The Ottomans | The Visual Language of Power

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The power of the sultan, or of the regional rulers, was often proclaimed quite openly and obviously in visual form. Architecture was most useful towards this end; a grandiose building, dominating the neighbourhood or (even better) the city skyline, makes a bold statement of power. On a smaller scale, the power of the ruler could be announced explicitly in written form, such as by including his name or title in the decoration of a building or even a manuscript. The imperial tughra is perhaps the most memorable example of this aspect of the visual language of power.

Name: Topkapı Palace
Dynasty: Construction began in hegira 9th century / AD 15th century, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II (his second reign: AH 855–86 / AD 1451–81); the last addition was made under Sultan Abdülmecid [‘Abd al-Majid] (r. AH 1255–77 / AD 1839–61) in hegira 13th century / AD 19th century Ottoman
Details: Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey
Justification: For about 400 years the vast Ottoman Empire was administered from the Topkapı Palace. The palace was stoutly fortified and guarded within the magnificent city walls of Istanbul.

Name: Süleymaniye Complex
Dynasty: Hegira 957–64 / AD 1550–7 Classical Ottoman
Details: Süleymaniye, Istanbul, Turkey
Justification: Süleymaniye Mosque is one of the monuments to dominate the skyline of Istanbul.

Name: #shak Pa#a Palace
Dynasty: Hegira 1199 / AD 1784 Ottoman
Details: Do#ubeyaz#, A#r#, Turkey
Justification: The sultans were not the only individuals to build grandiose palaces that imitated the central power; governors over the regions also did so.

Name: Mosque of Muhammad Ali Pasha
Dynasty:
Hegira 1265 / AD 1848 Ottoman

Details:
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
Muhammad ‘Ali built this mosque overlooking Cairo as a symbol of his power.

Name:
Kasbah (citadel)

Dynasty:
Between hegira 959 and 980 / AD 1552 and 1572; AH 1000 / AD 1591 Ottoman

Details:
Algiers, Algeria

Justification:
This imposing ensemble, a fortress, represented a very succinct reminder of the ruler’s power.