



Roma 2003

Cathedral Workshops on Religious  
Arts and Crafts

## ART OF THE LITURGICAL OBJECTS FROM THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

Tarcan Yilmaz

I want to begin my talk with a verse from Holy Qur'an, in the Sura of Tövbe – about Repentance – verse-number 34: “Those who treasure up gold and silver and do not expand them in the way of God, give them the good tidings of a painful chastisement”<sup>1</sup>. For this reason during the early Islamic period there was an orthodox disapproval of precious metals and it is clearly observed in the metal works. From the 9<sup>th</sup> century till the Ottoman period, popular material was first bronze and later it became brass. Islamic rulers Sultans and Emirs enjoyed surrounding themselves with high quality vessels inlaid with gold and silver, instead of solid gold or silver.

In regards to liturgical objects, I will now show you a rather popular shape used in Islamic art, an incense burner from a private collection and the Arenberg basin from the Metropolitan Museum<sup>2</sup>. Both are made of brass and inlaid with gold and silver. The Arenberg basin also has Christian subjects such as the annunciation, nativity, flight into Egypt, and so on. During the Islamic period liturgical objects and furnishings made from precious metals or metalwork can hardly be seen either in mosques or tombs.

This habit survived until the Mamluk period. The fashion of furnishing the tombs and mosques with inlaid brasses of lanterns, candlesticks, incense-burners, oil lamps, Qur'an boxes, began for the first time during the reign of the Mamluks. Despite the fact that it was forbidden by Qur'an, the Ottomans began to use precious metals especially after the conquest of Istanbul. The prevalence of precious metal objects at the Ottoman Court can also be seen in mosques and tombs and they were frequently used as gifts.

During the Ottoman period, liturgical objects such as incense-burners and rose sprinklers were commonly used in mosques and tombs on occasion of the *Mevlid* gathering on the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*Twelfth of Rebi ül evvel*). At this religious meeting the poem written by Süleyman Çelebi depicting the birth of Muhammad was sung. Liturgical objects were also used in religious meetings held in the memory of a deceased person. I will now show you some examples of incense-burners<sup>3</sup>. A parcel-gilt silver incense-burner dated to 1624 has an unusual shape hinged lid in the form of a cypress tree surmounted by a crescent and the foot rest on a flat dish, supported on three cast legs. The decoration of the lid consists of three engraved cyprus trees and open work arabesques. The inscription on the body gives the name of the nurse of Sultan Osman I. This object came from tomb of Sultan Ahmad I and Sultan Osman.

Another hanging silver incense-burner, also from the Sultan Ahmad I tomb<sup>4</sup>, is dated to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It looks like a cage or a fountain ending with six twisted silver wires on the top. The walls of the twelve-sided base were formed from a single sheet. Each facade is decorated in the style of book bindings with engraved and parcel-gilded ogival medallions containing leaves (*saz*) and rosettes.

A silver incense-burner formerly in the tomb of Sultan Mehmet III has an inscription on the tray that states that the piece was donated to the tomb<sup>5</sup>. It has three thin “S” shaped legs that rest on a tray. The body and the domed lid are divided into three vertical lobes. The lid is pierced with stylised floral scrolls, cross hatching embellishment on the centre of the florals. This is frequently seen on Ottoman metalwork as background decoration. Carved legs, lobed body and floral decoration reflect the European influences that began to appear in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The

repertoire of decoration in Ottoman metalwork began to change gradually when the European metal objects were imported especially from Austria and France. The next object is in a similar shape but the material has changed from silver to copper. It was gold plated and we call it *tombak*<sup>6</sup>, as seen in an example dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A ritual object that was used in religious meetings is the Gülabdan-rose sprinkler. Usually it has a globular body and a long neck. Two (*tombak*) gilded copper rose-sprinklers are in the TIEM<sup>7</sup>. The first one, dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is decorated with floral designs, while the second one, dated to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, displays European influence. The European influence is also seen on another silver rose-sprinkler. Now, I will introduce you to the folding Qur'an stand. They are called *rable* and used widely in Islamic countries. It is a small table used for the reading of the Qur'an during religious meetings. It is made of wood and very rarely decorated with precious metals.

A unique piece now in the TIEM was originally<sup>8</sup> in the Sultan Ahmed I tomb. The stand is made of two sections of wood. It is covered with silver sheets. The legs are shaped as trilobed arches. The upper right panel has a rectangular plaque with an inscription that states that the Qur'an stand was a gift from the Sultan Osman II to his father's tomb in 1619. The upper panels are decorated with lobed corner quadrants; the centres show a Turkish poem that praises Sultan Ahmed I. The verses are placed over floral scrolls with a ring-matted ground. Blossoms and leaves are rendered in relief on the edges of the corner quadrants. The legs are embellished in the same manner. Both the calligraphy and decoration reveal an expert execution. The technique is similar to that of the cage like incense-burner that we discussed earlier.

The treasury section of the Topkapi Sarayi Museum has a rich collection of Qur'an book bindings. I will refer to two examples<sup>9</sup>, the first of these bears the *tugra* cipher of Mahmud I. In this case gold polychrome enamels and niello technique were used for decorating the bindings. The ground is densely chased with foliate scrolls; the rest was worked in relief with foliate motifs and knot-pattern. This was much favoured by Northern European designers of that period. It was made by European craftsmen working in an Istanbul workshop. The knot-designs would indicate that the piece was made earlier than the date of the manuscript. It is probably dated to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The second Qur'an binding is made of gold and it is chased and enamelled in deep green on a quilloche ground. The borders and central panel are worked in high relief with scrolling and foliage, also with ornament encrusted with diamonds and a faceted emerald at the centre. It is probably dated to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century under strong European influence. I will now briefly explain some categories of furnishings found in mosques and tombs. These are huge candlesticks placed on both sides of the *mihrab* niche, hanging oil lamps, lanterns, and Qur'an boxes.

The shape of these objects is inspired from the Mamluk repertoire, after the conquest of Egypt by the Sultan Selim I at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Ottoman craftsman changed the repertoire of decoration to the Ottoman court-style. The first piece, a pair of candlesticks, is not made of precious metal but rather of brass plated with gold<sup>10</sup>. The inscription reveals that they were made in Istanbul in the last quarter of 15<sup>th</sup> century for the Sultan Bayezid's Mosque in Edirne. Each candlestick has a large socket and a tall neck with a thick ring. Its cylindrical base is decorated with engraved motifs. They are typical Ottoman floral *hatayi* blossoms. A Persian inscription praises light and also states the name of the Sultan Bayezid II.

Another pair of *mihrab* candlesticks in the same museum was taken from the Sultan Ahmad I tomb<sup>11</sup>. It has a flaring base and a long neck in silver, but the sockets are made of bronze. The decoration of arabesques is rendered in low relief and placed against a hatched ground. The inscription referring to the deceased Sultan Murad IV is dated 1640.

Another group of furnishings comprises hanging mosque oil lamps. As you know, in Islamic countries mosque lamps are developed from Byzantine types and enriched especially in the Mamluk rule of Egypt and Syria in various materials of glass and ceramics. Ottoman hanging lamps were made in silver, but in later years they were made in *tombak*. The hanging lamps were mainly pierced to allow more light to pass downwards. The first examples of these hanging oil-lamps are made of silver. The globular body standing on a bell-shaped foot is decorated with three pierced medallions just like in the widening neck. The lamp has no date or inscription. It belongs originally to the tomb of Sultan Ahmad I<sup>12</sup>.

The second piece has a similar shape and is dated 1618 from the shrine of Ebu Eyub Ensari. It is made of sheet silver partially gilt on the decorated areas<sup>13</sup>. The body is decorated with engraved lobed ogival courtouches containing floral motifs. A band of three similar medallions were executed in openwork around the neck. The lamps bear the assay mark of the Sultan Osman II that indicates that the object was given as a gift to the shrine. Now I will deal briefly with lanterns. Elaborate examples of the Mamluk lantern form are also used in Ottoman metalwork. They were made of diverse metals such as silver, brass, and plated copper. This Ottoman version of the Mamluk shape, is a lantern made of gilded sheet of silver that is embossed, engraved and pierced<sup>14</sup>.

The parts are: a finial and gadrooned lid, an hexagonal body, and the base tray with its seven tubular holders for the oil lamp. Along the top and the bottom of the body, run bands of inscription of verses taken from the Qur'an, as the Sura of Light verse No. 34. The oval medallions and the lid are pierced in arabesques, while the remaining areas were decorated with incised branches of floral decoration of the Court style of the Sultan Mehmed II. The lantern is found in the Sultans' mosque in Istanbul probably dated to 1450-60. Another lantern from the Mosque of Sultan Bayezid II was made of gilded-copper<sup>15</sup>. The inscription along the bands contains a poem praising the Sultan Bayezid II.

Now I am going to show you some precious objects made for furnishing the Ka'ba in Mecca. They were gifts from the Ottoman sultans and made mostly of gold and rarely in silver.

1) I begin with the padlock commissioned by the Sultan Murad III which belongs to an extensive collection of similar pieces housed in the Topkapi Palace. Many of these locks and keys to the Ka'ba were sent by Ottoman Sultans, as well as by rulers of earlier Islamic dynasties, including the Mamluks. This piece was made by the chief goldsmith Mehmed and is the most elaborate example of the series. It is gilded silver sheeted on iron and beautifully decorated with late 16<sup>th</sup> century floral designs and inscriptions including verses from Qur'an and all the Ottoman Sultans' names before the Sultan Murad III dated to the last quarter of 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup>.

2) Next is a Qur'an Box dated 1617<sup>17</sup>. It is a tall rectangular box with a pyramidal lid cover. The gilded silver plaques are applied to a wooden core. The inscription and floral arabesques are set against a hatched ground consisting of fine long parallel lines. The lid is decorated with verses from the Qur'an, the six upper layers of the base is decorated with poetry. In the inscription it says that this silver box was made for the Ka'ba to protect the Qur'an written by the third orthodox khalif Osman. It was commissioned by the Sultan Ahmed I. The large and impressive Qur'an box is among the refined examples of Ottoman silversmith.

3) Then we have a pendant made for the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad<sup>18</sup>. It is cut in hexagonal shape with a baroque jewelled gold cover. It bears the name of Sultan Mustafa III (1757-74). The vertical mounts of the emerald are of gold, set with small diamonds.

4) A gold candlestick with a similar shape as the 16<sup>th</sup> century example is engraved with the *tugra* of Mahmud II<sup>19</sup>. It contains an 11 line inscription stating that it was presented to the Ka'ba at Mecca (1814).

5) Then we have a pair of lampstands<sup>20</sup>, cast of 46 kg in weight, encrusted with 6,666 brilliants (the total number of verses in Qur'an). The verse inscription in the courtouches records that both pieces were presented to the Ka'ba by Sultan Abdulmecid (1839-61). *Tugra* appears on the object.

6) An incense-burner made of gold in openwork on the cover<sup>21</sup> has around the rim of the base an inscription with the name of Hatice Sultan who is the daughter of Sultan Mustafa III (1754-74). This piece was presented to the tomb of Prophet Muhammad in Madina. It is in neo-classical style.

7) A rose-sprinkler and stand made of gold chased and worked in relief<sup>22</sup> also displays polychrome enamels. Encrusted brilliants decorate the stand. There is an inscription stating that it was commissioned by Sultan Resad (1909-18) as a gift to Ka'ba at Mecca.

All the objects we have seen so far are presented to Ka'ba. They are now collected in the Topkapi Sarayi Museum. These religious objects were transferred from Mecca to Istanbul during the First World War. All the liturgical objects were also collected from mosques and tombs and they were transferred to the museums for security reasons after the Ottoman period.

I will finish the talk by showing you finally an object from the Holy Pavillion in the Topkapi Palace<sup>23</sup>. This piece is a reliquary chest containing the mantle of the Prophet. It is in the shape of doors with a door post and a padlock. The chest is of walnut and plated with gold, lined with green satin and gold chased decoration enhanced with niello and set with rubies and emeralds in collar mounts. Similarities regarding the technique between the Ka'ba padlock and the reliquary chest evidently suggest that they were possibly made by the same artist.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. 11, London 1955, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> E. Diez, *Die Kunst des Islam*, Berlin 1925, fig. 447; D. Barret, *Islamic Metalwork in the British Museum*, London 1949, p. 15; D. S. Rice, "Inlaid Brasses from the Workshop of Ahmad al-Dhaki al Mawsili", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 11, 1957, p. 311; *The Arts of Islam*, London 1974, "Metalwork" No. 216.

<sup>3</sup> J. Allan -J. Raby, "Metalwork", *Tulip, Arabesques and Turbans, Decorative Arts from the Ottoman Period*, London 1982, No. 53; F. Çagman, "Ottoman Art", *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, Istanbul 1983, No. 257.

<sup>4</sup> J. Allan -J. Raby, "Metalwork", 1982.

<sup>5</sup> F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 275.

<sup>6</sup> F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 284.

<sup>7</sup> Silver incense-burner, Turkish and Islamic Museum, Istanbul, Env. No. 75.

<sup>8</sup> J. Allan -J. Raby, "Metalwork", 1982, No. 2; F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 255.

<sup>9</sup> J. M. Rogers, *The Topkapi Saray Museum: The Treasury*, London 1987, p. 202, pls. 82-83.

<sup>10</sup> Ü. Erginsoy, "Turkish Metalwork", *The Art and Architecture of Turkey*, 1980, p. 212, pl. 152; F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 23.

<sup>11</sup> F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 256.

<sup>12</sup> Turkish Art and Islamic Art Museum, Env. No. 180-181.

<sup>13</sup> J. Allan -J. Raby, "Metalwork", 1982, No. 52; F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 253.

<sup>14</sup> *Art Treasures of Turkey*, Washington DC, 1966, No. 254; F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 21.

<sup>15</sup> J. Allan -J. Raby, "Metalwork", 1982, No. 20; F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1983, No. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Sourdel-Thomine, "Clefs et Serrures de la Ka'ba". Notes d'epigraphie arabe, *Revue Des Etudes Islamiques*, 39, Fac. 1, Paris, 1971, p. 71; T. Yilmaz, *Topkapi Sarayindaki Ka'be Kilit ve Anahartlari*, Istanbul 1993, Iricica Publication, pp. 76-79.

<sup>17</sup> J. Allan -J. Raby, "Metalwork", 1982, No. 11; F. Çagman, *The Anatolian Civilisation III*, 1982, No. 255; T. Yilmaz, "Degisik Bir Grup Gümüs Eser", IX. Milletlerarasi Türk Sanatlari Kongresi III, Ankara 1995, p. 535, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> J. M. Rogers, *The Treasury*, 1987, p. 188, No. 9.

<sup>19</sup> J. M. Rogers, *The Treasury*, 1987, p. 203, No. 90.

<sup>20</sup> J. M. Rogers, *The Treasury*, 1987, p. 203, No. 91.

<sup>21</sup> J. M. Rogers, *The Treasury*, 1987, p. 203, No. 95.

<sup>22</sup> J. M. Rogers, *The Treasury*, 1987, p. 204, No. 104.

<sup>23</sup> J. M. Rogers, *The Treasury*, 1987, p. 201, No. 79.

Prof. Tarcan Yilmaz  
Department Art History, Faculty of Letters,  
Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey