

Turks

A journey of a thousand years

London - Manal Ameer



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The Royal Academy of Art in London is now hosting a magnificent exhibition of Turkish heritage: "Turks; A journey of a thousand years".

The exhibition, which will be open till mid-April, takes the visitors on a tour through the different civilizations which were established in central Asia. During this journey they are introduced to all the empires that preceded modern Turkey. It sheds light on the legacy of Turkish art and how it influenced, and was influenced by, the various cultures the Turks came across on their conquests and explorations of different continents. The exhibition includes ten different galleries which are designed in chronological order and cover the period between (600 - 1600). ➤

Sword of Suleyman the Magnificent

سيف السلطان سليمان الكبير



Nomads, fourteenth century, Central Asia

بدو، القرن الرابع عشر، أواسط آسيا



Horse Drinking Water and Two Nomads, fourteenth century, Central Asia

حصان يشرب الماء وحوله بدويان، القرن الرابع عشر، أواسط آسيا

The journey begins in the sixth century, from the origin of the Turkish nomadic groups and ends with the last and greatest Turkish Islamic Empire: the Ottoman. It also sheds light on different Turkish dynasties which ruled in the region during these thousand years; the Seljuks, the Timurids, the Mongols and finally the Ottomans. A brief background is provided about their growth and decline.

The Silk Road

The first stop is the Silk Road, which connects the East with the West. The early Chinese merchants used this route to get their products to other parts of the world. This business route enriched the region with diversity as it had been used by people from

different races and played a great role in shaping the culture of the region.

Treasures from the different religions which were embraced by the inhabitants (Buddhism, Sky Worship, Christianity and Islam) and artefacts used in their rituals are exhibited in all the galleries.

The dominant religion which prevailed at the time, however, was Islam.

The Iranian Seljuk - Anatolian Seljuk dynasties

The Seljuks were the first Turkish Muslim dynasty to rule in the region.

They were named after their founder, Seljuk, an Oghuz army chief. He converted to Islam in 985 A.D. The Seljuks established a great empire that extended from west China to the Mediterranean.

During their rule they defeated the Byzantines and conquered Anatolia. The part of the dynasty that ruled there was known as the Anatolian Seljuks. Soon after they came to power, the Oghuz tribes' immigrations to Anatolia began.

This contributed greatly to the birth of new patterns of art in the region, as a result of different ethnic flows and

cultures. There was an artistic influx of poets and artists between Iran, Syria and Anatolia during the Seljuk period. Their movement enriched different domains of art such as literature, metal work, tiles and carpets trapping.

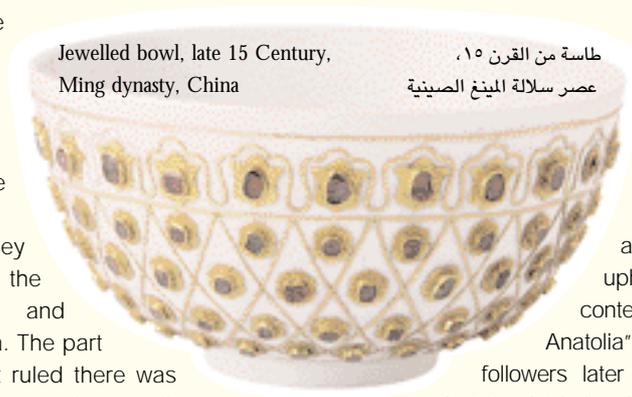
In this gallery there are different collections of art, literature and calligraphy. The show includes selections of Qurans that were written in different scripts. There are also some Sufi (mysticism) books which were written in different languages such as Arabic and Persian.

One of the exhibited books is a version of the famous book of "Kalila and Dimna" written in Persian. The visitors' attention however was attracted by the "Book of Kings" from the 10th century in Persian. This book is believed to contain the longest poetry in the world.

Another important book was "Ease of Hearts and Marvel Happiness" from the 13th century. It was not only artistic work and literature that flourished during this period - tiles and ceramics, with their special decorations, were also famous. One of the tiles exhibited in the gallery includes spiritual couplets of Mevlan Jalal Aldin Rumi. A major theme of the

work is a "call for fellowship and unity between human beings", which was used as "an antidote for upheaval in contemporary Anatolia". Rumi's followers later established the Mevelvi Sufi order.

Different pictures portray the daily life of the inhabitants. One of the pictures is about a ➤

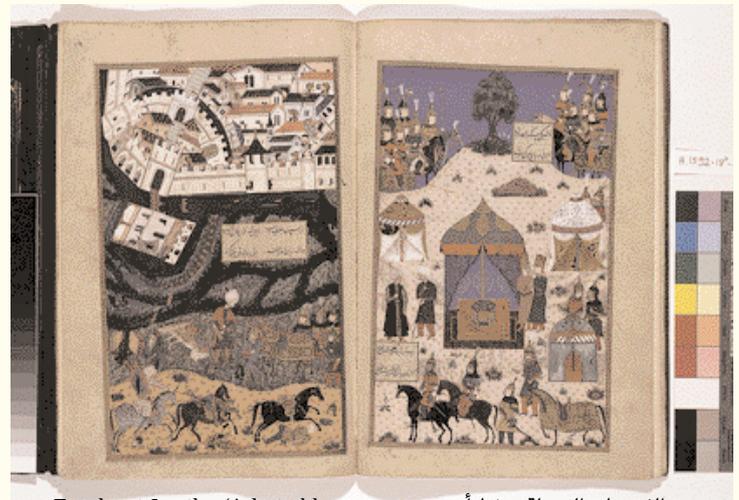


Jewelled bowl, late 15 Century, Ming dynasty, China

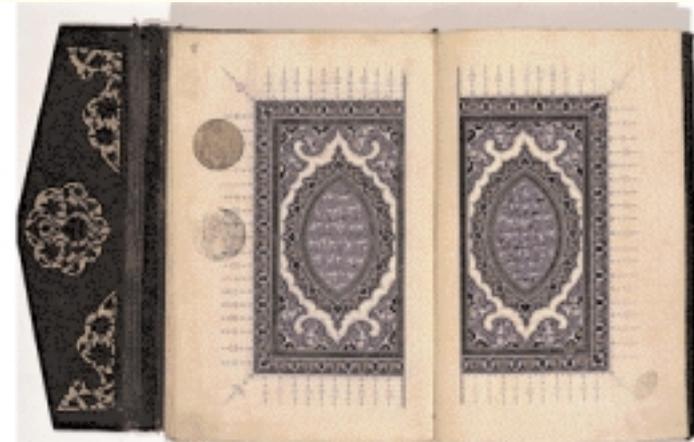
طاسة من القرن ١٥، عصر سلالة المينغ الصينية



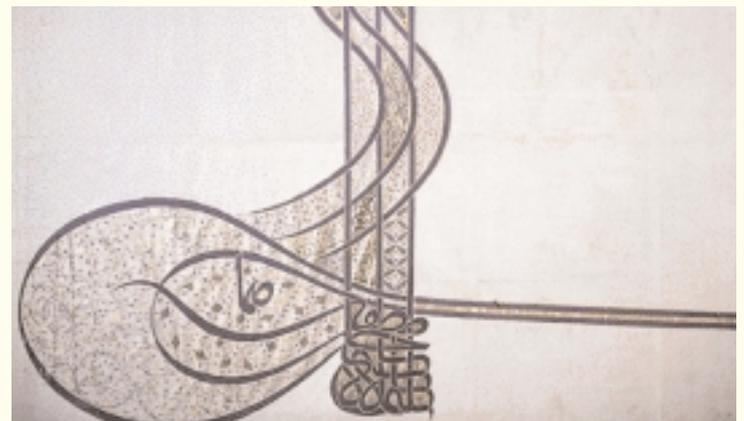
Mounted Warriors in Battle, c.1478-90, فارس في معركة، ١٤٧٨، يعتقد أن راسمها هو درويش محمد
Tabriz, Iran
Attributed to Darvish Muhammad



Futuhāt-i Jamīla, (Admirable Conquests) 1557
Copied by Abu-Turab el-Hasani al-Husayni al-Shirazi
الفتوحات الجميلة، بخط أبو تراب الحسيني الشيرازي، ١٥٥٧



Illuminated page from a book of rhetoric, 1467
صفحة ملونة من كتاب الخطابة، ١٤٦٧



Tugra of Suleyman the Magnificent, c.1540-50, Istanbul
طغراء سليمان الكبير، اسطنبول، ١٥٤٠

story, whose theme is narrated through a poem written beside it. This reflects the relationship between visual art and literature at the time.

The Timuri dynasty

The Timurids were named after their founder Timur (r.1330- 1405). In the West he was called Tamerlane and his bloody history is well known. He was a brutal military man who used art to serve his military purposes and sponsored art and architecture to create a sense of community between Muslims from different backgrounds: Persians and pastoral Turko – Mongols. The collection in this gallery gives an impression about the Timurids military character; items on display include a warrior's coat that was made of metal, swords and helmets.

This military equipment was displayed in a glass box. There was also a large stone with Arabic script, which narrated one of Timur's battles. Timur's art history is not very different from his military one and reflects his brutality and violence. He used to enslave the

best artists and architects from any captured town and transported them to his capital, where they were forced to serve him. These very same people are the ones who built Samarqand and made it one of the greatest cities of the time.

The Timurid was a vast Empire that extended from Turkey to India. It came to an end in 1530.

The Ottoman Empire

The last gallery is devoted to the greatest Empire of the Turks; the Ottoman.

A brief history of the Ottoman dynasty is exhibited alongside some of the Sultans' personal belongings, portraits, religious scripts, and books. The exhibition focuses on the three main eras of the Empire during which art and literature prospered: the rule of Mehmed (1451-1480), Selim (1481-1512) and Suleyman (1520-1566). At the entrance to the gallery visitors are welcomed by a portrait of the Sultan Mehmed (reigned 1451- 80), who excelled his predecessors and inspired his successor, the conqueror of Constantinople. After the fall of Constantinople in May 1453, it became the empire's capital and was

renamed Istanbul.

After its annexation Istanbul was inhabited by people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Their influx helped in producing a multi-cultural society distinguished by unique art work that resulted from this diversity.

Muslims, Jews, Christians, Turks, and Europeans lived in harmony in this city.

This mixture of people influenced the Ottoman's art, but did not affect its distinctive identity which is seen throughout the gallery. Art and literature prospered during Mehmed's rule.

Books were published in different languages; Arabic, Persian, Greek, Latin, and Turkish.

Most of the items displayed in this gallery have an Islamic touch. There are also some of the Sultans' clothes, and a beautiful collection of jewellery.

This exhibition is one of the special events that broadens one's horizon and understanding of the mediaeval Islamic ages: visitors encounter many exotic wonders in this journey to Turkish lands. ■