha Selim.

Visualizing Turks in Europe: Signs and Symbols

As mentioned, the standard visual image of the Turk in the European mind was formed primarily through the illustrations of travelers' accounts from early times onward. The turban, the standard Arab form of headdress, adopted by Muslims in many countries, was the primary iconic sign of a Muslim, and hence a Turk, in European representations from early times. By the fifteenth century, we can detect in the art of Italy, and of Venice in particular, "orientalist" images based on distinctive modes of dress—including turbans and other headgear—from two distinct parts of the Muslim world, both adversaries and trading partners of the Venetian Republic: the Mamluk domains of Egypt, and the Ottoman domains of Asia Minor and the Balkans.⁸ The Ottoman Turks adopted as their own a very particular kind of turban, known as a *saryk* (from the Turkish, which means "wrapped"), which consisted of yards of snow-white linen, cotton, or silk wrapped around a conical felt cap. By the early eighteenth century, Ottoman fashions had changed, and a different kind of turban, known as the *kavuk*—this time wrapped around a much more elaborate flat-topped felt hat—had become the standard form of Ottoman headdress and was frequently depicted by European artists. European artists working with orientalist themes varied extensively, however, in their devotion to realism, and a large group of orientalist costume prints, many depicting theatrical personages or costumes from court ballet, show their elegant and languid sultans and sultaneses wearing a variety of floppy turbans and voluminous *kaf-tans* whose relationship to actual Ottoman dress is rather remote.

The use of a crescent moon (*bilâl*) on certain Turkish military flags and banners gave that form an Islamic and Ottoman significance in European iconography that led at times to the absurd depiction of Muslims in European anti-Muslim propaganda as worshipping the crescent moon. The symbol of the crescent became conflated in Ottoman times with yet another very distinctive symbolic form sometimes given the name *chintimani* in the literature. The



9. *Ambassadeur de Perse* (Persian Ambassador).

By Jean-Baptiste Vien, France, eighteenth century.
Engraving

Courtesy of the family of Edwin Binney, 3rd; Edwin Binney, 3rd
Collection of Orientalist Prints

chintimani form, which originated in the ancient Buddhist iconography of India and Central Asia, may have entered the repertoire of Turkish artistic forms as early as the eighth century, when certain settled Turkic kingdoms of Inner Asia had adopted the Buddhist religion. The form consists of three eyelike circles with smaller circles within them, often forming a crescent as a result, frequently shown with another design of parallel tapered wavy bands. Thus, while in its original form *chintimani* was a well-defined Buddhist oceanographic element depicting three "auspicious jewels" or pearls (the three dots) either accompanied by flames or tossed on the waves of the sea (the wavy bands), by later times in the Islamic world, the form, which appears in Islamic art as early as the ninth century, seems to have become a generalized symbol of good luck and Turkic origins.⁸ As such, it appeared in Turkic nomadic carpets, on fourteenth-century coins minted by Timur himself in his capital of Samarkand (today in the Republic of



Photographic Services © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Harvard University

10. Ottoman fabric with chintamani design, from a pillow cover (*yastik*)
Turkey, second quarter of the sixteenth century
Crimson silk velvet with metallic thread brocading
Dimensions: 98 x 78 cm

Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art
Museums, The Edwin Binney, 3rd Collection of Turkish Art at the
Harvard University Art Museums, 1985-295

11. Ottoman fabric with chintimani design, Turkey, early- to mid-sixteenth-century *seraser* woven silk with metallic thread
Dimensions: 10 3/8" x 6 1/2"

Courtesy of the Collection of Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf, New York

The curious design of three dots or balls, often coupled with two wavy bands, known as *chintimani*—a Sanskrit word meaning "auspicious jewel"—is an unusual case of crosscultural transference of symbols in works of art. Originally a Buddhist symbol of three pearls shown either adorned with flames or borne on ocean waves (hence the wavy bands), the three dots became a popular Islamic symbol of good luck and a protection against the evil eye as early as the ninth century C.E. They were adopted as a design on coinage in Timurid Samarkand and by the fifteenth century had become one of the most popular motifs in the Ottoman artistic repertoire, appearing in virtually all artistic media from arts of the book to textiles, metalwork, carpets, and ceramics. The larger velvet textile with *chintimani* design was probably intended as a cushion cover, while the smaller fragment, woven in an extremely costly technique known as *seraser*, utilizing silver and silver-gilt thread, was probably part of a costume. WBD



© All rights reserved, Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf



12. Saber with scabbard (*kılıç*)
Turkey, nineteenth century

Steel, nephrite, gilt-copper, gilt-silver, gold, and semi-precious gems
Dimensions: L. 88.6 cm; Weight 3 lbs. 23 oz. (1465g)

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Bequest of George C. Stone, 1935, 36.25.1610ab

In the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II founded a new "modern" Turkish army and adopted European-style military dress and weaponry for the Ottoman officer corps. Traditionally shaped and decorated swords such as this one, with a long tradition in the Ottoman court, remained popular for certain court ceremonies and were probably also produced throughout the nineteenth century as royal gifts, and for sale to European tourists and collectors. WBD



13. Helmet
Turkey, fifteenth century

Steel, silver, and copper
Dimensions: Height 28.6 cm; Diameter 23.2 cm

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1904
(04.3.212)

The so-called turban helmet, with its large domed shape once thought big enough to fit on the wearer's head over a turban, is a well-known type of Islamic armor. With its peaked apex and sockets for aigrettes and other ornaments, this type of helmet came to symbolize Islamic military power in the West; its shape was also adopted for Russian military headgear. This particularly handsome example of hammered steel is decorated with incised designs of vegetal ornament and calligraphic inscriptions and probably reflects quite closely the type of head armor worn at the time of Bayezid's fateful encounter with Timur north of Ankara in 1402.

All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Uzbekistan), and later became one of the most popular forms of decoration for Ottoman Turkish carpets, ceramic wares, tile decoration, costumes, and silk textiles, where the spots and stripes were also often associated with the pelts of leopards and tigers.

Together with the turban, it was the kaftan itself, the voluminous outer robe worn by Turkish officials on ceremonial occasions, that was the subject of considerable interest by European travelers. In a famous mid-sixteenth-century passage, an extremely acute observer, the Hapsburgs' ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, writes:

Now come with me and cast your eye over the immense crowd of turbaned heads, wrapped in countless folds of the whitest silk, and bright raiment of every kind and hue, and everywhere the brilliance of gold, silver, purple, silk and satin. A detailed description would be a lengthy task, and no mere words could give an adequate idea of the novelty of the sight. A more beautiful spectacle was never presented to my gaze. Yet amid all this luxury there was a great simplicity and economy. The dress of all has the same form whatever the wearer's rank; and no edgings or useless trimmings are sewn on, as is the custom with us, costing a large sum of money and worn out in three days. Their most beautiful garments of silk or satin, even if they are embroidered, as they usually are, cost only a ducat to make.

The Turks were quite as much astonished at our manner of dress as we at theirs. They wear long robes which reach almost to their ankles, and are not only more imposing but seem to add to the stature; our dress, on the other hand, is so short and tight that it discloses the forms of the body, which would be better hidden, and is thus anything but becoming, and besides, for some reason or other, it takes away from a man's height and gives him a stunted appearance.⁹

The motifs and patterns of Turkish silks were many, and are reflected in many different artistic media.¹⁰ The complex vocabulary of palmettes and curving leaves, known as *saz*, is reflected in Judy Levin's costume for Andronico, while the most familiar layout consisted of staggered rows of motifs, often in ogival form. Another type of Turkish decoration very well known in Europe was the repertoire of stylized floral forms. The most famous of these, the *lâle*, or tulip, serves as a reminder of the European mania for tulips in the seventeenth century, in which this blossom originally native to the Central Asian steppes was exported from

Turkey to Holland, where it was the subject of an almost hysterical interest on the part of collectors and speculators.¹¹ Another favored Ottoman blossom was the *karanfil*, or carnation, whose characteristic fanlike form appears in many different Turkish artistic media, from the mid-sixteenth century onward.

Turkish weaponry was another area of great interest to Europeans. The curved sword known in Turkish as *kılıç*, and in the West termed a scimitar, with its sharp edge on the convex side, was enthusiastically adapted by European armorers and became the prototype for Polish and Russian court swords and the nineteenth-century European cavalry saber we see immortalized in battle paintings of the Romantic era. The *yataghan*, with its two-eared handle and its curved blade sharpened on the concave side, is a more characteristic Ottoman weapon, and served in nineteenth-century French orientalist works as a kind of icon of the Middle East, as in Victor Hugo's orientalist poem "Voeu" ("Vow"):

... plus loin que les terres arides
Du chef maure au large ataghan
Don't le front pâle a plus de rides
Que la mer un jour d'ouragan ...

... further than the parched lands
of the Moorish chieftain with his huge yataghan
whose pale face has more wrinkles
than the sea on a stormy day ...

Images of Women and Minority Communities

To the contemporary operagoer, it may seem a flight of Baroque fancy on the part of Handel's librettist and his French sources to have created a plot where Asteria, daughter of the Muslim sultan Bajazet, is in love with Andronico, a Byzantine (and hence, by implication, a Greek Orthodox) prince, or where the Muslim Tamerlano is betrothed to Irene, another blue-blooded Byzantine from Trebizond. This aspect of the opera reflects, of course, not only the Serbian origin of the historical Bayezid's wife, but in a broader sense, it reflects Baroque Europe's understanding of the Ottoman Empire of its own time as a multinational state. The Islamic political order is required to provide tolerance and even protection for the "People of the Book"—Christians and



*Une Dame Franque de Galata et son Esclave qui sont sur le point d'aller à Constantinople ou autre quartier turc
L'Esclave presente à sa Maitresse un voile semblable à celui qu'elle a sur le visage et sans lequel
les Femmes Turques ne sortent jamais .*

*Dessiné d'après nature à Constantinople par J. Etienne Liotard.
Le Usage gravé à Vienne par lui même, et les figures par Joseph Cameratta.
A Paris chez l'auteur rue de la Corderie. Rue de Jacques chez la F. Chereau au deux pilliers d'Or. Et chez Aubran à la Ville de Paris.*

Photography by David M. Thum ©

14. A Frankish woman of Galata and her slave, about to go into Constantinople or another Turkish quarter. The Slave presents to her Mistress a veil similar to that which she has on her own face, and without which Turkish Women never leave the house. Drawn from life by Jean-Etienne Liotard in Constantinople, the face engraved in Vienna by himself, and the figures by Joseph Cameratta

ca. 1740; published in Paris

Engraving

Dimensions: 30.5 x 24.6 cm

Courtesy of the family of Edwin Binney, 3rd; Edwin Binney, 3rd
Collection of Orientalist Prints

Jews within the Islamic state. And illustrated travelers' accounts and costume albums depict, in all of their diversity of costume and customs, both males and females of diverse religious and ethnic communities within the Ottoman state—Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Levantine Italians, Arabs, Berbers, and Iranians, in addition to the Turks themselves.

The depiction of Muslim women, however, was a somewhat more sensitive matter. The Muslim concern with privacy of women and the tradition of public veiling militated against Muslim women actually serving as models who would pose for European artists for extended periods. We may assume that most, if not all, Renaissance images of Muslim women, such as those of Louis Danet illustrating Nicolas de Nicolay's travel account must, in fact, depict non-Muslim women modeling Muslim dress, or, in some cases, such as those works purporting to represent the interior of a women's bath or a harem, are outright fantasies. Jean-Étienne Liotard's early-eighteenth-century depictions of women are recorded by him as Levantine Italians modeling clothing worn by Muslim women; Delacroix and other European artists who actually visited the Middle East in the nineteenth century used Jewish or Christian models or made sketches and drawings from quick visual impressions, rather than working with posed Muslim women.

This situation does not mean that the images we possess of Muslim women and their costumes are inaccurate; there is little reason to suppose that the sixteenth-century images in Nicolay's work or the eighteenth-century images collected by Ferriol are anything but accurate in details of costume, and differences of physiognomy among most religious or ethnic groups were largely insignificant. However, being fascinated by what we are not allowed to see is an old human trait, and the numerous European works of art utilizing sexualized and exoticized harem images of Muslim women owe a significant proportion both of their general inaccuracy and of their large numbers to this situation. In other words, if European artists had actually been able to record the reality of the women's quarters of an Islamic house or palace, in all of its banality and boredom, we would have far fewer painted images of sensuous odalisques and other steamy harem fantasies produced by the European fear and intolerance of Islam, European misogyny, or a European colonialist mentality.

Imagining the Orient in Opera

The willing suspension of disbelief that all operatic performances must necessarily require of their audiences creates both problems and opportunities for the singer-actors, the director, the stage designer, and the costume designer. While orientalist opera costume as early as the seventeenth century usually relied only very broadly on certain signs and symbols—voluminous robes suggesting kaftans, voluminous headgear suggesting turbans, and an array of weapons and other props—readily identifiable by the audience as of Turkish origin, and while contemporary costume designers frequently dispense with historicism entirely, both stage and costume designers over the centuries have catered to sophisticated audiences that were well aware of many of the subtleties of oriental dress and accessories. This was at no time more true than during the first half of the eighteenth century, a period of unprecedented European contact with the Turkish Empire that was known in Turkey as the *Lâle Devri*—the “Epoch of Tulips.” It was the period when Jean-Étienne Liotard and other European painters resided in the Ottoman capital, and the time of the publication of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's famous *Turkish Letters*;¹² the very careful renditions of costume by the painters were popularized by inexpensive single-sheet engravings, and engraved albums of oriental costumes published in various European countries were collected in aristocratic libraries. These familiar images of costumes were then in turn brought to life in European versions of oriental garb for the masked costume balls that were such a prominent feature of European court society at the time, with a passion for authenticity fueled by the extremely detailed descriptions of costume from the pages of Montagu's letters and the works of other writers of the time. Of the hundreds upon hundreds of orientalist theatrical and operatic costume images surviving from the eighteenth century, a very substantial portion impress the costume historian by their accuracy, thus more sharply evoking for contemporary viewers and listeners the cultural setting of the operatic drama.

In the late twentieth century, of course, the marked differences in popular and aristocratic costume that formerly distinguished various cultures around the world have disappeared to a considerable degree. Several different possibilities, therefore, are open to the costume designer of



Photograph by David M. Thum ©

15. Costume for Bajazet, Act I, Handel's *Tamerlano*

Designed by Judy Levin ©

Courtesy of the Glimmerglass Opera, Cooperstown, New York.

our time. In an extraordinarily *buffa* production of Rossini's *An Italian Girl in Algiers* mounted at Glimmerglass in 1997, Gabriel Berry's costumes for the comical Mustafa and his cohorts recalled the imagery of the military garb of Saddam Hussein's Iraq; this was a somewhat risky choice that might have perpetuated a most unfortunate cultural stereotype; in fact, when viewed opposite his equally outrageously stereotyped garb for the opera's Italian protagonists, it ultimately proved to be both comically successful and, for most viewers, politically neutral.

In designing costumes for *Tamerlano*, on the other hand, Judy Levin took an appropriately different path, adding to the eighteenth-century designers' concern with contemporary accuracy a late-twentieth-century fascination with

the vast historical tapestry of orientalist depictions. Against the background of the opera's austere and monochromatic sets by John Conklin, Levin's costumes—with their brilliant colors and textures of cloth of gold and silver, their sparkling jewels and their complex patterns—create an appropriate setting for a drama that essentially focuses on the eternal theme of pride and power confronting crises of jealousy and humiliation. For the informed viewer, the evocation of fifteenth-century miniature painting in the costumes of Timur/Tamerlano and his guards, the re-creation of sixteenth-century Ottoman splendors in the monumental costumes of the central tragic figure of Bayezid/Bajazet, or the evocations of eighteenth-century images of Liotard and others in the dress of Asteria and her atten

dants, greatly enhanced Haym's dramatic plot and Handel's magnificent music and allowed the tragedy of Bajazet's story to unfold in an atmosphere charged with emotion not only musically and dramatically, but to an exceptional degree, visually as well. The mixture of visual nuances created by Judy Levin's costumes, while especially intriguing to the specialist in costume history or the student of Islamic art, drew upon a tradition of orientalist operatic costume and orientalist European art several centuries old. Combined with Handel's music, it helped to enhance what is opera's most intriguing paradox, one heightened today when we see performances of "early" operatic works: the ability of a highly stylized and conventionalized medium to create an emotional bridge across the apparent chasm of time and space, and to render old stories and passions intensely and personally to the contemporary viewer.

There is one last observation that needs to be made about the use of this kind of costume in contemporary opera, and that is, of course, the element that the wearer adds to the costume itself. It is patently absurd for an opera singer/actor to move with the gestures and tempo of a contemporary American while wearing a costume evocative of the Ottoman Empire in its heyday. In many contemporary performances of Baroque opera, stage directors and singer-actors strive to move in a fashion appropriate both to the time of the opera and the visual setting of the stage. While viewing these costumes in the context of an art gallery or art museum, we are called upon not only to evoke the music of Handel in our mind's ear, but to imagine these works not as motionless, as we see them on exhibition displayed on their mannequins, but as works specifically imagined and created to move, sometimes slowly and haltingly, sometimes like rushing flames in green and gold, crimson and silver, against the visual background of the stage set, and the musical and dramatic background of score and libretto. It is for all of this that the opera costume designer's complex repertoire of imagination, historical knowledge, and technical skill exists, and in the Glimmerglass costumes for *Tamerlano* we see this repertoire at a very remarkable level indeed.

Notes

1. See the description of the battle in Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: William Morrow, 1977), 77-79. Kinross's book is the most recent and readable, as well as one of the most comprehensive, of the general histories of the Ottoman Empire.
2. There are many works dealing with Ottoman/European relations; among the most useful are Paul Coles, *The Ottoman Impact on Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968); Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk 1453-1517* (Nieukoop: B. De Graaf, 1967); and Fatma Müge Göçek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
3. Among the most useful works on this broad topic are Clarence Dana Rouillard, *The Turk in French History: Thought and Literature 1520-1660* (Paris: Boivin, 1938); Alexandrine St.-Clair, *The Image of the Turk in Europe* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973); and John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995).
4. For information on Schloss Eggenberg, I am indebted to Nina Cichocki who has generously shared her research on the palace decorations, and to Frau Dr. Kaiser and Frau Muchitsch, Director and Secretary to the Director, Schloss Eggenberg Museum, Graz.
5. See Robert Silverberg's *The Realm of Prester John* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).
6. On these French works, see Rouillard.
7. See Julian Raby, *Venice, Dürer and the Oriental Mode* (London: Islamic Art Publications, 1982).
8. See Gerard Paquin, "Çintamani" in *Hali* 64 (Aug. 1992): 104-19.
9. See Edward Seymour Forster, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 61.
10. For general discussions of Turkish motifs and designs in various media, see Esin Atil, ed., *Turkish Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution; New York: Harry Abrams, 1980) and Y. Petsopoulous, ed., *Tulips, Arabesques and Turbans: Decorative Arts from the Ottoman Empire* (London: Alexandria Press, 1982).
11. See Michiel Roding and Hans Theunissen, eds., *The Tulip: A Symbol of Two Nations* (Utrecht: M. Th. Houtsuma; Istanbul: Turko-Dutch Friendship Association, 1993).
12. On Liotard and his contemporaries in Istanbul, see Auguste Boppe, *Les orientalistes: Les peintres du Bosphore au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: ACR Edition, 1989); for Lady Mary's letters, see P. Halsband, ed., *Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, vol. 1 of 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); and C. Pick, ed., *Embassy to Constantinople: The Travels of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (New York: New Amsterdam, 1988).

Court and Conquest

*Ottoman Origins and the
Design for Handel's Tamerlano at the
Glimmerglass Opera*

FEATURING COSTUMES DESIGNED
BY JUDY LEVIN

The Equitable Gallery, New York,
November 19, 1998 – January 23, 1999

The Kent State University Museum, Kent, Ohio,
February 17 – April 25, 1999

WALTER B. DENNY, AILEEN RIBEIRO,
JUDY LEVIN, JEAN DRUESDOW

THE KENT STATE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM,
KENT, OHIO