

The Ottomans | The Visual Language of Power

‘Such decoration need not fill a large building; it can bestow the grandeur of empire on even a tent.’

The visual language of power need not be overt. Art has been used in ingeniously subtle ways to communicate a sense of the powerful. Elaborate architectural decoration, for example, by surrounding the viewer with a dazzling array of exquisite ornament, creates an aesthetic ambience reflective of the power of the patron. Such decoration need not fill a large building; it can bestow the grandeur of empire on even a tent. Spectacular displays of craftsmanship, too, form part of this visual language. When the sultan or his officials wore precious garments bedecked with elaborately worked ornament, whether actual symbols of rank (such as aigrettes) or simply useful accoutrements (like the links of a belt), the display of the wealth and skill at their disposal implicitly proclaimed their power.

**Name:**

Throne of Sultan Ahmed I

Dynasty:

During the reign of Sultan Ahmed I (Hegira 1011–26 / AD 1603–17) Ottoman

Details:

Topkapı Palace Museum
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification:

The throne of Sultan Ahmed I is a combination of the visual language of power and the fine artistic taste of the period.

**Name:**

Aigrette-holders

Dynasty:

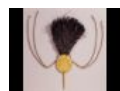
421 and 419: Hegira 10th century / AD 16th century; 438: Hegira last quarter of the 10th century / AD 16th century; 447: Hegira last quarter of the 11th century / 17th century Ottoman

Details:

Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification:

Aigrettes were prominent symbols of royal authority and of military rank.

**Name:**

Aigrette-holders

Dynasty:

421 and 419: Hegira 10th century / AD 16th century; 438: Hegira last quarter of the 10th century / AD 16th century; 447: Hegira last quarter of the 11th century / 17th century Ottoman

Details:

Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification:

Aigrettes were prominent symbols of royal authority and of military rank.

**Name:**

Bejewelled ivory belts

Dynasty:

Hegira, first half of the 10th century / AD 16th century Ottoman

Details:

Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts

Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification:

Exquisite accessories like these belts advertised the status and power of the wearer.

**Name:**

Table

Dynasty:

Probably around hegira 966 / AD 1560 Ottoman

Details:

Victoria and Albert Museum

London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:

This table is thought to have been used in the reception room of a palace to impress visiting officials and diplomats.
