

*An Instigative Attitude: “Conspicuous Consumption” at the Ottoman Court by the Patrons during Suleyman I’s Reign**

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Kışkırtıcı Bir Davranış: Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Döneminde Osmanlı Sarayı’nda “Gösteriş için Tüketim” ve Patronlar

Özet

Amerikalı sosyolog Veblen’in “gösteriş için tüketim” diye adlandırdığı malın mülkün halka sergilenmesi durumu, 16. yüzyıl Osmanlı sarayında statü ve gücü yansıtan önemli yollarından biri olmuştur. Bu durum aynı zamanda Osmanlı toplumunda yüksek bir pozisyona ulaşmak için de zorunlu bir hale gelmiştir.

Osmanlı sarayında, sultan gibi, şehzadeler, valide sultanlar, vezirler ve hazinedarbaşları da birer patron (sanat hamisi) olmuşlardır. Kanuni Sultan Süleyman’ın saltanatı zamanında (1520-1566) sanatla ilgili işler, başvezir veya sarayda zanaatçı örgütünün (Ehl-i Hiref) başında olan hazinedarbaşı tarafından yürütülmüştür. Bundan dolayı, bu tür iç içe geçmiş ilişkiler, patronaj açısından karmaşık bir patron / müşteri ilişkisi yaratmıştır; bu ilişkiler içinde sultan her zaman üslup yaratıcı konumunda olmamıştır.

Egemenliğin vazgeçilmez özelliklerin biri olan ihtişam fikrini öne çıkaran Başvezir İbrahim Paşa (1523–1536), Venedikli tüccar ve sanatçılarla olan yakın ilişkileri sayesinde Osmanlı sarayındaki gösteriş için tüketimi harekete geçiren en önemli ve güçlü patronlardan biri olarak öne çıkmıştır.

Bu makalede, başvezirler gibi Osmanlı sarayında yüksek statüye sahip görevlilerin sultan için sanat üretimine nasıl katıldıkları açıklanmaya çalışılacaktır. Ayrıca, bu görevlilerin, Osmanlı Devleti ve “dünya hükümdarı” olan sultanın evrensel egemenliklerini meşrulaştırmada kullandıkları etkili unsurlardan biri olan siyasal statüyü güçlendirmek amacıyla “gösteriş için tüketim”i nasıl harekete geçirdikleri de tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kanuni Sultan Süleyman, Osmanlı Sarayı, sanat hamiliği, gösteriş için tüketim, prestij

Abstract

The public display of wealth in the form of material possessions, what the American sociologist Veblen called “conspicuous consumption” has always been an important way of projecting royal status and power at the Ottoman Court of 16th century. At the same time, consumption in order to create pomposity was an inevitable fact to acquire a high position in the Ottoman society.

In the Ottoman Court, princes, valide sultans, vizierate and chief treasurers were the patrons of art as well as the sultan. In Suleyman I’s reign, artistic commissions of the sultan were usually conducted by the grand vizier or the chief treasurer who was at the head of the organization of royal artisans (Ehl-i Hiref). Hence, such interconnected relations created a complex network of patron/client relations for the patronage of art, in which the sultan was not always the chief tastemaker.

Promoting the ideal of magnificence as an indispensable attribute of sovereignty, Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha (1523-1536) was one of the most powerful and significant patron who instigated conspicuous consumption at the Ottoman Court in terms of his close relations with Venetian merchants and artisans.

In this paper, it is intended to investigate the involvement of high rank officers, such as grand vizierate, with the art production for the sultan in and outside the Ottoman Court, and how they instigated the conspicuous consumption in order to reinforce their political status, as it was also a powerful fact for the legitimating of universal sovereignty of the Ottoman State and the sultan as the ruler of the world.

Key words: Suleyman I, Ottoman Court, art patronage, conspicuous consumption, prestige

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The display of wealth in the form of material possessions, what the American sociologist Veblen called “conspicuous consumption”(1) has always been an important way of projecting royal status and power at the Ottoman Court of 16th century. At the same time, consumption in order to create pomposity was an inevitable fact to acquire a high position in the Ottoman society. In the Ottoman Court, princes, valide sultans, vizierate and chief treasurers were the patrons of art as well as the sultan. In Suleyman I’s (1520-1566) reign, artistic commissions of the sultan were usually conducted by the grand vizier or the chief treasurer who was at the head of the organization of royal artisans (Ehl-i Hiref)(2). Hence, such interconnected relations created a complex network of patron/client relations for the patronage of art, in which the sultan was not always the chief tastemaker(3).

In this paper, it is intended to investigate the involvement of the sultan himself and the high rank officials, such as grand viziers, with the art production for the sultan in and outside the Ottoman Court, and how they instigated the conspicuous consumption in order to reinforce their political status, as it was also a powerful fact for the legitimating of universal sovereignty of the Ottoman State and the sultan as the ruler of the world.

According to Gülru Necipoğlu, promoting the ideal of magnificence as an indispensable attribute of sovereignty, Grand Vizier İbrahim Paşa (1523-1536) was one of the most powerful patron who instigated conspicuous consumption at the Ottoman Court in terms of his close relations with Venetian merchants and artisans. Owing to these close relations, he possessed expensive ceremonial objects for the sultan, which resulted with a great expenditure of an enormous fortune to exhibit the sultan’s magnificence to the world. However İbrahim Paşa’s preoccupation with pomp eventually led to his execution in 1536. This instigative attitude of his changed dramatically after the appointments to the post of grand vizierate of Ayas Paşa (1536-1539), Lütfi Paşa(1539-41) and Rüstem Paşa (1544-53/1555-61) respectively. These grand viziers were characterized by a consistent avoidance of conspicuous consumption at the Ottoman Court(4).

In certain societies, artists generally convey their art within the borders of dominant culture and social relations. According to Halil İnalcık, this is quite obvious in a patrimonial society like the Ottoman

society that social and political status was only defined by the absolute ruler. The Ottoman sultan, “Sahib-i Mülk”, was always the supportive patron of arts. Being the patron of arts is associated with the definition of “patrimonial state”. In a patrimonial state structure, state power, sovereignty, mülk (land) and tebaa (subjects) are absolutely possessed by the ruler and the ruler’s family(5).

The reign of Süleyman was not only the high point of political and economic development, but also the golden age of Ottoman culture. Artistic production flourished under the demanding and generous patronage of the sultan himself, his extended family, and his high rank officials. Their wealth and ability to employ the most talented craftsmen, coupled with the idea of patronage as a responsibility of the state played a major role in the formation of a distinct taste. At the Topkapı Palace, Grand vizier was responsible for the organization of artistic production. Furthermore, one of the most important eunuchs, the Head Treasurer, who was at the head of the court ateliers (Nakkashane) was also the mediator for arts(6). On the other hand, ceremonial of the Topkapı palace that required the sultan to seclude himself in his private household at the Third Courtyard, hardly allowed him to be directly in contact with the artists; his commissions were given by the Grand Vizier or the Head Treasurer. Because the sultan was not always the tastemaker, it could be said that the artistic production at the Ottoman court changed according to the taste of high rank officials causing diverse artistic styles(7).

İbrahim Paşa, who was Süleyman’s Grand Vizier between 1523 and 1536, was an important character in determining the artistic disposition of the Ottoman court. At the time of İbrahim Paşa, court ateliers were employed by Iranian masters who were brought by Selim I. from Tebriz in 1514, and this caused the domination of Iranian artistic taste on the objects produced in the court ateliers. Furthermore, together with the Iranian effects, European artistic taste had also influenced this production through İbrahim Paşa’s Venetian advisor Alvise Gritti, who quickly became important at the Ottoman Court. Süleyman’s childhood training as a goldsmith brought out his great interest in collecting rare and valuable gems. It also encouraged a lively jewel trade with Venice in which Gritti was the key figure. It was the time of İbrahim Paşa when Suleyman’s sultanate had seen the peak of pomp and magnificence in visual cul-

ture. Especially in this period, consuming highly expensive and splendid objects were accepted as the primary matter for displaying authority(8).

Presenting the sultan with costly jewels, İbrahim Paşa seemed to be encouraging the conspicuous consumption at the Ottoman court. For example, according to Ali Seydi Bey's accounts, in 1525, he presented a gold cup inlaid with enormous diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and pearls worth 200,000 ducats, which he brought from Cairo(9). Other than these expensive gifts, a hundred male and female slaves, and sixty three Arab horses were brought from Cairo; indeed, the horse that İbrahim Paşa rode on the way to Egypt had a saddlecloth worth 170,000 golden coins. As he entered in Istanbul, he was welcomed with a ceremony, and this time his horse's saddlecloth worth 250,000 golden coins. In addition, there were two inventories indicating İbrahim Paşa's treasures he accumulated in Cairo. The descriptions made for those treasures in the inventories of 1536 showed that he possessed a fortune surpassing even those owned by the sultan(10).

According to Gülru Necipoğlu, there are three Venetian woodcuts and an engraving by Agostino Veneziano depicting Süleyman with a fantastic head-gear. It is a golden helmet produced for the sultan by Venetian goldsmiths in 1532. Besides a plumed aigrette with a crescent-shaped mount, the golden helmet had four crowns with enormous twelve-carat pearls, a head band with pointed diamonds, and a neck guard with straps. Featuring fifty diamonds, forty seven rubies, twenty-seven emeralds, forty-nine pearls, and a large turquoise, it was valued at a total of 144,400 ducats, including the cost of its velvet-lined gilt ebony case. Gülru Necipoğlu suggests that İbrahim Paşa seems to have been the guiding spirit behind the Venetian helmet project and he might well have been provided gold and jewels for it from his collection(11).

Another significant event of İbrahim Paşa's period was his wedding. Suleyman prepared a wedding for the marriage of his sister to İbrahim Paşa with an unprecedented wedding ceremony in 22 May 1524 in Istanbul. As the Venetian historian Sanuto told, the wedding was magnificent and eight different feasts were held in the Hippodrome. İbrahim Paşa displayed the gifts to the public in the early morning. These gifts were carried by some of the court attendants and slaves. The golden vessels were carried by the beauti-

fully dressed slaves; silk and gilded silver thread fabrics, white fox and lynx furs were carried by Janissaries. Behind them were the court attendants walking with forty horses, carrying a diamond worth 25,000 ducats and some other valuable gems. It took a whole morning and an afternoon to carry the bride's dowries; after the dowries' had been carried, İbrahim Paşa's paronymph (best man) Ayas Paşa's gifts arrived, which were carried by sixty mules. The bride's paronymph also gave earrings as a gift worth four thousand ducats. Before the evening prayer, İbrahim Paşa gave gold to the bride worth a hundred thousand ducats in front of her relatives; in return, the bride gave back the half of it, which was fifty thousand ducats, showing how much she loved him(12).

Rustem Paşa, who was promoted to the post of Grand Vizier in 1544, had been effective in constituting the classical synthesis in artistic production of the last two decades of Suleyman's reign. He was known for his stiff policy in economical issues, as he objected to import luxury goods such as textiles and jewelleries from Europe that literally happened during İbrahim Paşa's time; and also rejected the expensive and luxurious objects brought by foreign ambassadors as diplomatic gifts(13).

During Rustem Paşa's grand vizierate, goldsmiths were not important as they were used to be. However, the number of weavers that was twenty seven in 1526, reached the number of hundred and five in 1545 and hundred and fifty six in 1557. In the last years of Suleyman's reign, weavers became the major group of craftsmen in court ateliers; among them painters were of a secondary group(14).

The production of luxury objects at the Ottoman court ateliers had taken its roots from the Mongol-Timurid and Safavid artistic traditions(15). In Suleyman's reign, the system of artistic production was transformed into a centralized structure. In the reign of Mehmed the Second, craftsmen at the court ateliers could not work in collaboration. It was only after Bayezid the Second's time that the ateliers' structure was systemized, and certain craftsmen that Selim I. had brought from the conquered cities of Cairo and Tabriz were added to this structure. Furthermore, after the conquests, together with the craftsmen, precious illuminated manuscripts were brought to the court and preserved in the sultan's private library(16). However, in Suleyman's reign, the structure of court

ateliers' was changed; recruit masters known as devshirme, raised in different parts of the empire, were gradually replaced by the masters from Tabriz who dominated the court ateliers in 1520's and 1530's. As Süleyman's reign came to an end, the regulation of employing recruit children was continued. Recruit system, which was about training talented non-Muslim children to bring up loyal officials to the sultan and the empire, and including them to the central structure, also became a part of artistic production. Through this system, loyal viziers, commanders, soldiers and artists were located to certain state ranks and acquired their status only from the sultan. Having a non-Muslim background and having been educated at the palace from a young age, recruits reflected the multilingual and multicultural composition of the empire itself. It could be said that recruits were influential in the formation of classical synthesis in Ottoman art as they were employed in court ateliers from the second half of the 16th century(17).

The other factor in achieving the classical synthesis in Ottoman art was the abandoning of European artistic taste. In the last decade of Süleyman's reign, it was eventually realized that the ideal of universal rulership, adopted from the time of Mehmed the Second, could not be fulfilled(18). This led to an attitude of defining a unique identity within the political borders of the empire. In Mehmed the Second's reign, inviting famous European artists such as Matteo de Pasti, Gentile Bellini and Costanzo da Ferrara, denotes intense relationship between Europeans and Ottomans. From the time of Mehmed the Second, Ottoman court had been an alternative source for European artists in terms of artistic production. In the meantime, it had been a different experience for them to produce art for the sultans at the heart of the Ottoman Empire which had lands both in the West and East. With the conquest of Istanbul, Ottoman Empire came to be a major point in the European politics, and executed a cultural programme that owned universal ideals in the reign of Mehmed the Second. This programme was opened both to West's and East's artistic dispositions. Süleyman also adopted this ideals, which were about to animate the goal of uniting Rome and Istanbul under a new World Empire. However, in the mid of Süleyman's reign, it became only a dream to establish a world empire under one absolute rule in the Mediterranean. In this way, universal ideals were replaced by national ideals, so the European images were not used in status symbols in respect of changing cultural policies during

Süleyman's reign of 1540's and 1550's. This period could be identified as the classical period of the Ottoman culture and arts and the time that it gained its unique Ottoman identity. With the central control system established on artistic production and patronage, the unity in visual language that represented the Ottoman court was achieved. Furthermore, the constant salaries paid to artists formed a distinctive court culture; artists were encouraged for higher quality productions with the prizes given at the completion of each work. Visual culture had taken its shape around the Ottoman court in Istanbul which was the centre of the empire. Disseminated from the centre, visual culture possessed a distinctive and a connective feature on Ottoman identity. In the Ottoman political language, authority was identified with being close or far to the centre, therefore the system of these visual signs narrowed the spatial distances which caused an approval of one unique cultural formation. Visual unity in the artistic production throughout the last years of Süleyman's reign was transformed into signs of distinction for the ruling class and the public. It also served as a signification in identifying the hierarchy among the ruling class(19).

If the Ottoman classical age generated high quality art works in Süleyman's reign, it could be said that the sultan's exquisite taste of art was instrumental in artistic production. Yet, the quality of an art work and the fame of an artist were mostly assessed by the sultan, in which the appreciation and the acceptance were merely related to the sultan's favor(20). From this aspect, production of a manuscript named "Süleymanname"(21) by the order of Süleyman in the last decade of his reign draws attention to his position as a patron of arts. As from the 1550's, changing cultural and ideological structure of Süleyman's policy gave way to the emergence of formalization of the imperial image. At this point, it is striking that Süleyman appointed a şehnameci (court historian) in 1550's to write a history of the Ottoman dynasty. Arifi was the first şehnameci appointed to this post. He completed his history "Şahnâme-i Al-i Osman" in 1558 which was consisted of five volumes. Süleymanname is the fifth volume of this history. According to the records of Aşıkpaşazade, Süleyman was pleased with the activities of Arifi; he was also pleased with the first chapters that Arifi wrote and appointed him to the post of şehnameci with a daily stipend of twenty five akçes (coins)(22). Furthermore, Süleyman commissioned a group of painters and calligraphers for this

history to be written and illustrated as a manuscript. Arifi's Süleymanname contains 30,000 verses on the meter of Firdausi's Şahname. It is the only intact volume preserved in its original library, is registered in the Treasury Collection of the Topkapı Palace. It has the most extensive text (617 folios) and the largest number of illustrations (69 paintings). Süleymanname could be accepted as one of the explicit models of art patronage in Süleyman's reign, referring to Süleyman as a powerful patron of the arts. Commissioning a şehnameci and a group of artists to write and illustrate an official history of his reign, Süleyman played an active role in constituting his own "universal ruler" image(23).

Süleymanname contains a magnificent gold-stamped leather binding and opens with a marvellous double folio, which is called "münacat", meaning "prayers". The beautiful illumination, juxtaposition of decorative elements and the refined technique are found in the works of Karamemi who headed the court ateliers in 1557-1558. Arifi begins the Süleymanname with a selection of verses from the Kur'an chosen specifically for the sultan. They appear in the gold cartouches above and below the text panels. The verses stress the qualities of justice, generosity and tolerance, and include a reference to Solomon, with whom the sultan shares his name as well as his reputation for judicial reform. Dramatic events between 1520 and 1555 of Süleyman's reign were narrated chronologically in the Süleymanname, which is consisted of sixty nine miniature paintings(24). It is possible to find visual expressions of sultanate and the magnificence of Suleyman's reign. Especially the scenes which depict the entertainments happening at the various pavillions of the Topkapı Palace and one at the Edirne Palace show a highly ornamented style with the extremely elaborate architecture consisting of various interlocking components adorned with diverse geometric and floral motifs. Painters constructed these scenes by employing intersecting circular, diagonal and horizontal formations at the apex of that which is the sultan(25)

Same approach in depicting the architecture of the Chamber of Petitions at the Topkapı Palace, where the receptions of foreign ambassadors take place, was used by the painters of Süleymanname. When it is thought that ceremonial was an instrument used in defining authority, receptions of foreign ambassadors could be perceived as a stage for displaying the

wealth and splendor of the Ottoman Empire. According to Gülru Necipoğlu, the actual effect of reception ceremonies at the Topkapı Palace could be derived from the perfect order of the ceremony that was perpetuated equally in the same way(26). Parallel to this, the reception scenes depicted in Süleymanname could be perceived as such scenes reflecting the magnificence and splendor of the empire as well as the absolute power of the sultan. One of the reception scenes in the Süleymanname shows that Suleyman is receiving Elkas Mirza, the brother of Safavid ruler Tahmasp in the Chamber of Petitions (Please see Fig.1.)(27) Suleyman, sitting on a throne and attended by his ministers, has permitted Elkas to be seated at his presence. In the foreground are thought to be the arcades of the Second Courtyard and the domed Babussaade. Several officials including a gatekeeper, four ic oglans, and three special corps of guards wait outside the gate. The brother of Shah Tahmasp, Elkas had rebelled against the Shah and escaped to Istanbul in 1547 after being defeated. He brought his court with him and asked to take refuge in the Ottoman lands. When Elkas arrived at the Ottoman capital Istanbul, Suleyman was in Edirne. By the end of that year, Suleyman entered the capital with a spectacular parade, displaying all the wealth and power of his empire, making sure that Elkas was watching it. In addition lots of gifts were presented to Elkas. This kind of pomp was not only a display in terms of relationships with the other states, but a central component of the dynastic diplomacy. This was important in asserting the status and the strategic value of an enemy or an ally in the eye of the Ottomans. In particular, Ottomans tended to display the most splendid and pompous reception ceremonies for their major Muslim rivals, the Safavids(28).

According to Ali Seydi Bey's records, who was a 19th century high rank official at the Ottoman court, the entrance parade was organized by various groups of court attendants. At the foremost of the parade there were mules, horses and camels loaded with treasuries, after them there were a thousand miners and artillerymen accompanied with four thousand cavalymen. Court officials such as viziers, nişancı (high rank secretary), and treasurers were following them with a flag bearers carrying four tailed flags. Every time Elkas Mirza saw that a parade was approaching, he stood up and greeted the head of the parade imagining he was the sultan. Eventually when he saw the sultan, he was amazed by the glory of the Ottomans. After a couple of days, Elkas Mirza was

received with a special ceremony at the Chamber of Petitions and Elkas and his council was presented with various gifts worth more than a hundred thousand gold(29). Possibly, the extreme elaborate architecture with various geometric and floral motifs used in this scene could be depicted to transmit this prestige and once again to draw attention to the wealth and power of the Ottoman State(30).

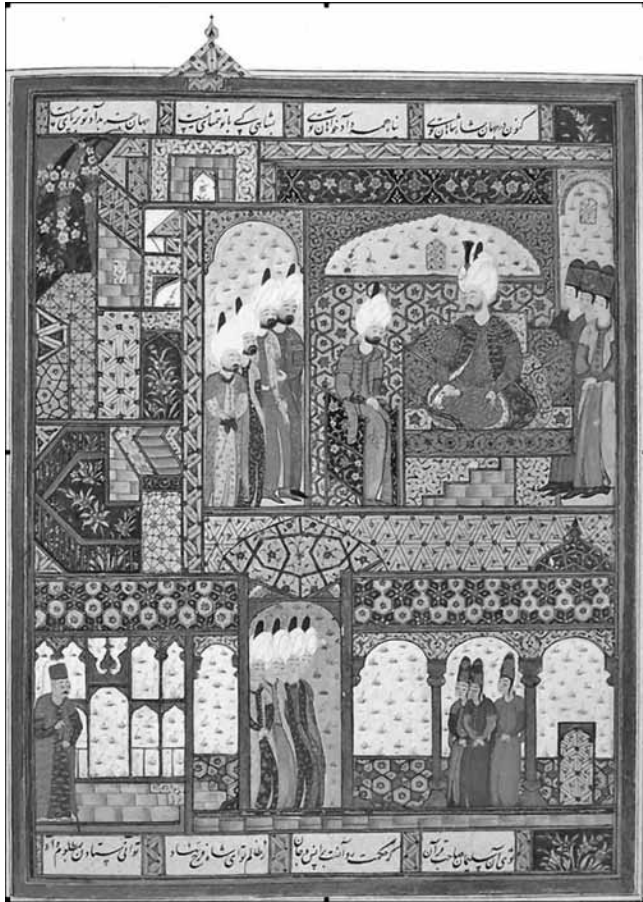


Figure 1. "Sultan Süleyman is receiving Shah Tahmasp's brother, Elkas Mirza", folio 471b, TSM H.1517.

In the Ottoman perspective of sultanate regarding the characteristics of authority, power relations were defined by signs. Characteristics that distinguish the sultan from the others, regulations of hierarchy and order, in other words all components that make the sultan unique, transform into signs of the sultan and the sultanate. During the reign of Süleyman, "conspicuous consumption" was one of the key factors in creating this uniqueness. Each object used or consumed by the sultan or by his family generated a dis-

play of the Ottoman political power in and outside the court and in front of the antagonistic states. In terms of power relations, "conspicuous consumption" had always been a valid process in defining the political and physical dominance.

NOTES

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10. Ali Seydi Bey; *ibid*, p. 210
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'Let Lastavica', Giacomo Balla, 1913.