

The Ottomans

From humble origins as a small emirate in Northwest Anatolia, the Ottomans rose to become one of the greatest Islamic empires in history. For centuries they stood as a world power, the centre of the Islamic world and a serious competitor to the West. The Ottoman dynasty began as one of a number of Anatolian beyliks, or emirates, in the late AH 7th / AD 13th century. Gradually they overcame their neighbours to become the strongest Muslim power in the region and, when they put an end to the Byzantine Empire by conquering Constantinople (Istanbul) in AH 857 / AD 1453, their status as an international power was secure. Further conquests over the 9th–10th / 15th–16th centuries gave the Ottomans control over an empire spanning much of the Mediterranean, southeastern Europe, the Arabian Peninsula, and of course Anatolia. This vast empire was governed under a highly centralised system, with the centre of power in Istanbul. Supreme authority rested with the sultan, although he was constrained by Islamic law. An extensive network of local governors ensured that the imperial writ was observed throughout the Ottoman lands. Ottoman art was profoundly influenced by this centralised system. Although its roots were in Anatolia, and it drew inspiration from sources as disparate as the cultures the empire had subsumed, the art of the Ottomans was in very large part devised in and disseminated from the imperial-court workshops in Istanbul. This resulted in the Ottoman style being consistent over an astonishingly wide geographic area. Whether decorating a palace or a mosque, adorning their own houses, or creating products for export to an eager European market, the Ottomans adhered to an aesthetic generated at the top. It was an aesthetic shaped by the Ottoman's deep Islamic piety, as seen in the emphasis on floral elements redolent of Paradise. The Ottoman Empire ended in the wake of World War I, but its art continues to captivate us today.

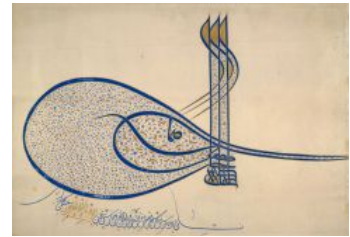


Topkapı Palace

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

Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Türkiye



Tughra (imperial monogram)

About hegira 956 / AD 1550

Ottoman

The British Museum

London, England, United Kingdom