

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 hejira 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 hejira 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:
Hejira 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:
Şah Paşa Palace

Dynasty:
hejira 1199 / AD 1784 Ottoman

Details:
Doğubeyazıt, Ankara, 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.
