

CHANGING AESTHETICAL TASTE IN OTTOMAN INTERIORS IN THE 1740S

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Abstract | This paper focuses on the analysis of one of the longly-ignored primary sources in the Ottoman archives: the written furnishing lists (*mefruşat defteri*). These lists feature the detailed description of the fabric, the embroidery type and style, and the colour used in pillows-cushions, couches-divans, curtains, carpets and covers, all of which represent the typical Ottoman interior fittings. Although it is hardly possible to reconstruct the exact image of the items based on the information we can retrieve from this source, a careful analysis of those lists provides us with a nuanced view of the aesthetical preferences and design taste in the Ottoman interiors. Against this backdrop, this preliminary research analyses the visual characteristics of the items based on their descriptions written in these lists. It conceives every piece of information written for each item on the furnishing lists as a trace of visual evidence. To analyse the visual characteristics of the interiors, it focuses on the two furnishing lists prepared for the two different summer palaces in Ottoman Istanbul: the 1705 list of the İstavros Palace and the 1745 list of the Beylerbeyi Palace. First, it identifies three categories of analysis based on the commonly described qualities for these groups: the fabric used, embroidery type or style and colour. Secondly, it compares the most used items respectively in these two palaces. The comparison demonstrates an increased preference for softer and smoother textures, lighter embroideries with plain but glimmering grounds, the replacement of the dominant Persian influence by that of primarily the Chios style, and finally, a paler palette composed of natural pastel colours. These changes, in turn, imply a transition in aesthetical preferences and design taste sometime around the 1740s, and suggest a search for a new visuality that is more sensory, softer, lighter with increased ratio of natural tones of colours.

Keywords: Ottoman material culture, aesthetical preferences, furnishings, interior spaces

The recent emphasis on the cross-cultural exchange on a global scale has also renewed the curiosity for the Ottoman material culture and design history. The corresponding body of literature has adopted a revisionist approach in recent years and put the transcultural dialogue forward between the Ottomans and the rest (Artan, 2006; Faroqhi 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Faroqhi and Neumann, 2004; Karahasanoğlu, 2009; Murphey 2007; Philips, 2016; Woodhead, 2008, 2012; Yenişehirlioğlu, 2015). These works have been challenging the conception of a linear transformation trajectory and questioning the confines of the 'modernisation' and 'Westernisation' narratives, which somehow still dominate the Ottoman historiography. This is especially the case for the research that has focused on the eighteenth century: a critical period in Ottoman art and architectural history which lies somewhere between the epilogue of the Ottoman Classical imperial canon in the 'premodern' period and the prologue of the Western-inspired 'modernisation' efforts of the nineteenth century (Hathaway, 2004; Murphey, 2007).

Despite the rapidly developing literature, the shortage of available physical and visual artefacts nevertheless limits the scholars. However, the Ottoman archives still comprise certain written documents that could potentially remind us of the forgotten design outlooks. This paper attempts to contribute to those debates by introducing a new source: the written furnishing lists (*mefruşat listeleri*). It reflects upon a different methodological take, one that would allow analysing the visual characteristics of the items based on their descriptions written in these lists. Although it is hardly possible to reconstruct the exact image of the items based on the information we can retrieve from this source, such an analysis nevertheless provides us with a nuanced view of the aesthetical preferences and design taste in the Ottoman interiors.

The furnishing lists were prepared to document the number and the features of the objects, utensils, and fittings in each room in a building. There were several reasons for this documentation. For instance, once decided to confiscate or seize a certain's movable and immovable assets, these lists were immediately prepared before transferring them to the Treasury (Karahasanoğlu, 2009). Besides, it was also a routine to document the interiors of the royal buildings (Ertürk, 2013, p.1-30). These records were frequently updated, and recorded in the Treasury.

In the corresponding body of research, these lists are increasingly used as critical archival documents on the research on Ottoman material culture. They provide information for assessing the extent of the wealth of certain individuals. They also give insights into the spatial layout of the buildings or building complexes. Thirdly, since they also feature the description of the upholsteries of the pillows (*yastık*), cushions (*minder*), couches (*mak'ad*), divans (*sedir*), curtains (*perde*) and covers (*puşide*), which represent typical Ottoman interior fittings, they are also an important source for research on the components and characteristics of the Ottoman interiors (Atasoy et al., 2002; Bilgi, 2007; Black and Loveless, 1978; İnalçık and Yalçın, 2008; Krody, 2000; Morehouse and Reynolds, 1996; Mutlu et al., 2017; Öz, 1946a, 1946b; Özbek, n.d.; Phillips, 2012, 2014; Reindl-Kiel, 2017; Taylor, 1993; Tezcan, 1993; Tezcan et al., 2007).

However, the unsystematic (or unstandardized) listings and the absence of any attached visual document or evidence complicate a thorough analysis of the visual characteristics of the interiors. This is especially the case for the pillows, cushions, couches, divans, curtains, and covers. This preliminary research nevertheless aims to tackle this problem. It explores to what extent these lists could offer a room to speculate on the aesthetical preferences and design outlook in the Ottoman interiors in the absence of visual evidence.

Inspired by the forensic approaches, this research conceives every piece of information written for each item on the furnishing lists as a trace of visual evidence (Bucklin, n.d.; Maze et al., 2007; Burney et al., 2013; Moran and Gold, 2019). To analyse the visual characteristics of the interiors, it focuses on the two furnishing lists prepared for the two different summer palaces in Ottoman Istanbul: the 1705 list of the İstavros Palace and the 1745 list of the Beylerbeyi Palace. The analysis has built upon three stages. The first step is the collection of information, which involves the digital relisting of the items with respect to their amount based on four furnishing groups: pillows and cushions; couches and divans; covers; and curtains. Secondly, it identifies three categories of analysis based on the commonly described qualities for these groups: the fabric used, embroidery type or style and colour. Finally, it examines the change in the most used items in these three categories by comparing the two furnishing lists. The examination indeed suggests a growing taste towards a more sensory, softer, and

2. The interiors of the Istavros and Beylerbeyi Palaces

In the following, the two furnishing lists prepared for two summer palaces, both located on the Asian shores of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, are analysed with respect to the approach mentioned above. The first one is the 1705 list of the Istavros Palace, which was amongst the most favourite summer palaces for the dynasty in Ottoman Istanbul prior to this date ((MAD.d.4763; Ertürk, 2013, p.119-32). The second is the 1745 list of the newly constructed neighbouring Beylerbeyi palace, which replaced the use of Istavros Palace and became the favourite destination of Mahmud I on the Asian shores of the Bosphorus during the spring and summer seasons (TS.MA.d.10120). The comparison indeed suggests that although the types of interior fittings remained the same, the fabric used, embroidery type or style and colour that dominated the interiors changed towards the 1740s.

2.1. The change in the preferred fabrics

The comparison of the fabric used in the upholsteries of the Istavros Palace in 1705 and the Beylerbeyi Palace in 1745 suggests a change of preference in the latter. This shift is visible in all the four furnishing groups: pillows-cushions; couches and divans; covers and curtains.

Table 1. The percentage of the most used fabrics in the Istavros Palace in 1705 and the Beylerbeyi Palace in 1745

Istavros Palace (1705)			Beylerbeyi Palace (1745)		
Velvet (silk)	20%	63%	Velvet (silk)	22%	
Bursa-Style (silk)	43%				
Serâser (taqueté) (a heavily woven silk)		10%	Chios-style (silk)	19%	38%
			Hatâyî (a silken fabric)	11%	
			Dîbâ (saten)	8%	
Kirpas (roughly woven cotton)		9%	Bez-Yemenî (lightly woven cottons)	16%	
Broadcloth (woollen)		3%	Broadcloth		10%
85%			86%		

Velvet was certainly the most used fabric in the Istavros Palace, whose great majority were the pillowcases made in the Bursa style. The Bursa-style pillowcases most likely corresponded to famous Bursa *çatmas*. Produced in the city of Bursa, *çatma*, was a specific type of brocaded velvet made of the finest quality silks in the Ottoman Empire (Bilgi, 2007; Phillips, 2012, 2014). The preference for velvet was followed by *serâser*, also known as taqueté, a heavily embroidered fabric with silk warp and silver or gold weft. *Çatma* and *serâser* were among the heavily woven fabrics made of the most expensive silk in the Ottoman empire.

Interestingly, there are no Bursa-style pillow covers in the Beylerbeyi Palace. Instead, the Chios-style is the most preferred type of upholstery used in pillowcases and couches after velvet. These were most likely made of Chios silk, which was produced on the island of Chios in the Aegean Sea. However, unlike the finest quality silk of Bursa, the Chios silks were amongst the middle-quality silks (Tezcan, et al, 2009). The third most used upholstery fabric in the Beylerbeyi Palace was two different types of silken fabrics: *hatâyî* and *dîbâ* (or baldachin).

While *hatâyî* usually refers to a silken fabric with metallic threads, *dîbâ* is a high-quality satin likewise enriched with precious metal threads like silver or gold. These two seem to have replaced the heavily woven *serâser* (*taqueté*), which has frequently appeared on the 1705 list.

Table 2. The documentation of the fabric used in the upholsteries in the Istavros Palace and the Beylerbeyi Palace

	pillows		cushions		couches		divans	covers		curtains		
Istavros Palace (1705)	Bursa-style	127	kirpas	18	velvet	30	no divan	kirpas	8	broadcloth	8	
	velvet	28	merre (?)	13	taqueté	6				taqueté	4	
	taqueté	20	brocade	9	satin	3				aba	2	
	baldachin	4	satin	3	hatâyî	1				baldachin	1	
	satin	2	cotton	3								
	hatâyî	1	fleece	2								
	Crete-style	1	unknown	15								
Beylerbeyi Palace (1745)	velvet	79	no cushion		broadcloth	28	cotton cloth	17	cotton cloth	34	broadcloth	10
	Chios-style	47			Chios-style	19	yemeni	3	tülbent	1	cotton cloth	7
	hatâyî	39			Chois-style hatâyî	3	printed cotton	1	unknown	3	yemeni	6
	baldachin	30			hatâyî	2	tülbent	1			Polish-style	3
	taqueté	11			printed yemeni	3	suzenî	2			printed cotton	3
	Banja Luca-style	6									ağani	2
	Persian-style	6										

The observed shift suggests that although the use of silk in pillows persisted in the 1740s, there seems to be a choice towards slightly cheaper silks in the Beylerbeyi Palace compared to those used in the Istavros Palace. Moreover, amongst the silks used in pillows, the decreased ratio of velvet and the increased ratio of silken fabrics with metallic threads imply a growing preference for the upholsteries whose surfaces seemed to be glimmer.

The decreased ratio of velvet is most visible in the couches. The 1745 list of the Beylerbeyi Palace testifies to the increased use of *çuka* (or broadcloth), a thin woollen fabric, as opposed to the velvet-made couches in the Istavros Palace. Although the quality of this woollen fabric is high, they were less expensive than velvet made of silk. Secondly, the same list also shows that the cotton started to be the preferred fabric for the divans.

The use of cotton indeed seems to have increased in the Beylerbeyi Palace overall. For instance, while the door curtains were made of either the expensive silken fabrics, like *serâser* and *dîbâ*, or the broadcloth in the Istavros Palace, the ratio of broadcloth curtains decreased in the Beylerbeyi Palace. While broadcloth

curtains were only one-third of the total number, two-thirds were made of different types of cotton. In fact, in the Istavros Palace, cotton was only used in the covers, all of which were made of *kirpas*, a roughly woven cotton type. The preferred cotton types for the covers in the Beylerbeyi Palace were nevertheless *bez* and *yemenî*, both of which refer to lightly woven cotton as opposed to *kirpas*. This shift implies that the increasing preference for cotton around the 1740s was realized alongside the increased use of its lightly woven types.

When all these changes are considered, it would be apt to infer that, around the 1740s, there was a growing preference for fabrics whose textures were lighter, looser and glimmer, which were also slightly cheaper than those in the 1705 list of the Istavros Palace. This shift was in tandem with the changing dynamics of Ottoman textile production in this period (Faroqhi, 2006a).

2.2. The Embroideries and the Style

The second analysis concerns the embroidery type on the fabrics or their style. Although the applied embroidery types or their style were only described for the pillows and couches and/or divans, it should be noted that these sitting fittings were the most visually dominant components of the interiors. Yet, there are two limitations in analysing this category. First, it is hard to analyse the embroidery type and style independent from the fabric used. For instance, when the fabric used is *serâser*, *dibâ*, or *hatâyî*, the lists include no further description about their embroideries. This is no surprise as these were already heavily woven fabrics. Therefore, they need to be considered as an embroidery type rather than simply a fabric. Secondly, these lists either describe the motif embroidered or denote their style, or very rarely both. Therefore, in this category, the analysis bases on three features: the preferred motif figure, the motif scheme, and finally, the style, which was usually named after the country, region, or the city of production.

The comparison between the two palaces brings forward three critical changes. The first one is about the embroideries on the velvets, the most commonly used fabric in pillows and couches and divans in both palaces. In the Istavros Palace, most of the velvets were embroidered with flower figures. In the Beylerbeyi Palace, however, there is no single velvet described as flowered. Instead, their great majority were plain but woven with metallic threads, among which only a few were perforated or striped. This shift suggests a change in figure-ground relation with an increasing ratio of the faintly glimmering plain grounds without motifs. Changing the figure-ground ratio with fewer motifs also means a decrease in the production cost (Philips, 2014, p.167).

Secondly, when the preference for the fabrics with a certain motif scheme or pattern is analysed, in the Istavros Palace, the overwhelming number of the Bursa-styled pillowcases attracts immediate attention. Those were most likely *çatma*, a type of brocaded velvets with motifs in silver and gold filaments wound around a silk core. The design of *çatma* represented the most distinctive characteristics of Ottoman silks. They had a large central motif arranged symmetrically by infinitely repeating patterns on staggered axes or in medallions within specific compositions, all of which were framed by a border. Their motifs were different types of flowers, blossoms, pomegranates, pine cones, or leaves (Bilgi, 1993, p. 17-19).

As opposed to the numerous brocaded velvets with a strong motif scheme in the Istavros Palace, the preference in the Beylerbeyi Palace was towards the patterned silken fabrics, such as *hatâyî* and *dibâ*. *Hatâyî* mainly refers to a pattern with stylised composite blossoms, flowers, or mythical animals like dragon or phoenixes made with metallic threads on a silken fabric. Although sometimes described as Chinese style, *hatâyî* was mostly associated with Safavid and Timurid influences (Phillips, 2012, p.17; Akpınarlı and Balkanal, 2012, p.189-90). *Dibâ* was likewise patterned, made of silver and gold threads on a satin ground (Tezcan, 1993).

In addition to the increased ratio of the patterned fabrics, it is impossible to overlook many Chios-styled pillows in the Beylerbeyi Palace. The textile and especially silk production in Chios has a long history (Argenti, 1953). However, there seems to be a change in the textile production in the 1740s, when the artisans of the island had mastered the imitation of Venetian, Lyonnais, Persian, and Indian styles. In fact, the settlement of French immigrants on the island in 1743, who quickly came to dominate the weaving industry there, must have played a critical role in the transformation of Chios-style textiles in the 1740s (Tezcan, et al, 2009, p.26-29). It is possible that the new Chios style attracted immediate

attention, leading to their purchase for the interiors of the Beylerbeyi Palace in 1745. Most of these Chios-style pillow covers were woven with metallic threads and had plain grounds, whereas some featured a picture made with double darning stitches, *pesend*, known as a Turkish type of stitching.

77

Table 3. The documentation of the embroidery type and style in the Istavros Palace and the Beylerbeyi Palace

	pillows			couches and divans		
	velvet			velvet		
Istavros Palace (1705)		Bursa-style	127		flowered	14
		flowered	13		flowered with metallic threads	10
		flowered with metallic threads	12		flowered and combed	3
		flowered and combed	3		combed	2
		Persian-style taqueté	18		Persian-style taqueté	4
		Persian-style baldachin	4		flowered satin	3
		taqueté	2		taqueté	2
		hatayî	1		hatayî (combed)	1
		Crete-style	1			
Beylerbeyi Palace (1745)	velvet	with metallic threads	56		broadcloth (plain)	28
		with metallic threads & combed	13	Chios-style	metallic threads	15
		with metallic threads & double darning	10		picture embroidered with double darning	4
	Chios-style	with metallic threads	41		fringed	3
		plain	6	hatayî	tin fringed with metallic threads	3
	hatayî	with metallic threads	24	yemenî	printed block striped&fringed (silk threads)	3
		Austrian	14		printed block cotton with metallic threads	1
	dîbâ	European	11			
		Istanbul-style flowered	9			
		Austrian	2			
		taqueté	7			
		Banja Luca-style	6			
		Persian-style (veined with metallic threads)	6			

Thirdly, the increased number of items with different styles in the Beylerbeyi Palace is worth highlighting. The upholsteries of this palace seems to have held a diversity of styles. In addition to Chios style, there were also examples of the Austrian-styled *hatâyî*, the European, Austrian and the Istanbul styled *dîbâ* (*baldachin*), together with Banja Luca and Persian styled pillowcases in the Beylerbeyi Palace. There were also some curtains made of block printing in the Polish style. Although they make up only a very small amount of the total number of items in the palace, the increased curiosity towards the styles coming from different parts of the Ottoman Empire in addition to those from its Eastern and Western neighbours is interesting. In fact, as opposed to the interiors of the Beylerbeyi Palace in 1745, in the 1705 furnishing list of the Istavros Palace, the upholsteries listed were only made in the Bursa and Persian style with one example of a Crete-style pillowcase.

Although it is hardly possible to come up with a clear conclusion about the changing embroidery type and style because of the limitations mentioned before, the analysis firstly suggests a growing preference for a lighter visual expression in the interiors around the 1740s. Secondly, it testifies to an increased curiosity for different styles. Perhaps this curiosity implies a widening network of transcultural exchange on a global scale in the first half of the eighteenth century.

2.3. Changing Colours

The careful comparison of the preferred colour palette for upholsteries also reveals an interesting shift, which seems to be even more salient. In the Istavros Palace, crimson (*sürh*) was remarkably the most preferred colour that was mostly used in cushions, curtains, and covers. Crimson was followed by yellow, scarlet (*al*), and white, respectively. There were also a few items in red and blue together with single samples in the colour of sour-cherry, orange, purple, and green. This palette reflects a preference for vivid and warmer colours, with copious use of different tones of red ranging from light to dark.

However, the interiors of the Beylerbeyi Palace seem to be much colourful with a rather paler palette. The most preferred colours for the fabrics woven with metallic threads were yellow, scarlet, purple, followed by dark-blue, white and rose-pink. For the patterned silken fabrics, the most preferred colour for the grounds were emerald-green, white, and red, followed by few items in red-green, orange and green. For the unembroidered fabrics, the most preferred colour was scarlet. Scarlet was followed by the colours described as apricot, quince's rose, rose-sherbet, chick-pea, and sea-coloured, all of which used in couches made of broadcloth.

Compared to the Istavros Palace, although the use of yellow, scarlet, and white persisted, there is a visible increase in the use of purple and dark blue in the Beylerbeyi Palace. Moreover, there is a growing preference for more pastel tones, such as rose-sherbet, rose-pink, quince's rose, chick-pea, emerald-green, apricot, and sea-coloured. Although naming colours after fruits, flowers, or food was not an uncommon trend for the Ottomans, the increased frequency of these colours in the 1745 list is intriguing. It seems that the interiors of the Beylerbeyi Palace featured a diversity of colours with an increasing share of more pastel and natural tones, suggesting a growing taste for a paler palette.

2.4. The preliminary findings: A New Visuality

In the absence of any visual evidence, it is hard to speculate on how the interiors of these two palaces exactly were. Despite this constraint, the analysis of the written furnishing lists of the Istavros Palace and the Beylerbeyi Palace revealed that the fabrics preferred, the format, motifs and style of the embroideries and the colour palette had begun to change in the first half of the eighteenth century. The growing taste for smoother textures and patterned fabrics, less embroidered surfaces, and a paler palette suggest a search for a new visuality that is more sensory and natural, softer, and lighter around the 1740s.

Even though the components of this growing taste echo the basic principles of rococo, this research also reveals that two dynamics played a critical part in the change. First is a shift in the economic concerns related to the textile sector alongside the efforts to decrease the production cost. Second is the increased and

diversified ratio of different styles in the interiors. For the latter, these findings open up new grounds to further analyse the multiple directions of the cross-cultural exchange and the entangled transcultural connections on a global scale, which seem to have gradually intensified in the first half of the eighteenth century. These inferences, in turn, are of utmost importance in reviewing the prevailing assumption on the Ottoman's attempt to imitate European rococo: an established frame that still dominates the work on the history of eighteenth-century Ottoman art and architecture.

3. Conclusion

This preliminary research has focused on a new way to interpret a longly ignored archival document that could remind us of the forgotten design outlooks in the Ottoman interiors: the furnishing lists. The preliminary findings have shown that examining the written descriptions of the furnishings provides us with the opportunity to detect changing aesthetical preferences and design tastes around the 1740s. Nevertheless, this preliminary research has its own constraints. In order to have more profound findings, it is of utmost importance to incorporate the furnishing lists prepared for the other summer royal palaces in Istanbul in this period. The expanding amount of samples would prevent the possible misinterpretations of certain qualities, and hence, would allow detecting better the categories of analysis and their changing features. Furthermore, the incorporation of additional primary sources, such as travel accounts, into the research would enable a better description of the ambience of the interiors, which, in turn, would provide a rather more vivid snapshot of the data. Despite these constraints, this preliminary research has shown us a starting point to analyse further this type of archival documents. Such analyses would bring forward a nuanced and dynamic view of the changing aesthetical preferences and design taste in Ottoman interiors and the dynamics behind the change.

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