The historiography of Ottoman velvets, 2011-1572: scholars, craftsmen, consumers

Amanda Phillips

This article focuses on scholarly writing about Ottoman figured silk velvet cushion covers made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (figure 1). These mass-produced objects are unusual subjects for an art historical study and the order in which I discuss their treatment will be correspondingly unorthodox: this essay surveys the historiography of textiles and like objects in the larger fields of Ottoman and Islamic art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in the nineteenth, and finally in the seventeenth and eighteenth. This excavation is intended to highlight the means by which scholarship of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries has obscured some of the issues that were, in fact, alive in earlier years, and is also intended to attempt to dispense with these deceptive effects in order to address the earlier contexts on their own terms. And because the textiles and their scholarship also stand at an awkward nexus of fields, including social and economic history and the history of art and material culture, some account of each of these is also attempted. The last section introduces the figure so often absent from the study of textiles and other objects of large-scale production – that is, the consumer – and considers his place in the history of luxury goods.


1 Figured should not be confused with ‘figural’; in design terms, it means patterned and further implies a repeating motif more elaborate than stripes or checks.
The cushion covers in question form a cohesive group. Their dimensions are regular, falling between about ninety and one hundred and ten centimetres in length, and about fifty-five to sixty centimetres in width. Their structure is voided and brocaded warp-pile silk velvet, always cut and always on a satin foundation. All of the examples considered here bear distinctive end-finishes called lappets in the English-language literature and niş in the Turkish; these are present in the earliest outliers (c 1580s) but begin to disappear around the 1750s, and are mostly absent by the 1770s. The main fields use a limited range of formats, mostly central medallions or smaller repeating motifs; although the details vary enormously, most participate in a larger Ottoman aesthetic, which includes familiar arrangements of roses, hyacinths, tulips, carnations, pomegranates, and palmettes as well as sun-burst medallions, variations of the çintamani motif, and other elements shared, in part, by other Mediterranean and Islamic traditions. Their collective palette is overwhelmingly crimson, with green and gold details, though a small but important group of gold- and silver-ground examples emerges in the 1720s and 1730s (figure 2). I estimate that about 400 to 500 examples survive to this day, which testifies to the original scale of their manufacture. The dating for the cushion covers is based on their relation to one another and to similar objects in other media; certain distinctive motifs as well as changes in materials and size also help place individual objects in a continuum. The cushion covers are most often identified with the silk-trading and weaving centre of Bursa, in western Anatolia, but it is almost certain that production also took place in nearby Bilecik and Göynük, and in Istanbul.


Because the group is large and its constituent objects consistent, the link between the category of object and references in the written sources is fairly easy to

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3 Court cases from Bursa itself mention weaving in the two cities, both of which fall in its judicial purview; Fahri Dalsar, Bursa’da İpekçilik: Türk Sanayi ve Ticaret Tarihinde, Istanbul: Sermet Matbaası, 1960, passim. Çatma weaving in Istanbul is attested by Topkapı Palace Museum Archives D 2314 and in Tahsin Öz, Türk Kumaş ve Kadifeleri, 2 vols, Istanbul: Mili Eğitim Basımevi, 1946-51, vol. 1.
establish, even for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Ottoman Turkish, the term çatma (voided and brocaded silk velvet, as defined by nineteenth-century dictionaries) is applied to cushions at around the same moment the first extant dateable examples emerged in the later sixteenth century. The term çatma yastık yüzü (voided and brocaded silk velvet cushion cover) is subsequently found in an abundance of records, from diplomatic gift lists to inheritance inventories to court cases, as well as in other sources. Alternative meanings proposed for this term (for instance, gold-embroidered velvet, plain velvet or figured solid-pile velvet) are not supported by objects; velvet cushions from the Ottoman Empire in other formats are absent from collections worldwide and cushions made from other materials entirely are surprisingly few. The large number of çatma cushions extant and an almost complete dearth of any other type argue against the possibility that a perverse accident of survival left all of one type and none of any other. Simply put, this large group of consistent surviving objects probably provides the best match with the equally abundant references found in the Ottoman documents. Both term and provenance are further strengthened by a narrative account, written by the seventeenth-century traveller Evliya Çelebi: he visited Bursa in 1640 and observed that the city was known specifically for its production of silks, including cushions made from “çatma mıünakkaş kadife” (voided silk velvet worked with gold brocade).

The numbers of cushion covers found in twentieth-century collections has provoked some comment and the occasional scholarly foray, but study of the group as a whole or as part of a greater Ottoman visual culture has been realized only recently.

The following section makes a reverse-chronological survey of the literature, and in doing so posits some reasons for the comparative neglect of the type.

I. The historiography of Islamic and Ottoman fine and industrial art, 2011-1600

The industrial arts of Islam and those of the Ottoman Empire

Before we can continue, it is necessary to consider carefully the words most often used to discuss the çatma cushion covers and other art objects produced on a large scale. The history of the terms ‘decorative’, ‘minor’, and ‘industrial’ arts is a long one, dating back to the first studies of Renaissance art; though extensive writing has

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4 Topkapı Palace Museum Archives D4 (1505) (transliteration generously supplied by J. Michael Rogers), and D 2314 (1568), and in Ömer Lütfi Barkan, ‘İstanbul Saraylarına ait Muhasebe Defterleri’, Belgeler 9(13), 1979, 298-380, passim. The Redhouse Ottoman and English Lexicon (1880) defines it as a gold brocade but not a brocade on a satin foundation (like a lampas), rather on something different — probably on a velvet. Çatma has been defined as voided and brocaded velvet in copious secondary source literature as well, most importantly in IPEK, as well as in reference works like Reşat Koçu’s Dictionary of Clothing and Ornament (1967).


addressed the failures of the terms and of the category they define, both persist nonetheless. The çatma cushions, like other non-figurative art objects, are decorative in two senses, one positive and one negative: they served to embellish – decorate – a space; and they are neither narrative nor illustrative. Nor are they explicitly expressive of an idea, emotion or other sentiment of either artist or patron; this definition of ‘fine’ versus ‘industrial’ art derives in part from Oleg Grabar, who in a 1988 review of two compendious works on ceramics described some of the internal contradictions that characterized Islamic art scholarship. He pointed out that scholarship about what he termed the industrial arts suffered from an ‘intellectual stagnation’, due in part to problems of methodology. His chief complaint towards such texts was directed at the discussion of objects, which was often visually and historically analytical, while the corresponding images and descriptions were grouped in the catalogue by their technical features with no reference to the accompanying text.

Several further issues are inherent to Grabar’s critique and are worth considering here in slightly more depth, especially as they pertain to later Islamic art. The first matter is the relatively small production of fine arts – in the narrowest Western academic definition – in the Islamic world. Painting is limited to that found in manuscripts, with several salient exceptions; sculpture is yet more rare. Architecture, long a favourite subject for scholars of the Ottoman Empire, fares somewhat better, as does architectural decoration; inscriptions provide evidence for patron and builder, and sometimes even propound an explicit political, religious or personal message. However, most objects of Islamic art, and in turn, the majority found in institutional and private collections, are those which do not satisfy these taxonomic criteria, and certainly cannot be safely described as expressive of any explicit sentiment of the artist or patron—if the latter existed as such at all. They are, instead, luxury goods. This definition also derives from the nature of their creation; Grabar points out that production on a large scale, involving the skills and labour of several types of artisans, is resistant to the methodologies that emphasize the will or genius of the artist or patron. This is a salient concern for all historians of

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8 Oleg Grabar, ‘Between Connoisseurship and Technology: A Review’, Mughānas, 5, 1988, 1-8. He also makes a general complaint about ‘good writing’ in Islamic Art history at this point: ‘full of internal contradictions’, it ‘has failed to come to grips with its material because it has not properly isolated or handled according to their own practices such diverse components as technology, scientific thought, patronage, governmental structure, history, social context, economics of trade, availability of materials, international contacts, the management of vast numbers and so on’ (3). This situation has been somewhat ameliorated, in the Ottoman case, by two large multi-author works to be discussed in more depth below: Atasoy et al., IPEK, and Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby, Iznik: The Pottery of Ottoman Turkey, London: Alexandria Press in association with Thames & Hudson, 1989.
10 Of course, there is substantial overlap in the categories; for example, in seventeenth-century Bruges, paintings on linen were manufactured on an industrial scale, as a commodity expressly for export to Mexico. See Hans J. van Miegroet and Neil de Marchi, ‘Flemish Textile Trade and New Imagery in Colonial Mexico (1524-1646)’, in Juana Gutiérrez Haces, ed., Painting of the Kingdoms, 4 vols, Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 2008-9, vol. 3, 878-923. A more relevant but less forceful example can be found in Lale Uluç, Türkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Arts of the Book in 16th Century Shiraz, Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2006.
craft production, including those of Islamic art. The treatment of ceramics described by Grabar – as mentioned above, this emphasizes a reliance on formal and technical analysis to classify objects, which are then placed in a larger historical context that fails to address the object or its distinguishing qualities – is one alternative to the masterpiece-and-genius model, however unsatisfying. For industrial arts in the medieval period, including those in the volumes reviewed by Grabar, the very treatment he described almost a quarter of a century ago remains standard, although recent work has effectively deployed evidence from archaeological sources and records of trade to make more specific and nuanced arguments about the nature of craft production and consumption.\footnote{For instance, Marcus Milwright, ‘Modest Luxuries: Decorated Lead-glazed Pottery in the South of Bilad al-Sham (Thirteenth-Fourteenth Century)’, \textit{Muqarnas}, 20, 2003, 85-111; Oliver Watson, \textit{Ceramics from Islamic Lands}, London: Thames & Hudson, 2004. It has been taken up in earnest in an article by Avinoam Shalem, ‘Mass Production: Notes on the Aesthetic of the Islamic Traded Ivories of the Crusader Era’, in Avinoam Shalem and Annette Hagedorn, eds, \textit{Facts and Artefacts: Art in the Islamic World, Festschrift for Jens Kröger on his 65th Birthday}, Leiden: Brill, 2007, 231-49.} However, methodologies for the later period of Islamic art are somewhat different. Works on Timurid, Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal industrial arts may discuss formal and technical qualities, but the objects are more often placed in the landscape of court-imposed decorative styles. In the Timurid example, compelling evidence of princely patronage was used to build a case for direct courtly input and intervention not only in manuscript painting and monuments, but also in decoration in multiple media.\footnote{Anonymous, \textit{Arzadasht}, in \textit{A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art}, selected and translated by Wheeler M. Thackston, Cambridge, MA: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and MIT, 1989, 323-7.} In this narrative, ceramics, textiles, manuscript illumination, architectural decoration and even leatherwork are produced in a royal atelier under the direction of a head-designer—and this model may be applied to the Ottoman court as well, especially in the sixteenth century. This implies, in turn, that the motifs, format and palette which together comprise a signature style spring from the political, religious and personal cosmos of the royal patron.\footnote{In fact, there appears to be very little evidence for this. The patron must have approved, at least, but specific and definitive input about motif, format or palette is very difficult to discern.} Some of this thesis relies upon the survival of written directives, as well as pattern books, and line drawings of single motifs or figures, some of them pounced.\footnote{Evidence for the court workshop and its directives exists for the Timurid case, as noted above, and in the Ottoman case, mainly for the mid to late sixteenth century, with several stray examples falling later. These include a mention of a drawing for a textile, stencils for tilework and other ‘master designs’. See Gülru Necipoğlu, ‘From International Timurid to Ottoman: A Change of Taste in Sixteenth-century Ceramic Tiles’, \textit{Muqarnas}, 7, 1990, 168, notes 36 and 37; and Atasoy and Raby, \textit{Iznik}, 59-60.} Indeed, the nature of the sources available for the later periods plays a role in this construct: a lack of archaeological research is balanced by the survival of inventory lists, wage registers, correspondence and even dateable albums of designs with patrons’ inscribed comments and attributions. Of course, this period in the Islamic world, as elsewhere, is also notable for the availability of abundant information about its charismatic leaders, including the Mughal sultans Akbar and Jahangir, the Ottoman sultans Mehmed II and Süleyman I, and Ahmed III and his powerful grand vizier Nevşehirli Ibrahim Pasha, the Safavid shahs Isma’il, Tahmasp and ‘Abbas, and, earlier, the Timurid rulers from Timur himself to Baysunghur; their patronage
provides a convenient and easily accessible framework on which to place architecture, fine arts and luxury material culture, or more simply put, crafts. The overarching construction of the later period, found in survey texts, exhibitions and some specialist texts, is that of sultanic and imperial will and its impact on the arts. Scholars intent on tracing the influence of the court-style in all modes of production have allowed the expansion of this model until almost any object can be located within it—from printed cottons to earthenware to low-quality velvet, a subject to which we will return.

Grabar, in his review, proposed the introduction of the consumer to the study of ‘industrially’ produced goods: organizing the discussion around the function of the object and how it was used by its first or second owner might help remedy the disconnection between technical features, distinguishing characteristics and historical context. Indeed, although art production for an urban middle class merits a brief appearance in some texts, the role of the consumer has been taken up in earnest in surprisingly few cases. I argue that by ignoring the consumers’ role in the large-scale creation and circulation of luxury goods, scholars risk misunderstanding the nature of production as a whole; in this way, they neglect a main conduit for the spread of styles and technologies as well as the nature of the wider visual culture in the early modern eastern Mediterranean. Because this article focuses on writing about Ottoman silk velvets, it is here that we turn to an overview of the historiography of the Empire’s arts and crafts in more detail, starting with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The history of Ottoman art: a quick introduction to the state of the field, 1940-2012

The practice of record-keeping in the Ottoman territories offers interested scholars a wide array of written documents: imperial orders for the building and decoration of palaces and mosques, wage lists for palace artisans, court cases which list dowries, estate inventories and disputes among craft guilds, descriptions of gifts given and received, and even a price list for goods and services available in Istanbul in the year 1640. In addition, published, transliterated and even translated chronicles and narrative accounts by Ottoman or other authors have become increasingly accessible, as has Ottoman poetry and prose, advice literature and even religious texts—all of which may be used as evidence of attitudes toward aesthetics, sumptuary concerns, material culture, figural representation and even style, as we

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shall see below.17 The possibilities offered by relevant written sources demand scholars achieve a competency in Ottoman Turkish, at a minimum, as well as Persian and Arabic, depending on the topic and period. Emphasis on the use of archival sources, especially, may be meant as much as a litmus-test of a scholar’s language and research skills, and the willingness of those working and studying outside Turkey to spend sufficient amounts of time in the country, as it is about the utility of the documents; as does Ottoman history itself, Ottoman art history fetishizes the use of unpublished primary sources. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, scholars working in modern Turkish have also published seminal works on a variety of topics, making knowledge of this language another necessity for historians of Ottoman art. It is equally important to note that many of the scholars of Ottoman art who have risen to prominence in Turkey, Western Europe and North America are Turkish — another element which sets this sub-field slightly apart in the wider field of Islamic art history as a whole.

The publication of visual sources has also led to an accretion of images available to scholars, though access to originals or to unpublished material is sometimes less than ideal.18 And certainly, the focus in Ottoman art history so far — on the exceptional objects in the Topkapi Palace, on lavishly illustrated manuscripts, or on royal architecture — is in part due to the suitability of these objects for celebratory publication in their own lavishly illustrated volumes, as well as to the ease with which they might be placed in narratives of imperial patronage, politics or other courtly imperatives. It may also be true, as we shall see, that art historical works from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries address an audience at once eager to learn about Ottoman art and desirous of placing it on a par with that of Safavid Iran or Mughal India.

17 The editing and transliteration of ten volumes of Evliya Çelebi, the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller, is now finished (Evliya Çelebi, Seyahatname, see footnote 5 above); forty volumes of transliterated court records from Istanbul have just been made available by scholars from the Islamic Studies Research Centre (ISAM) in Istanbul (Istanbul Kadı Sicilleri, ed. Coşkun Yılmaz, Istanbul: Islam Araştırma Merkezi, 2008-2011). Of interest to historians of architecture are translations of the architect Sinan’s autobiography by the poet Mustafa Sai Çelebi (Sinan’s Autobiographies: Five Sixteen-century Texts, Howard Crane and Esra Akin, eds, Leiden: Brill, 2006), a seventeenth-century treatise (Risale-i Mi’marisi: An Early-Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture, Howard Crane, ed., Leiden: Brill, 1987), and the work of the Iranian observer of Ottoman mosques, Ayyansarayi (Hafiz Hüseyin Ayyansarayi, The Garden of the Mosques: Hafiz Hüseyin al-Ayvansarayi’s Guide to the Muslim Monuments of Ottoman Istanbul, tr. and ed. Howard Crane, Leiden, Brill, 2000). Mustafa Ali’s advice and commentary, the Meva’idü’n-Nefis’i fi Kava’id’l-Mecalis [The Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings] is published as The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century, annotated trans. Douglas S. Brookes, Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Language and Civilizations, Harvard University, 2003. Some archival documents have been transliterated and published, most notably in the Turkish journal Belğeler, and as sections of books with extensive analysis: Küttükoğlu, İnalci, and Dalsar (see notes 69, 27 and 3, respectively) all represent this category. Most work in Ottoman history and art history, however, relies on unpublished documents found in archives in Istanbul (Prime Minister’s Archives Ottoman Division, Süleymaniye Library, Topkapı Palace Archives and Library), Ankara (Directorate of Religious Foundations), and in various archives in the former Ottoman cities of the Arab and Balkan worlds as well as Greece and the Ukraine. Of course, other sources are also inherent to the study of Ottoman manuscripts, architecture, and other goods, but these are still often textual (cophons, inscriptions, and so forth).

18 In part due to the renovations or moves of some libraries and collections, in part due to other administrative convolutions. Turkish and foreign citizens need research permits to work at some institutions; the process of obtaining these has become simpler over the past decade. Permits for archaeological work, however, seem more difficult to procure.
Although there are several prominent strains in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Ottoman historical studies – individuals or groups focusing on social and economic, political, religious, or intellectual aspects of the Empire – the most influential narrative in Ottoman art history is the court and its agendas. Studies on this model include those of Mehmed II and his plans for the new capital, as well as his patronage of Italian artists; Süleyman, his chief architect Sinan and the Ottoman style in its Anatolian, Balkan and Arab iterations, as well as the creation of a new Ottoman narrative and decorative language by palace artisans; and the festivities, outdoor entertainments and waterside palace- and fountain-building that characterized the first half of the eighteenth century. Even when the sultan himself is not the patron, scholarship tends to place the princess, pasha, eunuch or warlord in question, and his or her agenda, at the centre of study. At the same time, art historians have been less interested in incorporating research about the history of trade, economic or social structures, guilds and labour, or religion into their work, with some notable exceptions that will be discussed below.

Royal patronage is indeed an important aspect of Ottoman art—the Topkapı Palace collections and the sultans’ and their courts’ commissions will occupy several more generations of scholars before they approach any level of effective cataloguing, never mind publication. However, historians of Ottoman art have become perhaps too accustomed to using the model of a centrally-disseminated court style to organize and classify goods of wildly differing types, qualities, and even modes of production, while also neglecting whole classes of objects which cannot be linked with the collective will of Istanbul and other cities or with the charisma of their most influential inhabitants.¹⁹ This approach is bolstered by the availability of records documenting the myriad artisans attached to the palace, which are published in transliteration.²⁰ Exceptions, of course, exist. For the purposes of this article, the most compelling are two large volumes, one on Iznik ceramic vessels and one on silk cloth from Bursa, Istanbul and other centres.²¹ Notably, both are collaborations: Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby on the former, and Atasoy, Walter Denny, Louise Mackie and Hülya Tezcan on the latter, with contributions from other textile experts. Both books address the processes of production—for instance, the treatment of silk cocoons or the invention of the bole red which so defined mid sixteenth-century Iznik-ware. The consumer, whether palace or private individual, is discussed – the latter in abstract and prosopographical terms – as are the regulations with which the artisans were meant

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²¹ Other exceptions include Tülay Artan, Architecture as a Theatre of Life: Profile of the Eighteenth-century Bosphorus, unpublished PhD thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988; and Suraiya Faroqhi, Artisans of Empire: Crafts and Craftpeople Under the Ottomans, London: I.B. Tauris, 2009 – although the latter is not strictly a book about Ottoman art. I am excluding other works on ceramics and textiles because they focus exclusively on the palace or on architectural decoration. However, Tahsin Öz’s books on the palace collections are notable for their inclusion of information about production of goods outside palace workshops. Two volumes are in Turkish, Türk Kumaş ve Kadifeleri, Istanbul: Mili Eğitim Basımevi, 1946-51 and one in English, Turkish Textiles and Velvets, Ankara: Turkish Press, Broadcasting and Tourist Department, 1950.
to comply, as well as trade, the use of the goods in domestic settings or otherwise, and changes in style and quality.

And it is arguments about quality that haunt most writing about both fine and industrial arts in the Ottoman Empire. Exquisite objects – like the fabulous kaftans from the turn of the sixteenth century, or the incredibly fine jars, bowls and lamps painted by a man named Muslih al-Din, who called himself a décorator (al-nakkaş) – throw into relief other examples which are more numerous and less magnificent. In the case of textiles, catalogues focus closely on their subjects, and in this way come closer to the ceramics catalogues on which Grabar commented: classification by structure and technique is placed in a general historical context.

Ottoman silk textiles are also compared unfavourably with their European counterparts – even in the golden age of the sixteenth century – and with their Iranian equivalents. The latter comparison sometimes has a whiff of pro-Iranian chauvinism but it may also rest in part on the survival of a greater number of Ottoman objects and perhaps on the scale and breadth of Ottoman textile production (encompassing good, bad and indifferent specimens) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The chorus of praise for Persian manuscript painting – and objects in other media – may also derive in part from the concerns of the art market, collectors and other interested parties.

Islamic and Ottoman decoration: nineteenth- and twentieth-century European writing

Because several other articles in the present journal address the history of writing about and collecting Islamic decorative art, I will not belabour this matter, but rather give a brief outline of its implications for the çatma cushion covers. In her work on a

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22 For the kaftans, see Atasoy et al., IPEK, Plates 22, 23; for the work of Muslih al-Din, see Atasoy and Raby, 129-38.
23 For instance, Christian Erber, ed., A Wealth of Silk and Velvet: Ottoman Fabrics and Embroideries, Bremen: Edition Temmen, n.d. The Topkapı catalogue, curiously, does the same thing. Both books, however, address a general audience and the authors may have felt it necessary to explain the history and nature of the Empire for non-specialists.
24 See the discussion of Italian textiles for the Ottoman market in Atasoy et al., IPEK, 182-90.
25 There have been great losses of Iranian luxury textiles for several reasons, including the periodic burning of textiles to retrieve the precious metal found in them. See Patricia Baker, Islamic Textiles, London: British Museum Press, 1995, 113. Chauvinism towards Ottoman production is to be found in discussions of diverse media, excluding architecture and Iznik tiles. For literature see Victoria Holbrook, ‘Originality and Ottoman Poetics: In the Wilderness of the New’, Journal of the American Oriental Society, 112(3), 1992, 440-54; for painting, the acknowledgment of a distinctive Ottoman style was made earlier, by Atasoy in 1971 (‘The Documentary Value of Ottoman Miniatures’, in le IVème congrès international d’art turc: Aix-en-Provence, 1971, Aix-en-Provence: Editions de l’Université de Provence, 11-17) and by Norah Titley in 1981 (Miniatures from Turkish Manuscripts, Paintings in the British Library and British Museum, London: British Library). For velvets, in particular, much has been made of the Iranian seven-coloured pile and the amounts of gold- and silver-wrapped thread found on the back surface; see Carol Bier, ed., Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart: Textile Arts and Safavid and Qajar Iran, 16th-19th Centuries, Washington DC: The Textile Museum, 1987.
26 Nancy Micklewright, in an article about Ottoman painting, addresses the hyperbolic descriptions of Iranian art published in the earlier twentieth century and links them to the number of objects found in European and North American collections and, in turn, to the art market, “‘Musicians and Dancing Girls’: Images of Women in Ottoman Miniature Painting’ in Madeleine C. Zilfi, ed., Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Empire, Leiden: Brill, 1997, 154-5. Some hyperbole persist.
scroll of architectural drawings from late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century Iran, Gülru Necipoğlu describes nineteenth- and early twentieth-century western European conventions of describing and interpreting Islamic architecture and architectural decoration. Her summary emphasizes the concern with geometric decoration and its origin as an attendant to architecture as well as the arabesque as a supposed response to the prohibition of figural representation in Islam. Owen Jones, Jules Bourgoin, and Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, among others, paid particular attention to ornament in, and the over-ornamentation of, Islamic architecture. In their cases most decoration, and particularly the floral or curvilinear decoration which came to be known as the arabesque, was perceived as feminine and therefore passive—for which the Orientalist implications should be clear. For the Ottoman case, Léon Parvillée’s *Architecture et décoration turques au XVᵉ siècle* (1874) should also be mentioned for its recognition of the complementary strategies in patterning and palette seen in the tile decoration at Mehmed I’s mosque in Bursa, completed c. 1420.

Perspectives on, methods for, and the historiography of non-architectural ornament are slightly different. Alois Riegl’s study of the carpet collections at the Museum für Kunst und Industrie (today the Museum für angewandte Kunst or Applied Arts) in Vienna shaped his thinking about the power of individual motifs and their adoption in different media. His *Stilfragen* (1893) would go on to influence the study of the decorative elements in Islamic art, especially in the German-speaking world. Berlin’s Ernst Kühnel, whose career was both long and productive, mentioned Riegl on the first page of *Die Arabeske* (1949), and credited him with refining the definition of ‘arabesque’ to designate a forked rinceau exclusive to, and representative of, Islamic art.

At the same time, the industrial arts (including the production of one-of-a-kind items) were also the subject of categorization in art museums and in scholarly writing by Gaston Migeon in Paris and Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Diez in Berlin. The evolving canons of the early twentieth century included less fine examples of mass-production—like the *çatma* cushion covers—as these were deemed characteristic and worthy of inclusion because of their position in the historical continuum, filling the gap left by the absence of elite textile materials surviving from the eighteenth century. Formal features, as well as the time and place of

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production, provided the rationale for organizing exhibitions and catalogues—a practice which continues, as Grabar noted in 1988. Ernst Cohn-Wiener, as Eva-Maria Troelenberg points out, is one of the few who considered the social and economic contexts of the making of an object; he also invokes a broad consumption of the industrial arts and suggests that popular, mass-produced items must be taken into account when hoping to understand the culture in which they were made and first used.31 In Britain, the Arts and Crafts Movement’s interest in the rejuvenation of British craft traditions emphasized the moral value of ornament, at least partly in terms of the conditions in which it was produced, highlighting the plight of the skilled artisan in the wake of the Industrial Revolution and the advent of true mass-production.32 Iznik pottery, especially, inspired the ceramics of William de Morgan (d. 1917) and the textiles of William Morris (d. 1896).33 However, the Ottoman textiles themselves seem to have found little favour beyond their dual didactic role: that is, providing evidence for the continuity of craft tradition and providing eager artisans with a rich repertoire of motifs.

Collecting the ornamental: çatma cushion covers in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century consumption

Discourse aside, one tangible result of the focus on and publication of Islamic ornament between about 1850 and 1920—which at least in the British case had the explicit goal of invigorating contemporary design skills—was the collecting of textiles, ceramics, and other industrial arts by museums. The South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) in London, founded in 1852, was a state-mandated response to this, and it is no surprise that their collection of çatma cushion covers is one of the largest in the world. Of the forty çatma cushion covers found there, thirty-nine were acquired in the nineteenth century, one in the very year of the museum’s founding. The Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Design in New York had a similar goal, and indeed has a small collection of çatma covers and other Ottoman fabrics. The same may also be said of the collections at the Musée des Tissus et des Arts Décoratifs in Lyon, which, as part of the Centre International d’Étude des Textiles Anciens, were formed in close relationship with the silk manufactories there; the connection with the textile industry also may be a factor in donations made to the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester. Textile museums in Washington DC, Riggisberg, and Krefeld acquired çatma covers, as did museums of decorative or applied arts in Paris, Cologne, Vienna, and Hamburg. Çatma cushions were also acquired by fine art museums in North America, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Cleveland Institute of Art, and the Royal Ontario Museum; these are institutions which have collected paintings not only by Bihzad or Ahmed Karahisari, but also by Rembrandt van Rijn or Georgia O’Keefe. In these museums, the cushions are often used, in fact, as decoration, placed in period rooms or serving as backdrops in vitrines displaying metalwork or ceramics, and are found in spaces reserved for

31 Troelenberg, Eine Ausstellung.
32 The British Empire, the Industrial Revolution, the experience of the Raj, and the occupation of Cairo, among other things, contributed to this perspective.
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Islamic art.34 A dedicated collection of Islamic art started in 1935 by Doris Duke includes five of the type and several more from the later eighteenth and nineteenth century that she acquired in 1953 and 1954.35 In contrast, the much newer museums of Islamic art in Kuwait City and Doha have not collected the cushion covers, or indeed much else in the way of other mid-level production from the Ottoman period and territories.

The çatma cushions might have been deemed worth collecting in twentieth-century contexts in part because they were included in the 1910 exhibition Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst in Munich and its important accompanying catalogue.36 One Ottoman velvet merited a colour plate, and two çatma cushions, referred to as Scutari (Üsküdar) cushions, are included, as well as a similar cover in brocaded lampas, also referred to as a ‘Scutari Decke’.37 The two çatma cushion covers in the Munich exhibition were loaned by the Bacri Frères of Paris.38 Earlier, the Victoria and Albert Museum had acquired several from the firms of Raphael Stora (Paris and New York) and Vitall Benguiat (London and New York).39 Benguiat also supplied the art dealer Joseph Duveen with crates of Renaissance silks and trimmings and with Iranian carpets, which were then offered to Duveen’s group of collectors.40 Duveen, whose influence and acumen are the stuff of legend, certainly played a role in popularizing the use of heavy antique draperies, table-clothes and carpets among the newly very rich, and may be credited with creating a demand in the United States. Whether the Ottoman velvets were as desirable as their Genoese or Florentine counterparts is not clear. However, a photo of William H. Vanderbilt’s picture gallery in his New York mansion, taken in 1883 or 1884, depicts several settees, easy chairs and straight-backed chairs, all upholstered with cushion covers

34 In the Damascus room at the Metropolitan in New York, for instance, as it was installed in the 1980s, and in the collection of Doris Duke as it was installed in the Syrian rooms (known formerly as the Turkish and Baby Turkish rooms), the Damascus room and the Mihrab room at Shangri La in Honolulu; thanks to Dr Keelan Overton of Shangri La for providing information about the prior installations. I am unaware of any installations that include the cushion covers in non-Islamic settings.
36 See the article in this volume by Eva-Maria Troelenberg for a more in-depth consideration.
37 Friedrich Sarre and Fredrik Robert Martin, Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst in München 1910, 3 vols, Munich: F. Bruckmann AG, 1912, vol. 3, plates 218, 221. The association of these çatmas with Üsküdar probably derives from evidence that a workshop for cushion-making was established there in the eighteenth century, as part of the foundations of the Mihrîşah Emîne Sultan Mosque (1761). The first use of this term that I have found in secondary sources is Tahsin Öz’s book on the Topkapı textiles in 1946 (see footnote 3). I am not aware of its use in any Ottoman documents from the eighteenth or even nineteenth centuries.
39 V. Benguiat, who sometimes worked with his five brothers and specialized in Renaissance silks and Persian wool pile carpets, made many acquisitions in Smyrna and Alexandria at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century; it is tempting to think some of the cushion covers might have been picked up in the former. Encyclopaedia Judaica, ‘Jewish Museum of New York’.
that may be attributed to the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire (figure 3), and several folding screens incorporating sets of matching çatma cushion covers have come through the art market in recent years. These instances suggest a tertiary consumption, conspicuously associated with the homes of an elite circle of collectors that was perhaps not too distant from their intended primary use as domestic furnishings, albeit for Ottoman houses. The large collections in the Benaki Museum in Athens and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon appear to have been acquired around the turn of the twentieth century as well, probably through similar conduits stretching from Paris to Smyrna, Alexandria and Algiers. Still others came into museum collections through donations made by private individuals, amateur collectors and otherwise.

Collections in central and eastern Europe – Austria, Romania, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Russia – aggregated goods from a combination of sources; in many cases, it is likely that the objects were traded, captured or otherwise acquired in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and passed through or remained in private, ecclesiastical, princely or institutional collections, such as the Kremlin. Several were turned into vestments, a fate shared by other Ottoman and

41 The photo is held at the Library of Congress archives. It seems that the cushions were most likely chosen for their hues and formats rather than their explicitly ‘oriental’ nature; Benguiat’s sales include silks from southern Europe and the Ottoman Empire without any reference to the latter’s provenance.
42 See Sotheby’s London Islamic Sale, April 1983, lot 165 and Sotheby’s London Islamic Sale, October 2005, lot 137; both are folding screens.
43 The collections at the Royal Museums of Brussels were donated by Isabella Errera, a textile collector and later cataloguer at the Museums. Several from the Victoria and Albert Museum were donated by private individuals upon their decease; a group at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts were bequeathed by its first president and founder, Martin Brimmer, upon his death. As noted above, the Museum of Applied Art in Budapest acquired theirs expressly to complement the arms and armour in their vitrines at the Exposition Universelle in Paris (1889). In only two known instances can specific individual çatma cushions be traced back as far as the Ottoman Empire: a pair that was given as a gift from Abdi Pasha of Algiers to King Frederick I of Sweden in 1731, and another pair that was almost certainly part of the booty taken by Hapsburg soldiers after the 1683 siege of Vienna and now residing in the museum in Karlsruhe. Wace, ‘The Dating of Turkish Velvets’; see also Ernst Petrasch, Reinhard Sänger, Eva Zimmerman, and Hans-Georg Majer, Die Karlsruher Türkenbeute: Die ”Türkische Kammer” Des Markgrafen Ludwig Wilhelm Von Baden-Baden; Die ”Türkischen Curiositaeten” Der Markgrafen Von Baden-Durlach, Munich: Hirmer, 1991.
Safavid textiles, and preserved in church treasuries. Many were moved into state or national museums in the twentieth century (Stockholm, Karlsruhe, Warsaw, Krakow, Tarnow, Poznan, and Bucharest, among others). Some have remarkable histories: the Hungarian Pavilion in the 1889 Paris Exposition displayed çatma cushions bought expressly for this purpose. In Budapest, a half century earlier, the public intellectual and political thinker Lőrinc Tóth (d. 1903) had hoped his travelogue would raise some of his young compatriots ‘off the Asiatic cushions upon which they loll around’. By adding these çatma cushion covers to vitrines of Ottoman weapons and other military paraphernalia, the Hungarians made a point about vanquishing not only Ottoman armies but also Ottoman culture—interpreted here as languor, indolence and a lack of curiosity about the wider world.

Different circumstances and policies governed the creation of collections in twentieth-century Turkey. The Topkapı Palace has a good number of the çatma cushions; six of what appear to be the best were published in 2009 in a catalogue focused on the upholstery fabrics of that collection. All the çatma cushions there came from the confines of the palace itself or other properties of the Sultan, but there is no documentation about precisely where in the palaces they were found or used. Less beautiful or less well-preserved examples lurk unpublished in repositories there and elsewhere. In other cities in Turkey, museums of local production and culture, like that in Bursa, also house çatma cushions among numerous other textiles of local, regional or even distant manufacture. Little can be made of this, however, because of the state policy regarding the apportioning of goods to regional museums. The Sadberk Hanım Museum in Istanbul, a private institution with strong collections of later Ottoman domestic goods, also holds about fifteen pieces, acquired in the mid-twentieth century. Further private collectors in Istanbul and Ankara also periodically publish or otherwise make available some objects. In addition, the cushion covers appear regularly in sales at Sotheby’s and Christie’s in London, and at Phillips, Bonham’s and other smaller sales, as well as at the Parisian houses (Boisgirard, Gros & Deletterez, and Tajan, among others), where careful scholars and connoisseurs may note the same textile passing repeatedly through the showrooms over the years. While there are significant repairs in several of the objects, evidence for fakes or forgeries has been limited to a single questionable case in Brussels, for which no evidence of any dye (natural or otherwise) was detected by a liquid chromatography test—a finding which caused very little consternation in any quarter. As far as I am aware, museums and other

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44 See Atasoy et al., IPEK, 240-2 for several general examples; cushion covers turned into vestments may be found in the parish church collection at Kloww (Poland), the Kremlin, and Lyon, among other places.
45 See Atasoy et al., IPEK, 240-52 for a list.
46 Lőrinc Tóth, Uti tárca, Pest: 1844, unnumbered pages. Thanks to Wendy Bracewell for sharing this passage, as well as her translation.
48 For a recent example: Sotheby’s South Kensington, Art and Textiles of the Islamic and Indian Worlds, Including Works from the Collection of the Late Simon Digby, Friday 7 October 2011, lot 610.
art institutions in Europe or elsewhere have not collected the type since the mid-
twentieth century, perhaps because they were already so well represented.

The explicit definition of this type of cushion as an object of the Orient – as
described by Tóth – is largely absent in other sources. While function of çatma
cushions, as well as their eye-catching format and colours, might seem to qualify
them as key authenticating details in nineteenth-century Orientalist painting or
other arts, this was not often the case.50 A harem scene by Jean Lecomte du Nouÿ
(L’Esclave Blanche, 1888) does indeed show a woman seated on a çatma cushion—
easily identifiable from the lappets at the end. The rendering is faithful, as are those
of the other objects represented; Lecomte du Nouÿ was occasionally attacked for his
over-attention to glossy minutiae.51 In the case of L’Esclave Blanche, several scholars
have observed that Lecomte du Nouÿ, working in Paris, may have assembled
Ottoman objects from Eastern Europe (the spoon and embroidered shawl) alongside
those from Anatolia and Egypt (the cushion and the brocaded satin textile
underneath it).52 From where he obtained his props is less clear: the painter travelled
to Romania, Istanbul and Cairo and almost certainly made purchases there but, as
records show, there was a vigorous trade of Ottoman and other textiles in Paris. In
either case, the artist must not have seen this cushion or similar examples in situ; the
çatma cushions, as described in written accounts and depicted in Ottoman paintings
as well as those by Jean-Etienne Liotard, are designed and used for leaning, rather
than sitting. The çatma cushion as deployed by Lecomte du Nouÿ might still serve as
an authenticating detail, but it also indicates he did not encounter these or similar
objects in an Ottoman residence. Lecomte du Nouÿ is the exception that proves the
rule: this type of cushion fell out of fashion by about 1770 or so, and surviving
examples seem to have been stored away; other painters visiting Istanbul or other
Ottoman cities apparently did not register them, and hence did not depict them.53

The combination of cushion and sedir (the long, low and wide bench-like
platform which ran along the walls of some residences in seventeenth- and
eighteenth-century Istanbul) was a potent concept, and provoked comment from
travellers and visiting diplomats,54 and, as noted above, the seventeenth- and
eighteenth-century versions do serve, if infrequently, in museums as furniture for
period rooms, as in the New York Metropolitan Museum in the 1990s, or
occasionally as backdrops for Islamic metalwork in some displays, as seen on the
cover of a French auction catalogue from 2002 and in a display at Shangri La in

50 The concept of the ‘authenticating detail’ is described by Linda Nochlin in ‘The Imaginary Orient’, in
59. This is a useful idea but must be treated with care: the examples must be disaggregated and treated
in their own contexts, as noted directly below.
51 Roger Marie Herman Diederen, From Homer to the Harem: The Art of Jean Lecomte du Nouÿ, 1842-1923,
52 Diederen, From Homer to the Harem, 121.
53 The type of çatma cushion cover discussed here – a c. 1730 iteration of the type – is represented in
several works by Jean-Etienne Liotard, who worked in Istanbul and Smyrna in the early 1740s.
However, Liotard was not an Orientalist painter – in Nochlin’s sense – and his most colourful
depiction of the type is in a portrait of a Hapsburg Consul rather than any sort of genre scene.
54 Antoine Galland commented on ‘sofas covered with carpets and cushions’ (Journal d’Antoine Galland
pendant son séjour à Constantinople, 1672-3, ed. C. Schefer, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1881, 210), and Jean-
Baptiste Tavernier described gold brocaded cushions atop matching mattresses (Tavernier, Nouvelle
Honolulu, where Doris Duke housed her collection (figure 4). In private residences in North America or western Europe, like that of Vanderbilt mentioned above, there is no indication that the nineteenth-century cushions were more than heavy silk antique upholstery. Though this practice might have denied their original position on the sedir, it does not speak of any consistent, widespread and overriding interest in recreating an atmosphere of excessive luxury, indolence, decay, exoticism or the other trope of Orientalism.

Ornament, decoration and luxury goods: Ottoman writing, 1572-1776
Necipoğlu has also written a comprehensive introduction to the way in which the Ottoman writers discussed style, including the political contexts that helped shape the discourse, and only a quick recapitulation is necessary here. Architectural decoration occupies the most important position in contemporary writing on Ottoman and other Islamic arts. In most Ottoman writing on Ottoman art, style in

55 During Duke’s lifetime (she died in 1993), the cushion covers were also used as backdrops, rather than on the sedir that she had fitted into the Damascus room in Shangri La; the sedir instead used bolsters and wide cushions or mattresses. In this case, the textiles, and other furnishings, were indeed used to construct an Orientalist interior, though the visual culture and context of Orientalism in the mid-twentieth century United States should be distinguished from its earlier forebears.
56 The Oriental salons or ‘Turkish corners’ created in wealthy and middle-class homes in the late nineteenth-century Anglo-American world do not seem to use any çatma cushion covers. It is possible that the conventions that guided their construction demanded a more rustic aesthetic featuring wool carpets and kilims, weapons and other metalwork. One might perhaps interpret this as an interest in the noble nomad in contrast to his corrupt and sedentarized Ottoman counterpart.
architectural decoration and elsewhere – meaning combinations and repetitions of motifs, as well as their curvilinear, geometric or more naturalistic appearance – is only referenced in passing, using words which refer to, but do not describe, the object or pattern. For example, in 1572 the Ottoman architect Sinan asked Sultan Selim II whether he preferred a plain or lavish style (tarz) for the decoration of his mosque in Edirne.58 As the Sultan requested, the interior was indeed lavish in both painting and tilework, which the poet and eulogist Mustafa Sai describes as using motifs of the islimi, rumi and hatayı style.59 These terms, roughly translated as Arab-like (or arabesque), Rum-like,60 and Chinese-like, all refer to different but more or less curvilinear motifs found in the Ottoman repertoire. During the sixteenth century, some authors suggested that hatayı is associated with Iranian styles, and particularly that of the Timurids, while rumi might be more strongly identified with Ottoman territories in Anatolia and Thrace. Indeed, Gelibolu Mustafa Ali (d. 1600) discusses the invention of a new, ‘native’ Ottoman style, distinct from that of Iran.61 However, by the time Selim II’s mosque complex was completed in the 1570s, and certainly by the time the çatma cushion covers were being woven and displayed, any ethnic, religious or other distinction implied by either referent or object seems to have faded.62

Several other modes are found in the discussion of decoration: calligraphy was seen as the basis for some styles, while another category relied on associations with court artists such as Şah Kulu or Kara Memi.63 Writing in the 1640s, Evliya Çelebi, in his account of the sale of the possessions of the disgraced Abdi Pasha of Bitlis, also recognizes the canonical styles of calligraphy, and describes the fairy-faces, enchanted horses and bewitched elephants found in Iranian drawing and manuscript painting. He also mentions weapons that are masterworks from India or Damascus and clothes embellished with Ethiopian pearls or Aswan emeralds. In a single instance, he describes gilded dishes decorated with pen-work or fine linear designs (kalemkarı).64 As we shall see below, Mustafa Ali also emphasizes the value of the materials used in the object: gold thread for cushions and spreads or precious metals for candlesticks and basins. The place of origin also played a role. An elegant variation in furnishings is established by Mustafa Ali’s mention of carpets from both

58 Gülru Necipoğlu, ‘Qur’anic Inscriptions on Sinan’s Imperial Mosques: A Comparison with their Safavid and Mughal Counterparts’, in Fahmida Suleman, ed., Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’an and its Creative Expressions, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 78. Tarz is translated as style or order in the mid- and later Ottoman period, and continues to be so until the present; nuances include mode, manner, method, form, shape and appearance, among others, all of which – depending on the context – amount to a similar meaning.
60 ‘Rum’ means Thrace and Anatolia, the lands of Rum or old Rome, i.e. Byzantium. The terms are slippery even within the fifteenth and sixteenth century context. See Cemal Kağdăr, ‘A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum’, Muqarnas, 24, 2007, 8-25; Gülru Necipoğlu, ‘From International Timurid to Ottoman’, 138.
62 An inventory list (1704) for a royal yali in Istavroz includes quilts with decoration in three modes: kalemkarı, hatayı, and hindi (‘Indian’): see Artan, Architecture as a Theatre of Life, 52.
Egypt and Iran; this usage implies a commonly understood distinction between the two, probably based on palette and pattern, among other elements.

As valuable as Mustafa Ali’s descriptions are, he related specific styles principally to the fine arts – book painting, architecture – rather than the industrial ones. Interestingly, when this author did touch on luxury goods as a group, he did so in terms of their consumption; in his 1587 book of etiquette, the *Kavâ’idü’l-Mecalis*, he specifies the objects suitable only to those of high rank:

Especially Persian and Egyptian carpets, gold-laced and gold-embroidered sofa spreads, precious cushions and table mats, silver basins and candlesticks, gilded platters, silver censers, likewise golden and silver pen-and-ink case, gilded chiming clocks …

As described above, most Ottoman sources that mention craft products – like *çatma* cushion covers – emphasize the putative place of origin (Bursa, or perhaps Bilecik or Cairo, Istanbul or western Europe) and whether the piece is decorated with gold (*mużehheb*) or otherwise (*munakkaş*), or plain (*sade*). In other writing, too, references to the nature of the decoration are rarely found, although in one instance a velvet was described by a clerk in the palace as being strangely decorated or figured (*kadife-i miinakkaş-i Bursa ba tavr-i garib*). The list of administrative prices issued for Istanbul in 1640 describes gold and silver fabrics that incorporate plane-tree leaves, designs called ‘chicken tail feathers’, roses and crescent moons in their motifs. In a few other cases, a decoration is implied by a term that refers to something other than its origin; in the cases of fabrics, *gülîstani* presumably refers to pattern using rose blossoms, and *gülbedanlı* implies similar, while *Haleb çiçeklisi* refers to a floral design from Aleppo, favoured in the eighteenth century and found in abundance in the inheritance inventory of Vekil Osman Pasha (d. 1776). The documents offer no perspective or opinion on the motifs; their value in *akçe* is based on their quality, in turn defined as how much gold, silver or silk is used in the final product. These

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67 For instance, the records published in Ömer Lütfi Barkan ‘Edirne Askeri Kassamına Ait Tereke Defterleri’, *Belgeler*, 3(5-6), 1966, 19-123.

68 Topkapı Palace Museum Archives D 3/1.


several exceptions notwithstanding, Sai, Mustafa Ali and Evliya give the impression that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for the most part, decoration, underlying format, and perhaps material was communicated by the object’s place of origin: çatma from Bursa had its typical decorations, materials and dimensions, while brocaded lampas from Chios had its own.71

Consumers and producers: Ottoman artisans address their own craft

Having carefully considered the place of çatma cushions—and Ottoman industrial arts more generally—in Ottoman writing and in European and North American historiography from the twenty-first century back to the sixteenth, this section introduces a third type of historical writing about çatma cushions: that is, the records, descriptions and other documents of their production, and consumption, that were made during the seventeenth and eighteenth century by the people involved in their manufacture and sale. And because of the firm link between the object and the terms used to describe the cushions and their components—silk, dye, gilt—it is possible to read what craftsmen, regulators and customers had to say about the objects they respectively made, examined or purchased. The comparison of the descriptions in the documents with the extant textiles has surprising implications for the historiography of craft practice in the Ottoman Empire, which tends to prioritize the written document over surviving objects.

Weavers in Bursa, and Bilecik and Göynük, occasionally brought complaints or other matters involving craft to the kadi (judge) in the former city, which served as the legal and administrative centre for surrounding towns and villages. Although the testimony recorded by the scribe in court was often made in pro-forma language, a number of perspectives on the practice of weaving may be found, as well as information about the weavers’ more immediate daily activities.72 There were concerns about workmanship: in Bursa, a court case from 1638 specifies the duration of apprenticeship (four or five years) and a case from 1630 demands that the silk weavers of Bilecik mend their poor practices or risk being forced to submit to re-training by their peers in Bursa.73 Earlier, in 1615, nine Muslim and non-Muslim weavers in Bursa, including makers of çatma, complained to the kadi that some among their number were unskilled and clumsy (na-ehl, hamdest) and ill-informed about the state of the craft.74 The work of these individuals was unreliable.

71 It is important to note, too, that although Ottoman sources do not describe changes in style, changes nonetheless did occur—this holds true for architectural decoration as well as textiles, ceramics and metalwork. For examples, see Atasoy and Raby, Iznik, 100-4; Atasoy et al., IPEK, 300-3. Ottoman writing on style—and architectural style in particular—in the later eighteenth and nineteenth century, however, is something entirely different, usually described as alafranga versus alaturka. A notion of ‘pure’ Ottoman architecture—free from the recent and excessive influence of the west—subsequently appeared, chiefly represented by the Usul-i Mimari-i Osmani (1873). These concerns have limited relevance to the contexts of production or consumption of textiles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nor does change of style directly address personal preference: some individuals might prefer Chios silks to those of Bursa, or Salonika felts to those from Bulgaria.


73 Dalsar, Bursa’da İpekçilik, documents 275 and 19.

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(kalp; secondary meaning) and was damaging to the reputation of the guild.75 They asked the kadi to register their planned course of action: to chasten, correct or drive out those who were in breach of traditional standards. Earlier still, in 1577, the plain-velvet weavers of Bursa had complained about workers coming from Göynük—their fabric was fraudulent (kalp).76 The Bursans specify further: the velvet from Göynük was loosely woven because the warps were set too far apart, and because of this the velvet would fatigue.

Stinting on materials was also prohibited by Ottoman regulation, as Bursa court cases from 1584 and 1630 suggest; a famous enquiry on the part of the central administration, made in 1502, emphasized the dire consequences of economizations: towels were of inadequate size to cover a good Muslim in the hammam.77 The substitution of some fibres also provoked complaint. An individual who had the right to collect the stamp-tax on finished silks brought a case in 1602 accusing a çatma weaver of substituting cotton for silk in his products, citing the growing disrepute of this man and by inference of his products, ultimately compromising their rate of taxation.78 The kadi, who was himself not an expert on craft-practice, referred to the guild elders and other experts when ruling.

Ottoman legal opinion about silk-weaving emphasized the consistency of the finished products and the adherence to standards set by the guild; this is typical of other craft practices as well, and reflects the broader interaction of artisans with the judicial system. The importance of an established precedent was repeatedly invoked using stock phrases such as, ‘since the olden times’ (kadımdan beri). The reputation of the guild and the protection of the public from unscrupulous practices were also invoked to establish the legality of the complaint. Prior interactions, or even official complaints, were not noted, nor, usually, was any further action prescribed, save for demanding that the artisan in question mend his practices and return to the standards set by the guild. However, the textiles themselves show that the judgments and remedies were most roundly ignored.79 That said, occasionally a complaint was challenged. In 1599, two weavers of çatma were accused of substituting cotton and broken silk (gügül) for good quality silk (harir) in their products; along with an expert (ehl-i hibre) and two men from the silk-sellers’ market, they retorted that, to the contrary, the use of broken silk and cotton was in fact permitted in the cushion covers alone, and had been since olden times.80 This

75 Definitions from the Redhouse Lexicon (1881); see also Eunjeong Yi, Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Fluidity and Leverage, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 71.
76 Dalsar, Bursa’da İpekçilik, document 15 ‘...nefis kumaşta arş seyrek olmakla kumaş tiz helak olup.’
77 This well-known enquiry may have stemmed as much from Sultan Bayezid’s interest in preserving his reputation as a just ruler – by ensuring the protection of the public from unscrupulous producers or merchants – as it did from any precipitous decline in the textiles.
78 Dalsar Bursa’da İpekçilik, document 99.
79 Philips, Weaving as Livelihood, chapter four, compares extant çatma cushion covers with the regulations meant to govern that category. Significant discrepancy abounds. For instance, one example from the mid-seventeenth century substitutes wire for the gilt-wrapped silk thread (London, Victoria and Albert Museum 534-1884) (figure 5). Several more use wool in place of silk for less visible elements, and numerous others stint on the materials that are specified in the standards (London, Victoria and Albert Museum 797A-1897 & 797B-1897; London Victoria and Albert Museum 218-1892, 780-1897, 781-1897, 785-1897, among others).
80 Dalsar, Bursa’da İpekçilik, document 272.
case is also unusual in that the kadi, after consultation with master weavers, responded by allowing the broken silk, but not the cotton.

These records offer the historians something unusual: insight into the perspectives of the weavers who made the Ottoman çatma cushion covers and other textiles. In recording their arguments, these individuals also acted as historiographers themselves, indicating their attitudes toward the place of their products in the larger craft economy, in craft history and in the lives of their fellow Ottomans, the consumers. There are further implications: the records also reveal the ties between elements of the silk-weaving and -selling sector; tax collection, market inspection, putting-out systems, weavers hiring other weavers and the use of apprentices and improperly trained masters all factored into the industry. Some of the alleged violations—of small amounts of thread or small differences in the quality of thread—are difficult to detect in the finished textiles, even using a microscope. If we take the complaints at face value, the men who accused their fellows must have seen and understood the dressing of the loom or been told by one of the individuals involved, or otherwise have understood that the weaver in question was weaving too many çatmas out of too little thread. Because the amount of thread was apportioned by the guild this was not the complex calculation it might seem.

Scholars of Ottoman guilds themselves have recently argued for their conservative nature, which placed the good of the group at a premium and sought to maintain hierarchies within the guild as well as outside it; the kadi and guild elders worked together to re-establish old standards officially, as needed.81 But the goals, motivations and perspectives of craftsmen were not necessarily stagnant or

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81 In Ottoman Turkish, a group of artisans or other workers is usually referred to as a taife, which means a class, sect or group of people; this may be translated as ‘guild’ only with some caveats, as the Ottoman case is not entirely parallel to the European one. For more, see Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul*. 

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uniform. Among the weavers – ostensibly bound by rule and convention – some must have been agile, well-connected and willing to risk the disapprobation of their fellows and the kadi. The diversity of perspective might also explain the variety of breaches; extant objects show that cotton, linen, inferior silk, and even wool were used as substitutes for the expensive Iranian silk expected in čatma cushions, and economizations in quantity were cited. These men, as the records suggest, were intent on preserving their livelihoods as fluctuations in prices or shortages in materials caused temporary and longer-term problems for the industry.\footnote{82} The notion of an undifferentiated production by anonymous drones is undermined by the manner in which the weavers and their peers actually spoke about themselves, and by the emergence of new palettes and new motifs, apparently reflecting a response by the weavers to the changing demands of the market.

Equally salient for our concerns, court cases and extant objects reveal the importance of the consumer both in the documents left by the čatma weavers and to other artisans. While the protection of the public is part of the general rhetoric of craft- and market-regulation, another perspective on the buyer or owner is evident in the standards enforced by the guild: several qualities were permitted, with corresponding prices. Different densities of weaves – qualities – were permitted by guild elders and confirmed by the kadi, as long as the prices were set in accordance.\footnote{83} The range of the cushion covers, while all remaining within the category of luxury goods, expanded the ready market and ensured that the weavers could survive, if not thrive. The artisans also guided the central administration in setting prices for crafts, as with the Bursa čatma cushions given in the fixed price list of 1640. Very high, high and medium quality versions existed.

In Ottoman writing about Ottoman craft, the complex nature of the industry was a given, and authorities attempted to balance the sometimes competing interests of those involved, as they did for the rights of the producer, merchant and consumer. This brings us tidily back to Grabar and the re-introduction of the consumer to the study of Islamic industrial arts. The consumer, in the Ottoman legal tradition of craft regulation, was meant to be protected by enforceable set standards, while at the same time was appealed to by the introduction of a range of qualities and prices.

II. Other fields, other concerns: beyond the palace

Ottoman silk textiles: economic and social history in the mid twentieth century

Outside the art books and catalogues on Ottoman art history mentioned above, there is also abundant writing from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries specifically concerned with Ottoman textiles, and their production.\footnote{84} Some of the issues identified by Grabar in 1988 remain salient. Although IPEK (2001) addressed the material nature of the textiles and the economic contexts of silk-trading and weaving in the Ottoman Empire, it remained most interested in the palace and its commissions. One of the most important Turkish-language works – Fahri Dalsar’s

\begin{footnotes}
83 Dalsar, \textit{Bурсa’da İpekçilik}, document 242; also discussed in Atasoy et al., \textit{IPEK}, 162.
84 There are numerous works on the production and trade of other types of textiles, specifically wool, mohair and cotton.
\end{footnotes}
Silk-making in Bursa (Bursa’dan İpekçilik) – is concerned with the economics of production, as the subtitle, *Turkish Industry and Trade in History* (*Türk Sanayi ve Ticaret Tarihinde*), implies. His work was perhaps in part intended to help revitalize silk production in Bursa, and during the course of his research in the 1940s and 1950s he spoke to local weavers and other artisans about their practice. Another economic historian, Halil İnalcık, has also published extensively on Bursa and its role in textile trade and production, amongst numerous other topics. His latest work (2009) gathers and adds to research from his earlier publications on Ottoman textiles, and he uses several *çatma* cushion covers to illustrate the chapter on types of silk fabrics. Both authors touch on palace consumption, usually in the context of commissions or orders, but neither tackles the role of the broader market or even, really, the nature of the finished products or their consumers. Recent work by Suraiya Faroqhi, another social and economic historian, has also posited that cushion covers, in the eighteenth century, became one of the most significant craft products of Bursa, while the production and use of other silk textiles seemed to decline.

**Consumption studies and the Ottoman Empire**

The study of the consumption of craft or commodity has long been a feature of scholarship on northern, and later, southern Europe. This is almost surely an indirect result of the Industrial Revolution as it happened in northwest Europe; as scholars searched for its origins, they discussed the increasing supply of textiles, trimmings, or household goods, as well as increasing demand. The chicken-and-egg problem is implicit in most scholarship about social and economic history, trade and colonial history and certainly in the craft, labour and industrial histories of Europe. By contrast, parallel work on the Ottoman Empire has come only in fits and starts. Articles in a single volume on consumption studies (2000) surveyed both evidence and methodology for discrete cases, mostly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and largely focusing on Istanbul and sometimes on the

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85 See note 3.
86 He was not able, apparently, to find any equipment predating the nineteenth century, when most or all of the pattern harness-equipped drawlooms were replaced with jaccuard looms.
88 Consumption studies about the Ottoman Empire, as we will see below, remain in an early stage. A recent art historical perspective on the objects of everyday life – and their use – in the Ottoman Empire, omits textiles; M. Şinasi Acar, *Osmanlı’da Günlük Yaşam Nesneleri*, Istanbul: Yem Yayın, 2011.
89 Faroqhi, *Artisans*, 96, 170-1.
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The historiography of Ottoman velvets

palace. And a recent doctoral dissertation has also assessed evidence for the emergence of a consumer culture in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Bursa. Part of the reluctance of Ottomanists to take on consumption may come from the difficulty in interpreting documents pertaining to goods and prices—terminology, calculations for real price and even orthography all contribute to the dilemma. As for the contents of the documents, the nature of the information contained in the records is also lopsided: best for the palace and good for some urban elites, but less helpful in illustrating the acquisitive habits of even the average Ottoman subject. Despite these drawbacks, the acres of documents preserved in the Ottoman archives provide promising potential for the assessment of some aspects of material culture on a wide scale, as noted in the introduction. The availability of and preference for colours, fibres and fabrics, changes in clothing and furnishing styles, and even the introduction of coffee pots and cups may be detected by using information gathered from inventories. This is complemented with other sources, like Evliya Çelebi’s enumeration of the luxury goods, art and exotica found in the enormous estate of Abdi Khan of Bitlis; religious writing about the permissibility of wearing silk clothing; sumptuary law governing head-gear; or observations about regional tastes for jewel tones (Anatolia), paler hues (Iran), and crimsons, scarlets and burgundies (Syria).

Consumption studies and çatma cushion covers: luxury goods in context
The bulk of the preceding section set out the ways in which velvet furnishings provided evidence for their own production, while at the same time challenging much of what has been assumed about the regulation of craft in the early modern Ottoman Empire. Implicit in these arguments is the scale of manufacture: over a period of at least 150 years, many different weavers were engaged in purchasing threads from silk workers and gilt thread-makers and selling their goods to merchants or to a consuming public. This last interaction is crucial. Although the palace and its residents may have enjoyed velvet cushions, it is clear that wealthy and less-wealthy subjects from Aleppo to Sarajevo also owned them. In turn, the consumption of the çatma cushions surely had something to do with their continued production on a large scale in varying qualities, some of which were consciously made for men and women of modest means: some might be valued at 600 akçe (silver coins), like two belonging to Derviş Ağa (d. 1638), while others might be more modest, like a crimson example belonging to a Christian woman from Edirne named Moskhati (d. 1651), valued at only 105 akçe. As their court cases show, the

93 Quataert, *Consumption Studies*; there are also studies on the Arab world, but again, mostly for the nineteenth century. Three volumes co-authored by Colette Establet and Jean-Paul Pascual, all published by the Institut Français de Damas, use probate to discuss Damascus, but the concerns are more social-scientific than art historical: *Familles et Fortunes à Damas: 450 Foyers Damascains en 1700* (1994), *Ultime Voyage Pour la Mecque: Les Inventaires Après Décès de Pélerins Morts à Damas vers 1700* (1998), and *Des Tissus et des Hommes: Damas, vers 1700* (2005).
95 For a complete discussion, see Phillips, *Weaving as Livelihood*, chapter six.
96 Said Öztürk, *Askeri Kassama Ait Onyedinci Asır Istanbul Tereke Defterleri Sosyo-Ekonomik Tahlil*, Istanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1995; Barkan, ‘Edirne Askeri’. The recognizability of the çatma itself, as well as the distinctive format, helped to ensure its enduring popularity. An Ottoman
weavers were able to adjust their raw materials and quantities, but only the popularity of the finished product allowed production to continue and the weavers to profit.

As noted in the first section, much of the history of Ottoman decorative arts has focused on the role of the palace workshop, and by extension, its role in creating court taste and disseminating that taste across the Empire. The sending of paper designs from Istanbul to Bursa or to Iznik has indeed been documented, albeit in perhaps fewer instances than the centrality of this discourse might suggest. In the case of the çatma cushion covers, and their distinctive format, it is unclear if the palace or its minions had anything to do with the design of the first cushions or, most especially, with their continued popularity. While it is possible that the cushions might have been purchased by the palace, their presence in the list of fixed prices from 1640 implies that they were available to any urbanite in the mid-seventeenth century. And accordingly, the cushion covers and most other çatma fabrics were probably made far from the palace and its artisans.

Any discussion about the link between production, style, quality and consumption in the Ottoman Empire must eventually leap the walls of the Topkapı Palace. Tracing the ownership of çatma cushions, and other goods, to discover the nature of their consumption allows for examination of the impetus as well as the mechanism for the spread of style. Writing about Ottoman art has often implied the formation of a collective taste, and a ‘trickle-down’ of courtly style to the provinces or to non-royal individuals. This implies a natural process of percolation, driven by gravity or a path of least resistance. Looking at ownership of goods, and introducing the agency (or purchasing power) of the consumer should help correct this perception. Ottoman weavers concerned themselves with the consuming public – whether they wished to protect them or in fact to trick them with cheap goods made to look more expensive – and twenty-first century scholarship might benefit from

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individual who chose to purchase a gold-brocaded voided velvet cushion did so in part because the materials, palette and motifs were immediately identifiable and because these were signifiers of a particular status. Necessary constraints of topic and space preclude a lengthy digression on the shape of urban Ottoman society: simply put, a limited mobility within the middle and upper ranks, extensive patronage networks within the political structure, and a lack of a titled aristocracy allowed for social and economic climbing, and perhaps encouraged some Ottoman subjects to amass, and display, signifying goods they felt were in keeping with their aspirations.

97 Necipoğlu, ‘From International Timurid’, 155, see also note 13. This is not to say that the palace did not commission or order goods from both Bursa and Iznik—clearly the quantities of tiles used in mosque architecture and of textiles used at celebrations or other occasions demanded a vast supply of goods, at least in some periods. But these orders and commissions cannot account for all of the production, or for the introduction of each new style or type.

98 These documents may attest less to true prices in Istanbul or other cities (they were issued irregularly for the capital and other cities, and included more or fewer items) more to the concern felt by the Sultan, his grand vizier and the market inspectors for maintaining ‘just’ prices or the appearance of such. For a general introduction and the larger Islamic context, see Halil İnalcık, ‘The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy’, in Michael Cook, ed., Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East, London: Oxford University Press, 1970, 207-18. For a longer discussion about the discourse of just price concerning grain, see Seven Ağır, From Welfare to Wealth: Ottoman and Castilian Grain Trade Policies in a Time of Change, unpublished PhD thesis, Princeton University, 2009, chapter two; for fixed prices, see Kütükoğlu, Osmanlılarda Narh Müessesesi; for a more philosophical take, see Cemal Kafadar, When Coins Turned into Drops of Dew and Bankers Became Robbers of Shadows: The Boundaries of the Ottoman Economic Imagination at the End of the Sixteenth Century, unpublished PhD thesis, McGill University, 1986.
doing the same. An acknowledgment of the scale of production and its many processes should help rescue the vast quantities of textiles, ceramics, glassware, and other commodity goods from their awkward imprisonment beneath the imperial narrative most often used to describe the making of art in the early modern Islamic world. The more important acknowledgment of consumers and their role in the equation would further liberate art historians from the models of elite patronage that have limited not only the discourse about Islamic art but also the very objects deemed worthy of study.

Amanda Phillips received her doctorate in Islamic Art and Archaeology from the University of Oxford in 2011. She received the 2012 Margaret B. Ševčenko prize in Islamic Art and Culture for an essay about the purchase and display of luxury textiles in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire. Her most recent work focuses on artefact-based consumption history, which is the subject of her fellowship at the Max Planck-Kunsthistorisches Institut, for a project located at the Berlin Museum of Islamic Art.

amanda.phillips.khi@gmail.com