



Smithsonian Associates

Turkey: A Portrait of Artistic Richness

Nigel McGilchrist

Saturday, February 21, 2026 - 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ET

On the Execution of Süleiman's son
Sehzade Mustafa.

O King of Noble Blood, is this justice?
You may be Lord of the world, but is this proper government?
Is this the practice of the great Emperors of history?
Is this the practical wisdom of those who rule with judgement and skill?
You may be Muhibbi, but is this affection?
Is this tenderness to kill someone as dear to you as Mustafa?
You killed him deluded by a lying trick: where is the truth in that?
You have been deluded by the words of an enemy: is that love?
You have shed his blood. Is that the justice of a Caliph?
What has become of Mustafa? Why did you kill him, my Sultan?

Mehmet Hayali Bey,
Friday, October 6th 1533

Poem by Süleiman the Magnificent
to Roxelana

Throne of my lonely niche, my wealth, my love, my moonlight.
My most sincere friend, my confidant, my very existence, my Sultan
The most beautiful among the beautiful...
My springtime, my merry faced love, my daytime,

My sweetheart laughing leaf...
My plants, my sweet, my rose,
 The one only who does not distress me in this world...
My Istanbul, my Caraman, the earth of my Anatolia
My Badakhshan, my Baghdad and Khorasan
My woman of the beautiful hair, my love of the slanted brow,
My love of eyes full of mischief...
I'll sing your praises always
 I, lover of the tormented heart, Muhibbi of the eyes full of tears,
 I am happy.

Pliny the Younger

Letters 10.96-97. (112/113 AD.)

Pliny to the Emperor Trajan

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought

should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.

Trajan to Pliny

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

Black Sea Deluge Hypothesis:

Ryan, William; Walter Pitman (1997). [Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About The Event That Changed History](#). Simon & Schuster. ISBN 978-0-684-85920-0.

Durupinar at Mount Ararat - ?Noah's Ark

https://www.academia.edu/105266586/Durupinar_Debunked_A_Comprehensive_Analysis_Debunking_the_Claims_of_Noahs_Ark_at_the_Durupinar_Site

Göbekli Tepe

https://web.archive.org/web/20120131114925/http://arheologija.ff.uni-lj.si/documenta/authors37/37_21.pdf

The Cnidian Aphrodite of Praxiteles

There are works by him at Athens in the Cerameicus; and yet superior to anything not merely by Praxiteles, but in the whole world, is the Venus, which many people have sailed to Cnidus to see. He had made two figures, which he put up for sale together. One of them was draped and for this reason was preferred by the people of Cos, who had an option on the sale, although he offered it at the same price as the other. This they considered to be the only decent and dignified course of action. The statue which they refused was purchased by the people of Cnidus and achieved an immeasurably greater reputation. Later King Nicomedes was anxious to buy it from them, promising so to discharge all the state's vast debts. The Cnidians, however, preferred to suffer anything but this, and rightly so; for with this statue Praxiteles made Cnidus a famous city. The shrine in which it stands is entirely open so as to allow the image of the goddess to be viewed from every side, and it is believed to have been made in this way with the blessing of the goddess herself. The statue is equally admirable from every angle. There is a story that a man once fell in love with it and hiding by night embraced it, and that a stain betrays this lustful act.

Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, Book XXXVI, VII. 127

We entered the temple, in the midst of which is found the goddess — a most beautiful statue of Parian marble—proudly smiling a little with her lips parted. Draped by no garment, all her beauty is uncovered and revealed, except in so far as she unobtrusively uses one hand to hide her private parts. So great was the power of the craftsman's art that the hard unyielding marble did justice to every limb....The temple had a door on both sides for the benefit of those also who wish to have a good view of the goddess from behind, so that no part of her be left unadmired. It is easy therefore for people to enter by the other door and survey the beauty of her back; and so we decided to see all of the goddess and went round to the back of the precinct. Then, when the door had been opened by the woman responsible for keeping the keys, we were filled with an immediate amazement for the beauty which we beheld.

Liutprand of Cremona's legation
to the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus Phocas in 968

In Constantinople, there is a palace of marvelous beauty and size, which the Greeks call Magnaura. In front of the emperor's throne stood a tree made of gilded bronze, whose branches, also of gilded bronze, were filled with birds of various sizes that sang according to their species.

The emperor's throne was constructed so that at one moment it was low, then higher, and finally extremely tall, beside it were lions of immense size (although it was unclear whether they were made of wood or bronze, they were certainly covered in gold) that seemed to guard him, striking the ground with their tails, they roared with open mouths and flickering tongues.

When I was led before the emperor, the lions roared and the birds chirped, each according to its kind. After bowing to the emperor three times, I lifted my head and, while I had previously seen him seated slightly above the ground, I suddenly saw him dressed in different garments, almost at the height of the palace ceiling. I could not understand how he managed this, unless perhaps he had been lifted there by some mechanism.

He did not speak at all himself, because even if he had wished to, the great distance between us would have made it impossible; instead, he addressed me through an official.

Liutprand of Cremona,
Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana, Book 6 (5)

Walnut Tree

Nazim Hikmet

My head is a foaming cloud, sea inside me and out,
I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park,

An ancient walnut, all knotted and scarred:
You don't know this, and the police don't either.

I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park;
My leaves are nimble, sparkling like fish in water,
My leaves are sheer, fluttering like silk handkerchiefs.
Take one and wipe the tear from your eyes, my rose.
My leaves are my hands; I have a hundred thousand hands:
Istanbul, I touch you with one hundred thousand hands;
My leaves are my eyes, I look in amazement,
I watch you, Istanbul, with a hundred thousand eyes,
And my leaves beat, beat like a hundred thousand hearts.

I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park.
You don't know this, and the police don't either.

July 1957

The Great Turks Declaration of War against the Emperour of Germany (At his Pallace at Adrinople, February 20, 1683)

Mahomet Son of Emperours, Son to the famous and glorious God, Emperour of the *Turks*, King of *Graecia*, *Macedonia*, *Samaria*, and the Holy-land, King of Great and Lesser *Egypt*, King of all the Inhabitants of the Earth, and of the Earthly Paradise, Obedient Prince and Son of *Mahomet*, Preserver of the Towns of *Hungaria*, Possessour of the Sepulcher of your God, Lord of all the Emperours of the World, from the rising of the Sun to the going down thereof, King of all Kings, Lord of the Tree of Life, Conquerour of *Melonen*, *Itegly*, and the City *Protenix*, Great Pursuer of the Christians, Joy of the flourishing World, Commander and Guardian of the Crucified God, Lord of the Multitude of Heathens.

We Command you to greet the Emperour Leopold (in case he desire it) and you are our Friends, and a Friend to our Majesty, whose Power we will extend very far.) Thus,

You have for some time past acted to our prejudice, and violated our Friendship, although we have not offended you, neither by War, or any otherwise; but you have taken private advice with other Kings, and your Council's how to take off your Yoke, in which you have acted very Indiscreetly, and thereby have exposed your People to fear and danger, having nothing to expect but Death, which you have brought upon your selves. For I declare unto you, I will make my self your Master, pursue you from *East to West*, and extend my Majesty to the end of the Earth; in all which you shall find my Power to your great prejudice. I assure you that you shall feel the weight of my Power; and for that you have put your hope and expectation in the strength of some Towns and Castles, I have given command to overthrow them, and to trample under feet with my Horses, all that is acceptable and pleasant in your Eyes, leaving nothing hereafter by which you shall make a friendship with me, or any fortified places to put your trust in: For I have resolved without retarding of time, to ruin both you and your People, to take the *German* Empire according to my pleasure, and to leave in the Empire a Commemoration of my dreadful Sword, that it may appear to all, it will be a pleasure to me, to give a publick establishment of my Religion, and to pursue your Crucified God, whose Wrath I fear not, nor his coming to your Assistance, to deliver you out of my hands. I will according to my pleasure put your Sacred Priests to the Plough, and expose the Brests of your Matrons to be Suckt by Dogs and other Beasts.

You will therefore do well to forsake your Religion, or else I will give Order to Consume you with Fire. This is enough said unto you, and to give you to understand what I would have, in case you have a mind to know it.

A DEFIANCE AND INDICTION OF WAR SENT BY SULTAN MAHOMET IV. TO LEOPALD EMPEROUR OF GERMANY, WHEREBY HE DOES DETERMINE THE CONFUSION AND RUIN OF THE EMPIRE, AND OF THE PRINCES OF CHRISTENDOM, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF VIENNA THE IMPERIAL CITY.

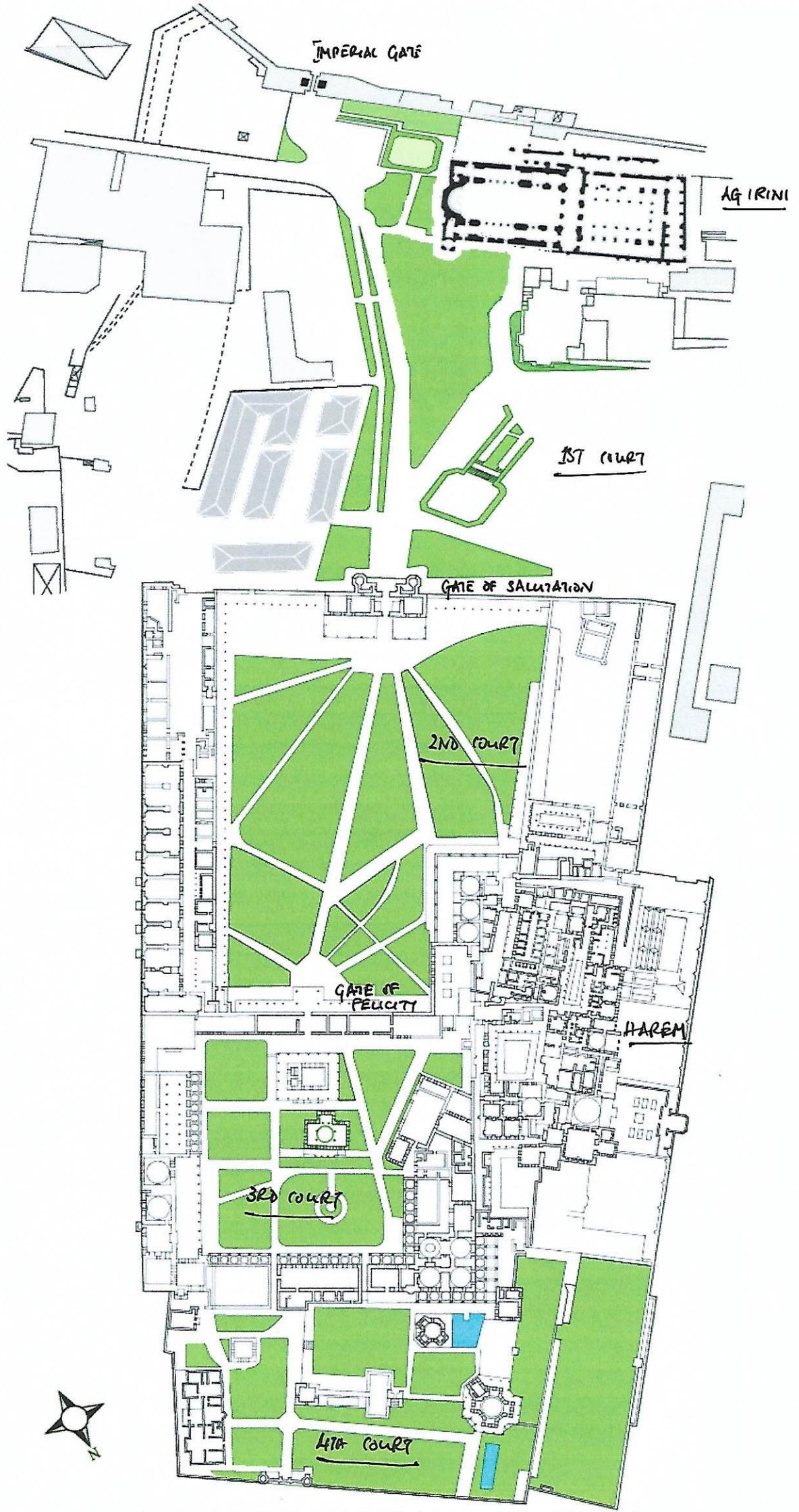
BY the sufferance and power of the great God, We Sultan Mahomet, God on Earth, High and Omnipotent Emperor of all the World, Defender of the Mahometan Faith, Patron and Protector of all Christians which submit and give obedience to our Imperial Commands, We send and declare unto thee Leopald, all wrath, calamity and infelicity, and a total Ruin and destruction to all thy Princes, Subjects and Abettors; We Publish, and truly declare unto thee, and to the whole Universe, That we by the sufferance and power of the great God, stiled and named the Omnipotent and Universal God on Earth, most High and Mighty Emperour, Soldan in Babylon, Lord of America, the most mighty in Persipolis and Numidia, the great Assistant and helper of God, Prince from the Road of Barbary unto the Mountains of Achaia, King of Kings from the Meridian to the Septentrian of the Earth, from the rising place of the Sun to the setting of it, supream Commander of all the Seas in the Universe, the first and chiefest placed in the Paradice of Mahomet, the Calamity and destroyer of Christendom and of all Hereticks, Infidels and Christians, the keeper and defender of the Sepulcher of thy Crucified God, the only victorious and Triumphant Lord and Sovereign of all the World, and of all the Dominions and Territories thereof, Thou Leopald, which stilest and writest thy self King of our Kingdom of Hungary, which is under our Obey|sance, We will visit thee again for that cause, and also with our strength and might of thirteen Kingdoms, with the power and force of our Janizaries, Saphies, Asaphies, to the number of 300000 as well Horsemen and Footmen prepared for War, with all the power and strength of Munition, and with such power as thou nor none of thy Servants have seen, heard, or had know|ledge of, even before thy chief City Vienna, and the Country thereabouts. We Sultan Mahomet, supream God on Earth, against thee with all thy Aiders, Helpers and Abettors which our Warlike strength do pronounce, declare, and protest your utter|most destruction, ruin and depopulation, as we can by all means possible devise and contrive: And this we do signifie unto thee, to the which thou and thy inseparable people may prepare your selves. With us it is determined, with our men appointed, thee and all thy German Kingdoms, Territories and Dominions finally to confound and destroy: This Misery and Calamity we have con|sented unto against thee and thy Princes; and have thou no doubt but we will come. And We the Almighty God of the whole Universe, do hereby further declare, That all those who shall submit themselves to our Omnipotency, and yield obedience to our Commands, shall not only be protected and rewarded with Territories and Lands according to their respective Merit, but shall have Liberty of Conscience, and a free exercise of their Relig|on, let them be Jews or Greeks, Otocompadians or Lutherans, or Calvinists, or of any other Perswasion, other than Idolaters, and Jesuits whom we do abhor, and do propose to prosecute with Fire and Sword. In these Resolutions we doubt not of the Con|currence, Affection, and well wishes of all good People. Dated in the City of Constantinople, out of which we did ba|nish your Predecessors, their Wives, Children and Friends, and made them most miserable Slaves and Captives, the Year of our Reign Thirty Sixth.

On the Execution of Süleiman's son
Şehzade Mustafa.

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Mehmet Hayali Bey,
Friday, October 6th 1533





Skeleton time-line for
Byzantium / Constantinople / Istanbul

667 bc	'Byzantium' founded by Byzas of Megara
203 ad	Septimius Severus rebuilds and enlarges 'Byzantium'
324	Constantine the Great defeats Licinius at Chrysopolis (Üsküdar/Scoutari)
330	Constantine refounds Byzantium as 'Nova Roma' (Constantinople)
408	Theodosius II builds new land walls for the city
532-7	Justinian builds Haghia Sophia
1071	Byzantine army heavily defeated by Seljuk Turks at Battle of Manzikert
1326	Osman I takes Bursa and makes it the first Ottoman capital
1346	Sultan Orhan captures and moves capital to Edirne (Adrianopolis)
1451	Mehmet II builds Roumeli Hisar on the west shore of the Bosphorus
1453	Mehmet II takes Constantinople
1520-66	Reign of Suleyman the Magnificent
1529	The Ottoman Siege of Vienna
1920	The Ottoman Empire divided up (Treaty of Sèvres), after WWI defeat
1922	At war with Greece
1923	Republic of Turkey created under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk
1923	Ankara replaces Istanbul as capital of Turkey
1938	Death of Atatürk
1987	Turkey applies to join European Union