

The Ottomans | The Visual Language of Power

‘For as long as people have held power, they have looked for ways in which to demonstrate it.’

For as long as people have held power, they have looked for ways in which to demonstrate it to both those under its sway and to those outside it. In particular, art and architecture have often been used to create a ‘visual language’ through which to proclaim power. Such visual proclamations have taken many forms over the centuries; sometimes they are quite overt and unmistakable, while at other times they are more subtle and implicit. The art and architecture of the Ottoman period includes an instructive range of examples by which the power of the sultan and of the Ottoman state was manifest in a visual form.



Name:
Star tiles

Dynasty:
During the reign of Sultan Alaaddin ('Ala al-Din) Keykubad I (r. hegira 616–35 / AD 1220–37) Anatolian Seljuq

Details:
Karatay Madrasa Tile Museum
Konya, Türkiye

Justification:
Many of the figures on tiles such as these are thought to have been symbolic of the power held by the state. These tiles are of the Anatolian Seljuq period.



Name:
Tu#ra of Sultan Osman III

Dynasty:
Hegira 1170 / AD 1756–7 Ottoman

Details:
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Türkiye

Justification:
This tughra represents Sultan Osman III and served as an overt symbol of his power.



Name:
Tent

Dynasty:
Hegira 11th century / AD 17th century Ottoman

Details:
Army Museum
Stockholm, Sweden

Justification:
A tent used by high-ranking Ottoman officials on campaign, and decorated so as to befit their rank. The tent was captured from the Turks in 1683 during the second siege of Vienna.

**Name:**

Tent hanging

Dynasty:

Hegira 11th century / AD late 16th–early 17th century Ottoman

Details:

National Museums of Scotland (NMS)
Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom

Justification:

Such a hanging would have adorned the tent of an important Ottoman official.

**Name:**

Tile panel

Dynasty:

Late hegira 10th/AD 16th century Ottoman

Details:

Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:

The Ottomans used a distinct visual style to identify 'their' buildings.
