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THE ICONOGRAPHY OF RENAISSANCE CEREMONIALS IN THE EARLY MODERN WORLD

Metin Mustafa*

Abstract: This article explores the iconography of Renaissance court ceremonials in the 16th century – how the East influenced the West – before the Orientalist trend and its impact on European visual culture during the latter part of the 17th and 18th centuries. From similar practices of using ceremonials and pageantries as representations of power and dynastic propaganda, to forging imperial and dynastic identities through myths, the Ottoman sultans and the dukes and princes of Florence and the Republic of Venice contributed to cross-cultural connections during the Renaissance period. As a result of this inextricable cultural connection between the Ottoman Empire and Renaissance Italy, this article argues the Ottomans deserve a place in Renaissance discourse.

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire, Orientalising, ceremonial, iconography, pageantry, Renaissance Italy*

INTRODUCTION

The iconography of Renaissance festivals and ceremonies came to reflect early modern political, social and cultural representations of dynastic identity and power in Europe and the Ottoman Empire. *Imitazione* (imitation) and *adeguazione* (adaptation) of the past into contemporary contexts underpin the 16th century Vasarian understanding of *rinascita* (rebirth).¹ This Renaissance paradigm of cultural awakening exemplifies the iconography of Ottoman and Italian ceremonies and characterises the complex and culturally inclusive nature of the early modern period. As Mulryne, Aliverti and Testaverde state:

Festivals were interdisciplinary and, on occasion, international in scope. They drew on a rich classical heritage and developed a shared pan-European iconography as well as exploiting regional and site-specific features. They played an important part in local politics

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¹ See Giorgio Vasari, *Vasari’s Lives of the Artists*, trans. Jonathan Foster (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), Kindle edition.

and the local economy, as well as international negotiations and the conscious presentation of power, sophistication and national identity.²

Whether set against the background of St. Mark's Square in Venice and the Byzantine-inspired St. Mark's cathedral with the bronze horses taken from Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), or the At Meydanı (old Roman Hippodrome) in Ottoman Istanbul, these pageants and ceremonies demonstrated power, identity and courtly magnificence of respective rulers. As Matteo Burioni questions: "Is there just one concept of rebirth, or should we account for a wider variety of instances of rebirth"³ Similarly, Jerry Brotton's assertion of a "... more global perspective on the nature of the Renaissance" is needed where a series of "Renaissances throughout the regions, each with their own highly specific and separate characteristics ... overlapped and exchanged influences with the more classical and traditionally understood Renaissance centred on Italy."⁴

This international scope allows a more culturally inclusive Renaissance narrative of the rebirth of cultural magnificence and reawakening by engaging with the classical past, and one that includes the Ottoman Empire. The influence of early modern Ottoman visual expressions on the courts of Renaissance Italy realigns and re-orientates the language of the iconography of pageants and ceremonies. Through their aural, visual, literary and theatrical features, including costuming and setting aesthetics like carpets, the pageants and ceremonies underscore the *Ottomanising* influence found within the pluralistic Renaissance context of the Mediterranean basin in the 16th century.⁵

This paper investigates the 1582 Ottoman celebration of Murad III's son's circumcision depicted in the illuminated manuscript, *Surname-i Hümayun*. By comparing this event to Renaissance ceremonies, one sees very little separating the ceremonies of East and West in purpose or aesthetics. In fact, in some European ceremonies and pageants, a hybrid art form emerged, where imitations of Ottoman art objects – influenced by diplomatic relations and trade – blurred the cultural boundaries of Ottoman and European Renaissances. Typically set before an audience of foreign guests, such spectacles were major contributors to the composition and circulation of Ottoman costume books, which depicted 16th century daily life in the Sultan's capital and increased the dissemination of Ottoman visual culture throughout Renaissance Italy, Saxony and Poland.⁶

Visual impressions of lavish ceremonies in Renaissance Italy were captured through their own courtly observations, including processions in Florence and processions through St.

² J. R. Mulryne, Maria Ines Aliverti and Anna Maria Testaverde, *Ceremonial Entries in Early Modern Europe: The Iconography of Power* (England: Ashgate, 2015), vii.

³ Matteo Burioni, *Vasari's Rinascita: History, Anthropology or Art Criticism* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010), accessed March 14, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/2638258/Vasari_s_rinascita_History_anthropology_or_art_criticism, 117.

⁴ Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8.

⁵ For more on the influence of Ottoman military music on Italian stage interludes, see T. D. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism. Western Music and the World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 8, 20-21.

⁶ For a list of sixteenth-century printed costume books, see Joanne Olian, "Sixteenth Century Books," *Costume* 3 (1977): 20-48.

Mark's Square in Venice. Similarly, the Ottoman court used manuscripts to depict, and preserve, the histories of events such as post-battle marches of triumphant Sultans returning to Istanbul, weekly Friday prayer processions and the circumcision ceremonies of royal princes.

Methodology

This article examines the cultural mimicry that existed between the two early modern societies and how it defined the complex and multinational Renaissance identity. If the Ottoman court and its European counterparts shared similarities in visual taste and ceremony, can the pageants during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent be considered part of the Renaissance experience of cultural awakening and magnificence? And, according to Orientalism discourse, why was there a desire in Europe to imitate the Ottoman 'Other'?⁷

Renaissance dukes and princes, using visual representations of themselves as well as emulating their adversaries, resorted to mimicry. Their act of constructing reality was influenced by "things that seem [rather] than those that are."⁸ Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha argues mimicry is a desire to recognise the 'Other' as a "subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."⁹ He also argues it represents

... a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualises power.¹⁰

The desire to assert their (i.e. Florence and Venice) power and identity by imitating the Ottoman 'Other' may have been a symbolic way of accepting their nemesis into the Renaissance discourse. However, the problematic nature of their imitation through the "sign of a double articulation" had more to do with marginalising the power of the Ottoman Empire while asserting its own supremacy. Through the desire to emerge from these representations of Ottoman ceremonies through mimicry, one is faced with the irony of "partial presence"—an "incomplete" identity—as a result of cultural deficiency.¹¹ According to Bhabha, their presence and representations of reality are twofold: "while one considers reality as it is [i.e. to be like the Ottomans] the other [i.e. to remain European] disavows it and replaces it by appropriating its desire that repeats and rearticulates 'reality' as mimicry."¹²

The desire of the courts of Renaissance Italy to imitate Ottoman ceremonies is related to "metonym of presence"; that is, where the identity of Renaissance courts through repetition also become 'different' like the Ottomans.¹³ By crossing cultural boundaries and "enunciate[ing] through a strategic confusion of ... metaphoric and metonymic axes" the

⁷ For more on imitating the 'Other', see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1995).

⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, "Discourses on Livy," in *The Prince and the Discourses*, ed. and trans. Luigi Ricci (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 182.

⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

ceremonies represented “cultural production[s] of meaning.”¹⁴ In other words, Renaissance pageants and their mimicry of Ottoman culture was not due to mockery, but a desire to incorporate it as an active player and *metonymically* accept its ‘Otherness’ through a visual manifestation. The influence of the Ottomans’ visual aesthetics on Renaissance ceremonial aesthetics of Italy definitely enriched and integrated the splendour and magnificence of these spectacles with an Eastern flavour.

THE CONTEXT OF THE OTTOMAN RENAISSANCE CEREMONIALS

The pageants of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566), and those of Murad III (1574-1595), were held before international audiences, where stories about them spread across Europe. Pomp and ceremony were integral elements of Ottoman court culture, and the splendour of the Sultan and his household were used to impress the citizens of Istanbul. During a triumphant entry into the city by a victorious sultan, like Süleyman the Magnificent – as depicted in many of Peter Coeck’s engravings – to the birth of a royal son, accession to the throne, imperial wedding of a sultan, pasha or princess, and the circumcision of a prince, the city became like the “centre of the universe.”¹⁵ As 17th century court poet Nedim wrote:

O city of Istanbul, priceless and peerless! I would sacrifice all Persia for one of your stones!¹⁶

The inhabitants of Istanbul connected with their city through the iconography of Renaissance ceremonies and pageants, regardless of whether they were secular or religious.

Ottoman ceremonies often used the old Roman Hippodrome (*At Meydanı* in Turkish) and the waters of the Bosphorus as their backdrop, which also included the Sultan’s elegant narrow *kayıks* with their long-pointed prows, which were as iconic of Istanbul as gondolas were of Venice. Merging the classical past with a contemporary setting allowed the Ottomans to engage in the Renaissance discourse. The festivities were embellished with entertainment provided by chariot races, jugglers, simulated combat between janissaries, knights in armour and competitions in which Qur’anic verses were recited – all of which connected the city and dynasty to their classical roots. Lavish presents of crystal, Chinese porcelain, Syrian damask, muslin from India and slaves from Africa were presented to the Sultan by his pashas and viziers, and displayed to the public while poets recited works that had been composed in honour of the occasion. In return, the Sultan would present *hil’ats* (i.e. Ottoman kaftans) to his foreign guests and it was visual displays such as these that left European visitors with a cultural impression of Istanbul, which they then took back to Europe. In 1671, after observing one of the Sultan’s processions when he left the palace to go hunting in Edirne, the French ambassador, Marquis de Nointel, wrote:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (London, UK: John Murray, 1995), 80.

¹⁶ N. Menemencioğlu ed., *The Penguin Verse of Turkish Verse* (Suffolk, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), 108.

If this ceremony has some splendour, one must take guard not to be overwhelmed by it ... The true remedy to avoid being prejudiced is to think of the grandeur of the King's [Louis IV] Household ... His Majesty wanting to make an entry, can efface without difficulty the finest spectacles in these regions and in the rest of the Levant.¹⁷

No other capital city in Europe produced such grand spectacles more often than Istanbul.¹⁸ The combination of the visible beauty of the city, with its gleaming domed mosques and palaces—during the day—and its silhouetted minarets—at night—as well as the majesty of Topkapı Palace, ensured imperial processions and their splendour became an integral part of the Süleymanic Age and left lasting impressions on the visual culture of the early modern world.

Ottoman Pageants: Classical Past meets Ottoman Present

During the Sultanate of Süleyman and his successors (Selim II and Murad III), one of the implicit ways they demonstrated imperial authority was through iconic image ceremonies, which were spatially supported and elaborated by the architecture of the palace grounds. Selecting the location for a royal ceremony was a crucial part of preparing for it, and often involved appropriating settings that featured in classical antiquity. For example, the Roman Hippodrome in Istanbul played an integral role in Ottoman and Orientalised European ceremonies. In 1582, the *millet* (i.e. ethnic) groups of the Ottoman Empire, as depicted in *Surname-i Hümayun*—and included former slaves who had become pages, as well as eunuchs, pashas and viziers of the sultan's household—attended a 52-day (and night) festival at the Hippodrome. While this setting was not new to Ottoman ceremonies—as witnessed half a century earlier by the weddings of Sultan Süleyman to his wife Hürrem Sultan, and his Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha to the Sultan's sister Hatice Sultan—no illustrated manuscripts exist in relation to its earlier Ottoman history. However, according to contemporary historian Selaniki (d. 1600), as part of the preparations for the ceremony, the palace of Ibrahim Pasha was renovated with an additional high balcony and a new entrance in one corner.¹⁹ Additionally, none of the statues that had been added by Ibrahim Pasha—from his campaign in Hungary earlier in the century—adorned the Hippodrome in front of the palace.

In 1582, Murad III commissioned the *Surname-i Hümayun* for his son's (Prince Mehmed) circumcision festival. This festival lasted for 52 days and was probably one of the grandest and most elaborate festivals the Ottomans ever held. Such events took months of preparation and included: the design and construction of pavilions, which required numerous trades and industries; organising large groups of people from all classes for public ceremonies to foreign dignitaries; arranging accommodation for such guests; and feeding several thousands of guests that would attend each day. Preparations began a year in advance and included everything from sending invitations to preparing the daily menus, which were organised by Kara Halil Bey (the

¹⁷ Marquis de Nointel, cited in Mansel, *Constantinople*, 80.

¹⁸ Mansel, *Constantinople*, 80.

¹⁹ Mustafa Selaniki Efendi, *Tarih-i Selaniki*, vol. 1., ed. Mehmet Ispirli (Istanbul: Türk Tarih Kurum Basımevi, 1989), 131-136.

superintendent of the imperial kitchens). Murad III made sure it was well-documented by the author Intizami, who worked chronologically to capture the details of events as they occurred, while court artists followed his written word to create accompanying miniatures.²⁰ As the guilds' floats passed by, and paraded their arts and crafts—watched by the Sultan from the palace of Ibrahim Pasha—Intizami appears to have captured every detail so viewers of the manuscript feel just as welcome at the event as the foreign guests who watched from the galleries. This visual expression reinforces Ottoman cultural self-awareness and interest. The documentary-style genre and recognition of history exemplify the Ottoman Renaissance mindset and one that equally engages in the Vasarian paradigm of *rinascita*, as noted above.

This manuscript, however, is more than a parade of the guilds of the empire. It challenges one of the main misconceptions about the non-celebratory status of Ottoman artists, which have contributed to the lack of receptivity of Ottoman art in the West. What it clearly demonstrates is the celebration of collective genius rather than that of individual genius, which clearly sets Ottoman artists apart from their Florentine counterparts expressed by Giorgio Vasari in his work *The Lives of the Artists* (1550).

Throughout all of the manuscript's folios, the At Meydanı (old Hippodrome) features as part of the backdrop and in front of the Ibrahim Pasha Palace. Here, the Sultan, the Prince, members of the *harem* and other important guests are positioned. The At Meydanı features a Serpent Column that depicts three serpents, which originally stood in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi—symbolising the defeat of the Persians in the Battle of Plataea (479 BCE). It also houses an Egyptian Obelisk that had been built for Pharaoh Thutmose III (ca. 1500 BCE) as a means of recording his Syrian campaigns and crossing of the Euphrates; however, it was eventually brought to Constantinople in the fourth century because an emperor, perhaps Constantine, thought it could be a symbol of imperial power for the Hippodrome.

These classical allusions did not escape the literary elite of the Ottoman court. In fact, using the old Hippodrome as a theatrical setting for the circumcision festival—with the building's classical monuments from Ancient Greece and Egypt, and the fact its presence in Istanbul was due to an Eastern Roman emperor—produced a uniquely Ottoman Renaissance experience. Such visual expressions, linking the classical past within the Ottoman cultural and historical contexts, interweaved Ottoman celebrations into the 16th century Renaissance narrative that was taking place at the time. In particular, Prince Mehmed's (Süleyman's son) circumcision ceremony in 1530 was not only the first time a spectacle of its magnitude had been seen, it was also a very clever way in which the Ottomans appropriated and connected with the classical past. It asserted the self-fashioning and power of the imperial identity through engaging with their inherited heritage of the East and classical West. According to Necipoğlu, “[D]isplayed as parade accessories and stage props in ostentatious ceremonies, these ... royal status symbols were primarily aimed at communicating Ottoman imperial claims to a Europeans audience

²⁰ Derin Terzioğlu, “The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation,” *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 97. Also see Stephane Yerasimos, “The Imperial Procession: Recreating a World's Order,” in *Surname-i Vehbi*, accessed September 23, 2014, http://web.archive.org/web/20091025054327/http://geocities.com/surnamei_vehbi/yeramos.html.

through a Western discourse of power.”²¹ Such grandiose ceremonies as visual expressions of power and courtly splendour represented dynastic self-fashioning during the Renaissance and reinforced the Ottomans’ integral part in the discourse.

INFLUENCE OF OTTOMAN VISUAL CULTURE ON RENAISSANCE ITALY

Ottoman ceremonies and pageants became so popular that the courts of European dukes and princes began to emulate them. During the 16th and 17th centuries, Ottoman visual material culture became an integral part of European court ceremonies, in which Ottoman costumes and objects—that had been looted during the Battle of Lepanto—began to appear in pageants and as diplomatic gifts between European monarchs symbolising power, authority and even colonial possibility. For example, in 1587, Italian dukes sent a delegation, bearing gifts, to Saxony. The gifts came from the war booty of Lepanto and included an Ottoman helmet, and Italian imitations of Ottoman objects, such as a leather bow and quiver set featuring a coat of arms (*Figures 1 and 2*). The use of Ottoman or Ottoman-inspired objects as gifts and in pageants was likely due to their connection with the exotic Eastern ‘Other’, which Saslow has expressed as:

The iconography of the events – characters and their actions, whether embodied by artistic images, by public figures, on the urban stage, or by actors in frank impersonation – constitutes a revealing summation of the taste, imagery, and political symbolism of an influential late mannerist court.²²

The thirst for Ottoman objects and visual aesthetics reinforce Bhaba’s assertions above. Such practices contribute to a more culturally inclusive approach to the Renaissance discourse than previously thought.

Figures 1 and 2. Left, a set of *tirkeş* or quiver and bow case or *sadak*, Italian, leather, mid-sixteenth century. Gifts made by the Italian delegation to the Elector in 1587 emulating

²¹ Gülru Necipoğlu, “Süleyman the Magnificent and Representations of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Habsburg Papal Rivalry,” *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (1989), 401, accessed August 3, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3051136>.

²² J. M. Saslow, *Florentine Festival as ‘Theatrum Mundi’: The Medici Wedding of 1589* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 2.

Ottoman models as seen on the right. Left, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Rüstkammer, Dresden, inv. no. Y 176. Right, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul.



Renaissance Wedding Ceremonies: The Medicis meet Süleyman the Magnificent

The depiction of a royal wedding shows it was also an occasion that attracted visual splendor in the streets of Istanbul, so the presence of imperial women could not be ignored. Süleyman's favourite concubine, Roxelana, as she was known to the Europeans, but named Hürrem by Süleyman because of her laughter, became the Ottoman 'queen' upon their marriage. A marriage like theirs was the first of its kind and Süleyman's unprecedented act constituted a break from the earlier traditions of the dynasty, which meant the dynastic family now focussed more on Istanbul than on the provinces of the Empire. Additionally, the importance of the *haseki* meant the husbands of these Ottoman princesses generated much prestige for the royal family, as evidenced by Princess Mihrimah's (daughter of Süleyman) marriage to Grand Vizier Rustem Pasha, and Süleyman's sister, Hatice Sultan, marrying Ibrahim Pasha (who was Rustem Pasha's predecessor). However, it appears no concubine received as much attention as Hürrem. Her title as *haseki* of Süleyman added to her status, but her marriage to Süleyman further promoted her ascendancy among the ruling elite.

The visual display of pomp and ceremony of the wedding would have very obviously marked Hürrem's elevation to 'Sultan' status. The marriage of Süleyman and Hürrem is clearly described by a representative of the Genoese Bank of St. George, in a letter in which he establishes the importance that such visual spectacles held for Ottoman audiences.²³ Through the medium of the marriage ceremony, Süleyman not only created a visual expression of his love for Hürrem, but also made a statement about his queen—his equal—and her identity as a woman of the ruling elite:

This week there has occurred in this city a most extraordinary event, one absolutely unprecedented in the history of the Sultans. The Grand Signior Suleiman has taken to himself as his Empress a slave-woman from Russia, called Roxalana, and there has been great feasting. The ceremony took place in the Seraglio, and the festivities have been splendid beyond all record. There was a public procession of the presents. At night the

²³ See George Young, *Constantinople* (New York: Dorset House Publishing Co Inc., 1997), 135.

principal streets are gaily illuminated, and there is much music and feasting. The houses are festooned with garlands and there are everywhere swings in which people swing by the hour with great enjoyment. In the old Hippodrome a great tribune is set up, the place reserved for the Empress and her ladies screened with a gilt lattice. Here Roxalana and the Court attended a great tournament in which both Christian and Moslem Knights were engaged, and tumblers and jugglers and a procession of wild beasts, and giraffes with necks so long they as it were touched the sky ... There is great talk about the marriage and none can say what it means.²⁴

According to a Venetian ambassador, Daniello De'Ludovici, the wedding occurred around June 1534.²⁵ While there are no miniatures that depict the actual event, there are a number of miniatures from during and after Süleyman's rule that can be pieced together to illustrate the visual spectacle that would have been displayed for his subjects. The appropriation of the Roman Hippodrome as a wedding backdrop set the stage for the merging of classical aesthetics with Ottoman visual tastes, which was interspersed with Muslim and Christian entertainment, and further signified the interconnectedness of the two Renaissance civilisations.

The pomp of such ceremonies was, of course, not exclusive to the Ottoman court. Similar marriage festivities were also seen in 16th century Venice, for in Renaissance Italy, just as in the Ottoman Empire, the "theme[s] of marriage, and of love and virtue within marriage"²⁶ were deemed worthy of pageantry. In Renaissance Italy, the marriage of the elite used decorative and entertaining effects: "jousts and historical or recounted battles were good subjects for a display of the chivalric paraphernalia which became increasingly fashionable during the century."²⁷ In 1539, at around the same time as Süleyman and Hürrem's marriage, stories of the magnificent scenery and floats used at the wedding of the great Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574) and Eleonora di Toledo are well known through Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (1550), as well as through other sources. In Vasari's account of the life of the resourceful designer Il Tribolo, Vasari describes the wedding that took place in Florence:

Tribolo was given the charge of constructing a triumphal arch at the Porta al Prato, through which the bride, coming from Poggio, was to enter; which arch he made a thing of beauty, very ornate with columns, pilasters, architraves, great cornices, and pediments. The arch was to be all covered with figures and scenes, in addition to the statues by the hand of Tribolo.²⁸

²⁴ Young, *Constantinople*, 135. For more on the wedding ceremony see Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 61-62.

²⁵ See De'Ludovici's report to the Venetian senate delivered on June 3, 1534, in Eugenio Alberi, *Le Relazioni Dgli Ambasciatori Veneti*, serie 3, vol. 1:29 (Firenze: A Spese Dell'Editore, 1863), accessed June 14, 2015, https://archive.org/stream/E.AlberiRelazioniDegliAmbasciatoriVeneti-Serie3-Vol.1/Alberi.Vol.I_djvu.txt.

²⁶ P. Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation and Identity* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 28.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Vasari, *Lives*, 170.

For her dowry, Eleonora was given 50,000 ducats, which equated to half of what Hürrem received from Süleyman.²⁹ Before entering Florence, the couple stayed for a while in the villa of Poggio a Caiano, and on 29 June 1539 they made their triumphant entrance into the city.

Like the wedding of Süleyman, Medici's marriage ceremony to Eleonora of Toledo was equally filled with symbolism. Impressive festivities and scenic decorations accompanied the wedding, which was celebrated in San Lorenzo. Accompanying the decorations were various paintings, executed by Battista Franco, Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio and Michele Tosini, that depicted scenes of celebrations and allegories. Performances of Antonio Landi's play, *Il Commodo*, were conducted in the large courtyard of Palazzo Medici and interspersed with intervals that consisted of allegorical scenes by Giovanbattista Strozzi that were set to music by Francesco Corteccia. In addition, the walls were hung with a series of exemplary scenes, featuring illustrious Greeks and Romans on the one hand, and figures from the Medici family on the other, which were painted by Tribolo, Bronzino, Pierfrancesco di Sandro, Francesco Bacciacca, Domenico Conti, Antonio di Domenico, Battista Franco, Francesco Salviati and Carlo Portelli, thereby symbolically connecting the Medici and Renaissance heritage to the classical past. However, the wedding of Süleyman and Hürrem had no need for a triumphal arch, as their backdrop of the ancient Roman Hippodrome is what fused their traditional Ottoman Muslim imperial wedding to the classical past.

Public rituals in Florentine society between the 15th and 16th centuries, according to Testaverde, were fundamental in creating a sense of identity for the community and persuading it to conform to a political programme.³⁰ In 1588, Bernardo Buontalenti designed sets and costumes in preparation for a performance at the wedding of Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici (1549-1609) and Christine of Lorraine. One scene of the performance included characters who were residents of ancient Delphi. However, with their full beards, balloon pants and turbans they looked more like 16th century stereotypical Turks (*Figure 3*). In fact, Buontalenti's conjuring of exotic images from some mythological past demonstrates Ottoman symbolism, and his use of Turkish costumes at the wedding's performance raise questions about the relationship between the Medici and Ottoman court. While the Delphic Turks of Buontalenti's play may have appeared strange at the marriage ceremony, their performance at the *fiesta* would have enchanted its Florentine audience. Buontalenti's incorporation of exotic costumes, despite the cultural distance between Florence and Istanbul, suggests his play was set in a different time and place.

²⁹ Letter of the *notaio* Bernardo Gamberelli to Cosimo de' Medici I, 29 March 1539, cited in *La Corte, il Mare, i Mercanti* (Firenze: Electa, 1980), filza 337, cc.134 e 137.

³⁰ Anna Maria Testaverde, "The Book of Ceremonies of Francesco Tongiari (1536-1612)," in *Ceremonial Entries in Early Modern Europe*, eds. J. R. Mulryne, Maria Ines Aliverti and Anna Maria Testaverde (Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 99.

Figure 3. Bernardo Buontalenti, Costume Design for Delphic Couple, 1588, Biblioteca Centrale, Palatina C.B. 3.53, vol. 2, c.13r, Florence.



The impression of Ottoman visual aesthetics as witnessed at the wedding of Süleyman and Hürrem further reinforces Bhabha's assertion of the desire of appropriation rearticulating reality as mimicry.³¹ Ironically, it was also an act of integrating Ottoman visual culture into the narrative of Renaissance Italy. The classical allusions combined with the Ottoman visual mode signify a merging of Eastern and Western iconographies. While the fanciful nature of Buontalenti's costume design is obvious, it also points to an aspect of the Grand Duke's personality, who throughout his career held a fascination with Turks and the Islamic world. In fact, he sponsored Arabic press and garden projects, in the Islamic tradition, at his villa in Pratolino.

Like Süleyman's majestic ceremonials and pageants, through magnificent spectacles, such as the Grand Duke's wedding, the Medici asserted their princely prominence and erased any trace of their modest origins. As early as 1516, there was growing awareness that the court culture of Florence was changing. Of the courts, Luigi Alamanni observed, "[a]ccustomed as they are to pay respect to none other than their own magistrates and citizens, they show themselves to be alien to court manners in a way I think matched by few others."³² According to Perkins, these "alien" displays were the results of the following phenomena:

[S]elf-made signori all over Italy were acutely aware of the questionable nature of their claim to hereditary dominion. For in every aspect of their personal comportment and political activity they attempted to convey an impression of the magnificence expected of rulers with their pretensions.³³

³¹ For more, see Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

³² Discorso di Lodovico Alamanni sopra il fermare lo stato di Firenze nella Medici devozione de. Luigi Alamanni, cited in Testaverde "The Book of Ceremonies," 101.

³³ L. L. Perkins, *Music in the Age of the Renaissance* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 395-396.

As can be seen in the wedding ceremonies of the Medici, alongside their patronage of Ottoman arts, they clearly conformed to what the prevalent princely articulation of authority was at the time. Additionally, the Ottoman visual mode demonstrates a transformation of Florentine republican iconography, according “to the needs of an emerging and ceremonial court,”³⁴ which Mulryne explains as:

[A]n iconography emerged which sought to bring Florence into the mainstream of diplomatic practice alongside comparable city-states, while also flexibly responding to the city’s social and political structures which, in contrast to other Italian principates of noble and feudal origin featured an elite of socially privileged and wealthy families no more than reluctantly tolerant of the new court, a process of adjustment which required complex political acculturation.³⁵

The dissemination and reception of Ottoman costume books in Europe, by the likes of Lambert de Vos and Sonnegg, provided a means for European engagement with the Orient, and also offer further evidence of the transcultural contact and exchange that occurred during the early modern period.

While the Turks remained a threat to Christendom through the 16th century, they also offered new prototypes of representation that appealed to the Florentines and their celebrations. The pageants and tournaments organised by the Medici, who are traditionally portrayed as classicising humanists, reveal another aspect of their appreciation for the Sultanate ethos that was so brilliantly represented by the Ottoman court. Therefore, like their Ottoman counterparts, “the Medici consciously used symbols to project the desired images of themselves; ... [and support] Savonarola’s transformation of carnival behaviour into devout procession.”³⁶ According to Pastore, through their representation of the Ottoman model, Florentines were able to break free from the “ideological and psychological control of ancient and modern Rome.”³⁷ By looking to the East and drawing from Ottoman-Turkish visual tastes, Florentines undermined the Vasarian notion of the *rinascita* or rebirth of classical rediscovery, and therefore, also challenge the 19th century pan-European concept of “the Renaissance,” as proposed by Burckhardt and Michelet in the 19th century.

The flexibility of the iconography that was used during the period demonstrates the fluid integration of Ottoman visual motifs; that is, in relation to the distinct idioms of the Renaissance and their allusions to classical symbolism. In fact, without Ottoman-inspired visual cultural influences, the Renaissance narrative, as it is most commonly read, would not have been possible. However, by re-orienting the discourse it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of the early modern period and rely less on a pan-European paradigm.

³⁴ Mulryne, Aliverti and Testaverde, *Ceremonial Entries in Early Modern Europe*, 5.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ R. C. Trexler, *Public Life in Florence* (London: Cornell University Press, 1980), 475.

³⁷ C. Pastore, “Bipolar Behavior: Ferdinando I de’ Medici and the East,” in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450-1750: Visual Imagery before Orientalism*, ed. J. G. Harper (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 129. Also see Saslow, *Florentine Festival as ‘Theatrum Mundi.’*

CREATING THE MYTH OF THE RENAISSANCE CITY: VENICE MEETS OTTOMAN ISTANBUL

Borrowing Burckhardt's title, "The State as a Work of Art" became synonymous with not only 16th century Venice, but also Ottoman Istanbul. The visual imagery and splendour developed by 'la Serenissima Republica,' that is 'the Most Serene Republic of Venice,' as well as Ottoman Istanbul, came to define Renaissance self-fashioning. In the 16th century, these two cities embodied the official iconography of 'the State' and the ways in which they employed this imagery resonated within their respective cultures. There are also parallels between the 'myth' of Venice and the 'myth' of Ottoman Istanbul, in which visual motifs that responded to and manipulated historical events have been used as reliable portraits of each city.

The Myth of Venice

There was a complex interplay of meanings—associated with the Virgin Mary, St. Mark, Wisdom, Justice and Peace—that was central to the popular 'idea' of Venice. According to Rosand, this was no "iconographic slippage," but rather due to active "self-imaging" and a "formal visualization of [a] political ideal ... come to represent the reality of the myth itself."³⁸ Charles Dempsey shares Rosand's view and delved deeper into the Venetian "myth" that transformed into "reality," as illustrated by the following passage:

An example is the image of the lion, which taken alone stands for St. Mark, the city's patron and so can also stand for Venice itself. In the biblical book of Wisdom, Divine Wisdom is personified seated on the lion-throne of Solomon, and lions flanking a throne thus signify her ... Biblical exegesis equates Divine Wisdom and the Virgin, and Jacobello depicted the Archangel Gabriel with Madonna lilies and a scroll to the right of Justice (who is crowned like the Queen of Heaven ... This inevitably evokes Venice's other patron, for the city has been founded on the feast of the Annunciation ... the concepts of Justice founded in Divine Wisdom, the Virgin, St. Mark, and of course Venice herself, are seamlessly joined.³⁹

Here, religious allusions to biblical prophets served to forge the myth of the city of Venice and became a catalyst for its early modern identity formation.

Whether Venice was personified in paintings, such as Veronese's *Apotheosis of Venice* (1585), or represented as Venus, whose beauty was born of the sea, the iconographic metonyms of such myths presented the city and its ceremonies, but also magnified the image of Venice. For example, in *Apotheosis of Venice*, her personified figure is shown dressed in royal dress and enthroned between the twin towers of the city's Arsenal.⁴⁰ She is about to be crowned by flying victories, who carry her laurel crown, and at her feet—offering wise counsel—according to Paoletti and Radke, "... personifications of Peace, Abundance, Fame, Happiness, Honour, Security and Freedom."⁴¹ A triumphal arch with "twisted columns" marks the top of

³⁸ David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State* (Library of Congress, Washington DC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1-2.

³⁹ Charles Dempsey, cited in David Rosand, "Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State," *Renaissance Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2003): 454, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1261857>.

⁴⁰ J. Paoletti and G. M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005), 490.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

an immense balcony, which seems to “burst through the ceiling and into the ether beyond”⁴²— apparently, as stipulated in the commission of the work, in order to accommodate for multitudes of celebrating onlookers. At the base of the painting, Venice’s cheerful subjects seem undisturbed by the enormity of the traversing horsemen in their midst, who act as reminders of the military power of Venice.⁴³ Paoletti and Radke informs the illusionistic portrayals and dramatic light effects in the painting are intended to produce “political allegory”⁴⁴ of the rebirth of Venice as a dynamic Mediterranean thalassocracy challenging its Muslim ‘Other,’ the Ottomans, in the centuries to come (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Paolo Veronese, *The Apotheosis of Venice*, 1585, Hall of the Senate, Palazzo Ducale, Venice, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paolo_Veronese_-_Apotheosis_of_Venice_-_WGA24943.jpg.



Ottoman Renaissance objects serve as decorative ornaments in paintings. The paintings of Gentile Bellini’s 1496 painting of the *Procession in the Piazza San Marco*, which was commissioned by the Scuola Grande di S. Giovanni Evangelista, depicts an annual event that is held on 25 April to celebrate the feast day of St. Mark; in honour of the working miracle of the relic of the True Cross. In the painting, the confraternity can be seen marching through the piazza, preceded by a choir and honour guard of marchers holding large candlesticks (called *doppiari*) surrounded by Turkish-inspired Hans Holbien carpets hanging from the balconies of St. Mark’s Square. The relic of the True Cross sits under a fabric cover and is carried on a

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

decorated platform. However, the painting also demonstrates the civic values of Venice, which are represented in features such as a canopy that is decorated with the coats of arms of all the *scuole grandi*. Additionally, the painting includes Venetians from all walks of life; whether secular or religious, its citizens are shown as lines of spectators who fill the piazza and windows of the palaces, as seen on the right side. On the far right of the painting, the Doge is also visible, but preceded by groups of standard bearers and trumpeters, followed by patrician magistrates and high-ranking officials. The particular order used within the procession aligns with Venetian rankings of caste, office and seniority, and underscores the city's stability (*Figure 5*).

Figure 5. Gentile Bellini's political depiction of the *Procession in the Piazza San Marco* (1496). Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Accademia_-_Procession_in_piazza_San_Marco_by_Gentile_Bellini.jpg.



Venetian sculptural embellishments equally contributed to the iconography of the ‘myth’ of Venice. As observed earlier, Venice came to embody Justice and that virtue emanates through the Ducal Palace of the Doge. “The meaning of the Ducal Palace,” according to Rosand, “was quite clear: as Venice herself was equated with Justice, so the palace of the doge was to be considered a palace of Solomon—”⁴⁵ the Old Testament patriarch who constructed the House of God and the house of the king. For example, the palace constructed under Doge Francesco Foscari (1423-57)—at its corner “adjacent to the Porta della Carta, above the capital of the massive column, a sculpted group representing the Judgment of Solomon announces the major theme of the Ducal Palace in a narrative key.”⁴⁶ As its central motif, to represent scenes of justice and dispensers of law, on the capital below are the figures of Aristotle, Moses, Solon, Scipio, Numa Pompilius and Trajan—all personifying Justice.⁴⁷ The legibility of such imagery did not miss the Florentine visitor in 1442 describing the palace in verse: “In which is seen the memory / Of wise Solomon with the justice / He rendered to those women.”⁴⁸ In other words,

⁴⁵ Rosand, *Myths of Venice*, 14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Venetians required narratives to visually reinforce and confirm the political, economic, and social strength and authority of the Serenissima (i.e. Venice). Furthermore, Venice sought to solidify its position as the true successor of the ancient Roman Republic—on which it modelled its system of government.

The Myth of Ottoman Istanbul

The Ottoman myth about the city of Istanbul was based on the religious iconography of the Holy Mantle, Holy Standard and burial shrine of Ayyub (Eyüp in Turkish)—the Prophet's companion who died at the Arab siege of Constantinople in the seventh century. Such a myth was created for reasons similar to the Venetian's regarding their stories about Venice. The lack of an Ottoman bloodline that could directly connect it to Islam created conflict in the minds of many Ottomans. Even a 16th century Grand Vizier, Lutfi Pasha, questioned how an Ottoman Sultan could be the 'Shadow of God' when he could not claim direct ancestry to the Prophet or his family.⁴⁹ Therefore, in place of a bloodline, the Holy Mantle and caliphate became symbolic of the House of Osman, and through ceremonial rituals the sacred city and the Sultan's residence—*Der'i Sa'adet* (House of Good Fortune)—were used to construct the Ottoman myth. Like the Venetians, the Ottomans used religious rituals to establish unity and order in the city, and most importantly, to legitimise and amplify their Islamic prestige as caliphs in the Muslim world.

Of the three religious rituals, the first was the ceremony for the Sultan and his court, which occurred within the palace during the month of Ramadan. Süleyman's father Selim I originally brought the Prophet's Mantle and other relics of Muhammad to Istanbul after his conquest of Egypt, Mecca and Medina in 1516-17. Officials, scholars, pashas, viziers, the Grand Vizier and the Şeyhülislam (the Empire's leading religious authority) had new clothing prepared to wear for the event. However, no medallions or jewellery of any kind were permitted because such adornments may have caught on the cover of the Mantle as they leaned over it to kiss it.

On the fourteenth day of Ramadan, the Holy Mantle would be transferred to the Revan Pavilion of the Palace. Prior to this, the Sultan, viziers and other officials would use a symbolic gesture to sweep the chamber clean and signify their servitude to the Prophet, which they regarded as a great honour. Additionally, the walls would be washed with rose water and perfumed with musk, which symbolised the scent of Paradise. On the fifteenth day, all the officials, scholars, janissaries and cavalry officers would gather during noon prayer time at the Palace's Gate of Felicity and wait for the Grand Vizier while the Şeyhülislam (chief Islamic cleric of the Empire) led the congregation in prayer at the Hagia Sophia. After prayers, the group proceeded to the chamber according to rank—i.e. the Sultan followed by the Şeyhülislam and Grand Vizier, who were followed by scholars, state officials of Istanbul, the Head of the Janissaries and Cavalry, the Sword Bearer, the Head Footman, the Head Equerry, the Chief

⁴⁹ Halil Inalcık, *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies Department, 1993), 28.

Servant of the Table for Handkerchiefs and the Head Servant of the Keys—to view and kiss the Holy Mantle while the Qur’an was recited in the background.

The Sultan would then send peace and blessings to the Prophet. Bringing a large golden basin to the visitors’ space filled with *zamzam* holy water from Mecca, the edges of the Prophet’s Mantle would be lightly dipped in it. The holy water from Mecca signifies the link to Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael, who was saved by the *zamzam* water in the desert after Patriarch Abraham left them there.⁵⁰ This ritual symbolically connects the Ottoman Sultan-Caliphate not only to the Prophet through his holy Mantle, but to Abraham as well, considered to be the “father of many nations,” thereby creating a sacrosanct image of the Sultan before the eyes of his multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious subjects (i.e. his *millets*), and thus solidifying his Caliph status even further (*Figure 6*).⁵¹

Figure 6. The Room of the Holy Mantle, Topkapı Palace, Istanbul. Photograph by Metin Mustafa, December 2015.



The second religious ritual was tied not only to military campaigns, but also the notion (and myth) of the holiness of the city. The Procession of the Honoured Standard of the Prophet would be raised on a flagpole 40 days before the Sultan embarked on his military campaign (*Figure 7-8*). The remains of the Prophet’s fragile flag was appropriated by Ottoman artists who recreated it with red and green Bursa silk and the names of the Prophet’s ten companions, which were embroidered, in silver thread, on the red section of the flag. This ceremony held a special significance for the people of Istanbul, and according to Hilmi Aydın, “they filled the streets from Ayasofya square to Edirnekapı, and from there to Davutpaşa. As depicted in the

⁵⁰ Muslims believe Abraham took Hagar and Ishmael to the Valley of Baca (mentioned in Psalms 84:6, “Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools”). Muslims believe the valley of Baca to be the ancient site of Mecca. After leaving Hagar and Ishmael, the boy was saved by the Zam Zam water that sprung from beneath his feet. Although the Qur’an does not mention this, the hadiths of the Prophet elucidate this narrative in more detail. See hadiths of the Prophet by Bukhara in M. Muhsin Khan, trans., *The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Sahih Al-Bukhari: Arabic-English* (Lahore: Kazi Publications Inc., 1995).

⁵¹ See Genesis 17:5.

miniature painting to see the [Holy Mantle and] Honoured Standard was considered a meritorious act, as well as means of hope for the ill, young children, and those in difficulty”⁵² (Figure 9). Being in possession of such holy objects allowed the Sultan-Caliphate to legitimise its authority to rule over the Islamic world and, therefore, set its visual discourse on an aesthetic path that followed its cultural traditions. However, while their aesthetics differed from their Renaissance counterparts, their purpose did not.

Figures 7 and 8. The black flag of the Honoured Standard “Uqab,” which belonged to the Prophet is kept in green silk bag. It disintegrated over the centuries, Topkapı Palace Museum, inv. no. 21/19; The Honoured Standard was remade by the Ottomans with pieces of the original flag sewn on with verses from the Qur’an and the names of the ten companions of the Prophet, Topkapı Palace Museum, inv. no. 21/18.



Third, with the burial place of the Prophet’s companion, Ayyub, located in Istanbul, the Ottoman myth became a reality for the sultanate. The founding of his remains by Mehmed II’s spiritual Sufi, Sheykh Akshemseddin—before the conquest of the city in 1453—and the mosque that was built at the site by the Conqueror, represented spiritual significance and Islamic legitimacy for the Ottoman Turks, in addition to Prophet Muhammad’s prophecy that a Muslim army would conquer Constantinople.⁵³ These factors combined to create a link between the new capital and the Prophet. Additionally, ‘Ayyub’ became ‘Eyüp’ in Turkish, and the patron saint of Ottoman Istanbul. By the middle of the 16th century the Mosque of Eyüp became a pilgrimage centre for Muslims and took the title of ‘fourth most holy site’—after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. It also became the coronation mosque for Ottoman sultans where they were girded with the sword of Osman, the founder of the dynasty.

Selim [II] had set a precedent, and all future sultans followed him in making the pilgrimage soon after coming to the throne. The fact, however, that Murad III delayed the occasion for two weeks after his accession in 1574 and Mehmed III for five weeks after his in 1595

⁵² H. Aydın, *Pavilion of the Sacred Relics: The Sacred Trusts, Topkapı Palace Museum* (Istanbul, Clifton, USA: Tughra Books, 2011), 80.

⁵³ See hadiths of Prophet Muhammad by Ibn Katheer Dimashqi, *Book of the End: Great Trials and Tribulations*, trans. Faisal Shafiq (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2006), 75-77.

suggests that it was not yet a firmly established ritual ... but it was Ahmed I's accession that the ceremony took its final form. When he had arrived at the mausoleum and prayed to the saint, the chief mufti girded him with a 'victory-bringing sword'.⁵⁴

Figure 9. Parading the Holy Mantle and Honoured Standard. Miniature painting, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul.



The coronation ceremony at the Mosque of Eyüp reflected the Ottoman myth as reality. Not only was it a display of a symbolic connection to the Prophet, it also represented the Ottomans' militaristic zeal, as signified by the "victory-bringing sword" with which the sultan would expand his realm. By possessing the relics of the Prophet and housing them at the sultan's palace or the annual court, and using them in religious ceremonies, such as those associated with the Mosque of Eyüp, the allegory of 'Holy' Istanbul and its legitimate Ottoman Caliph-Sultanate was born. Like Venice, the Ottoman elite deemed it necessary to forge an identity through myth to legitimise its imperial presence and provide the former Eastern Roman capital, Constantinople, a new Islamic character – Ottoman Istanbul.

CONCLUSION

Early modern festivities, weddings and pageantries represent the celebration of Renaissance material culture. Equally, they represent a search for court identity and legitimacy. According to Loren Partridge and Randolph Starn, the "art making" and other propagandistic displays of the emerging early modern societies, were "product[s] of the triumphalist state. It involved a large bureaucracy, an extensive division of labour, a careful allocation of resources, all controlled from the top to mobilize the display of intellectual, artistic, and material resources."⁵⁵ Based on Partridge and Starn's view, it was clearly an experience that occurred in the Ottoman Empire of the Süleymanic Age and Renaissance Europe. Another significant

⁵⁴ Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 106.

⁵⁵ Loren Partridge and Randolph Starn, *Arts of Power: Three Halls of State in Italy, 1300-1600* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 211.

point about the iconography of these events is they represented a hybrid art form that fused instrumental music, song, dance, and lavish costumes and stage designs to glorify the ruling elite. It was not only the ruling elite of Renaissance Italy who took centre stage, but also the visual culture of the Ottoman court. Hentsch describes the phenomenon as:

[The] Orient was not simply a mirror, but the indispensable complement of a Western civilisation which searched for totality and plenitude in fusion with it, sought coherence continuity in a philosophy of history which saw pre-Hellenic antiquity conscripted into the service of European [Renaissance] universalism.⁵⁶

Historically speaking, the cultural rebirth through *imitazione* (imitation) and *adeguazione* (adaptation) noted by Vasari and concurred by Bhabha, demonstrate a convergence of the Renaissance paradigm, one that includes similar visual practices from different cultural traditions rather than excludes. It was through the visual and material fusion of the Ottoman world with Renaissance representations of political entities that discourses became intertwined and converged. Such a view also suggests Renaissance Italy consciously accepted its classical heritage and equally, its indebtedness to the Ottoman Renaissance legacy that enriched its being.

⁵⁶ Thierry Hentsch, *Imagining the Middle East* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 139.

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