



# Turkish and Islamic Art Museum: The Palace of Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha

## *Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi: Makbul ve Maktul İbrahim Paşa'nın Sarayı*

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Turkish and Islamic Art Museum in Istanbul is the second museum in the Turkish museographic history and the first example of its kind. Its foundations were laid in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and of the Ottoman Empire. Collecting antiquities and museographic activities had already started beside other cultural and artistic institutions as a result of westernization initiated with developing contacts with Western countries and in 1869 the Imperial Museum (Müze-i Hümayun) constituting the core of Istanbul Archaeological Museums today was established.

This awareness started with the protection and collecting of Greek and Roman antiquities; however, increasing events of theft in *waqf* buildings such as mosques, masjids, *tekkes* and tombs in order to supply the increasing demand of European museums and private collections rang the alarm bells for Turkish and Islamic artifacts and a commission was established under the direction of Osman Hamdi Bey, the director of the Imperial Museum. With the efforts of the commission, and other individuals and institutions with a concern on the issue the Museum of Islamic Awqaf (Evkaf-ı İslamiye Müzesi) was founded in the *imaret* (or *darüzzıyafe*, public kitchen) building of Süleymaniye Complex for the protection and exhibition of these artifacts in order to prevent further thefts. The Museum opened to public on April 27, 1914 was turned over to the Ministry of National Education in 1924 and its name was changed to Turkish and Islamic Art Museum. The Museum served in the same building until 1983 when it moved to the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha where it is currently located (Figure 1).

The museum building is named after the powerful Ottoman Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha of Parga. Formerly called the Atmeydanı Palace (literally "horse square palace") the palace was repaired by Süleyman the Magnificent (*aka* al-Qanuni) and given as a gift to Ibrahim Pasha. But, who was this Ibrahim Pasha, who was presented with a gift of a palace by the Sultan himself? Many Turkish and foreign sources give the same basic info underlining that he was promoted very quickly due to his closeness with the sultan.

It is generally agreed that Ibrahim Pasha originally came from Parga in the Epiros region of Greece. He was taken captive by pirates when he was only six and sold to a widow in Manisa. The widow trained and educated him very well, particularly in the arts, literature and languages, and Ibrahim was bought by Prince Süleyman, who was the *sanjak bey* in Manisa at the time. Based on his upscale education, intelligence, skills and good communication Süleyman always held him in high esteem and Ibrahim served Süleyman for 16 years in total, 13 of which as a grand vizier. Ibrahim's positions at the Topkapı Palace started with Kapı Ağası, Has Odabaşı and İç Şahinciler Ağası and after the campaign to Belgrade, which he partook together with Süleyman, he was promoted to Beylerbeyi of Rumelia first, and then Grand Vizier. Ibrahim Pasha's promotion in state offices was unusually fast and not conforming to the state traditions of the time. For instance, he assumed the title of Serasker Sultan for the first time in history and a fourth vizier position was created for him; furthermore, for the first

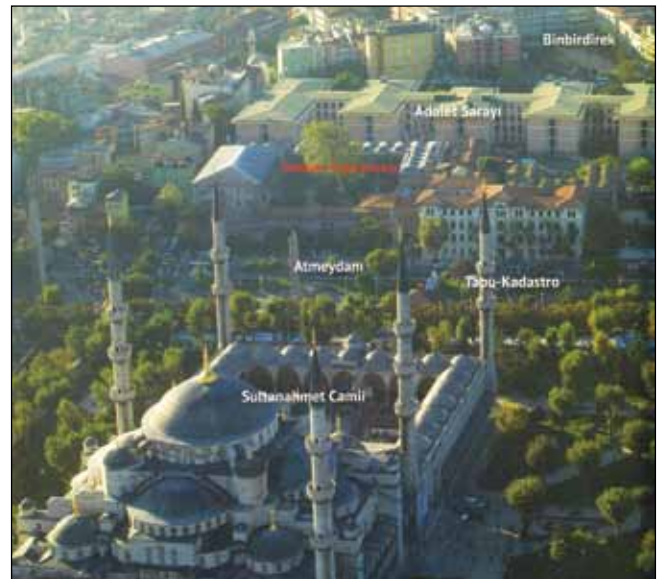


Figure 1: Palace of Ibrahim Pasha location.

time in Ottoman history he was promoted to the Grand Vizier position directly from the Fourth Vizier position although the tradition suggested the First Vizier to be raised to Grand Vizier position. This promotion was further embellished with his marriage to Hatice Sultan, sister of Süleyman the Magnificent, in 1524. Their wedding festival was held at the Atmeydanı Palace, later to be called Ibrahim Pasha Palace, and lasted for 15 days and 15 nights.

Ibrahim Pasha's rapid ascension up the steps of the state certainly increased the number of his enemies. However, his military and diplomatic victories both in the East and the West prevented his enemies from taking action earlier. Ibrahim Pasha's enemies did not have to wait too long because his extreme self-confidence led him to behave contrary to customs and traditions such as erecting statues of Artemis, Apollo and Heracles from the spoils of Budin in Hungary in front of his palace, his vast wealth, and his support for Prince Mustafa versus the sons of Hürrem Sultan, the wife of Süleyman the Magnificent, as well as his extremely independent acts in the contacts with foreign envoys. All these played into his enemies' hands and he was strangled at Topkapı Palace on the night of 14/15 March 1536 when he was invited over to Ramadan dinner. His body was taken out of the palace via a gate on the Seraglio Point, then to Galata area on a boat and buried in the cemetery of Canfeda Tekkesi at Fındıklı.

This very attractive story of Ibrahim Pasha, known as "Makbul" (literally, *persona grata*) first and then as "Maktul" (literally, murdered), paved the way for many Turkish and foreign sources to include much information on the palace, which was not even mentioned in former sources.

Ibrahim Pasha Palace serving as the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art today rises on the steps of Roman-Byzantine hippodrome, in Atmeydanı, the oldest and most important public square of Istanbul (Figure 2). The ancient Hippodrome was originally built by the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus (AD 193-211) and was embellished with various works of art brought from all over the Empire as the city was declared the new capital by Constantine the Great (AD 306-337) on May 11, 330. The most important ones of these works of art are the Serpent Column, which was originally erected at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi (Greece) as a memory for the victory of Greek cities united against the Persians in 479 BC, and the Egyptian Obelisk erected here in AD 390 by Theodosius I, who brought it from the temple in Karnak, where it had been originally erected by Pharaoh Tuthmose III. Being the center of the city through Byzantine and Ottoman periods this area witnessed festivals, chariot races, weddings, ceremonies, processions, and riots.

In contrast to the common timber vernacular architecture, Ibrahim Pasha Palace was built with stone masonry, which has allowed it to survive many fires and earthquakes. This palace is the only extant example of famous 16<sup>th</sup>-century grand palaces of grand viziers mentioned in many sources; however, its original construction date and patron are not



**Figure 2:** The plan of the area of the Hippodrome and Palace of Ibrahim Pasha.

known. Solakzade's *History* states that it was built in the reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512). A document of 1520 in the archives of the Topkapı Palace states that it was repaired by Süleyman the Magnificent from his personal budget. This suggests that the building had been built some time before 1520, so long that it was necessary to repair it. Another document of June 1521 in the archives of Topkapı Palace states that it was presented to Ibrahim Pasha as a gift by Süleyman the Magnificent. The same document also states that the palace reached up to Binbirdirek Cistern and which parts had been repaired. Certainly, the first guest to the newly repaired palace was Sultan Süleyman himself.

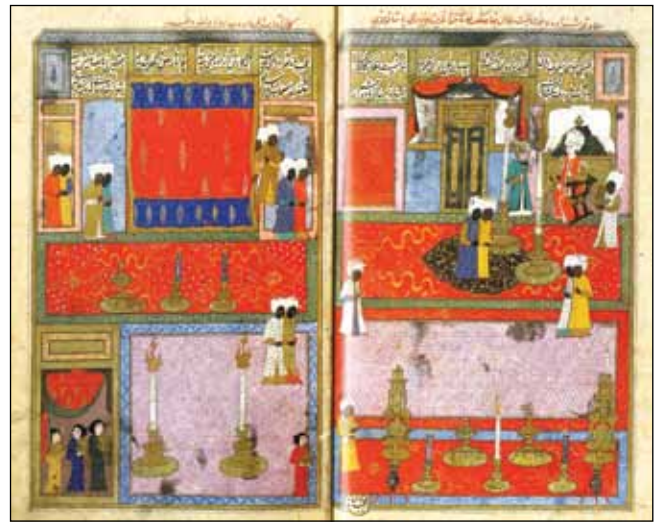
After this date it is possible to compile more information on the palace and Ibrahim Pasha himself from Turkish sources such as Solakzade, Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, Peçevi, Selaniki, and Naima, and foreign sources such as Pietro Zen, Cornelius Duplicius Schepper, Hans Dernschwam, M. L. Abbe Sevin as well as 16<sup>th</sup>-century miniatures, and paintings and engravings of foreign artists. Thus, it is inferred that the palace originally comprised grandiose buildings built with cut stones and arranged around four courtyards, guarded with iron gates. Experts have shown that this grandiose palace's premises reached Firuz Ağa Mosque on the front side and Binbirdirek Cistern at the back. However, nothing is known about the architect of the palace; yet, the modifications and new entrance gate were built by the renowned Ottoman architect Sinan prior to the circumcision festival of Prince Mehmed, son of Murad III, in 1582.

The location of the Ibrahim Pasha Palace ascribed it an additional function: Besides being a residence it also served as the imperial loge, emulating the *kathisma* of the Byzantine Hippodrome. Celebrations, entertainment, sports events and ceremonies held in the square were watched from here as clearly seen in the miniatures illuminated by a team led by Naqqash Osman in the manuscripts such as *Hünername*, *Surname-i Hümayun* and *Şehinşahname* written in Turkish by



**Figure 3:** Miniatures located at Surname showing the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha and the festivals held in front.

Seyit Lokman, the court historian. These miniatures also cast light on the palace complex; they depict the *divanhane* and its balcony, spectators' building and its loges, the gate built by Sinan, and the interior of a room in its harem (Figures 3,4). Other visual materials giving information on the palace include engravings and photographs. Particularly the engraving by Antoine Ignace Melling and photographs taken around 1865 by Pascal Sebah clearly show the façade of the palace and other buildings annexed later (Figure 5). Despite the damage by natural elements and mankind scholars' studies on written and visual evidences have revealed important information regarding the architecture of the palace. Thus, the façade



**Figure 4:** Miniature in Şehinşahname showing inside the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha.



**Figure 5:** Façade of the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha in a photograph taken by Pascal Sebah in 1865 (Bahattin Öztuncay archive).

of the palace rising on the rows of seats of the hippodrome originally measured 142 m. including the extant part of 130 m. The complex originally comprised three-storied masonry buildings arranged around four courtyards; building walls had plain surfaces enhanced with brick rows only (Figure 6,7).

The parts of the palace extending towards the Firuz Ağa Mosque and those at the back were pulled down when the Sultanahmet Palace of Justice was built. The extant part of the palace with its façade overlooking the hippodrome square is attested in numerous visual records. One of the

most important visual records is the miniature in *Hünername*. The miniature depicts the façade having two doorways, one of which was wide enough to allow access with a horse-carriage. The first courtyard of the palace looks more like a recess overlooking the square. The area with two doorways is concealed behind the buildings of Defterhane and Title Deed and Cadastral Office constructed later.

The second courtyard of the palace is located on top of barrel-vaulted galleries opening into the square. The open courtyard is surrounded with vaulted rooms of the ground



Figure 6: Façade of the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha.

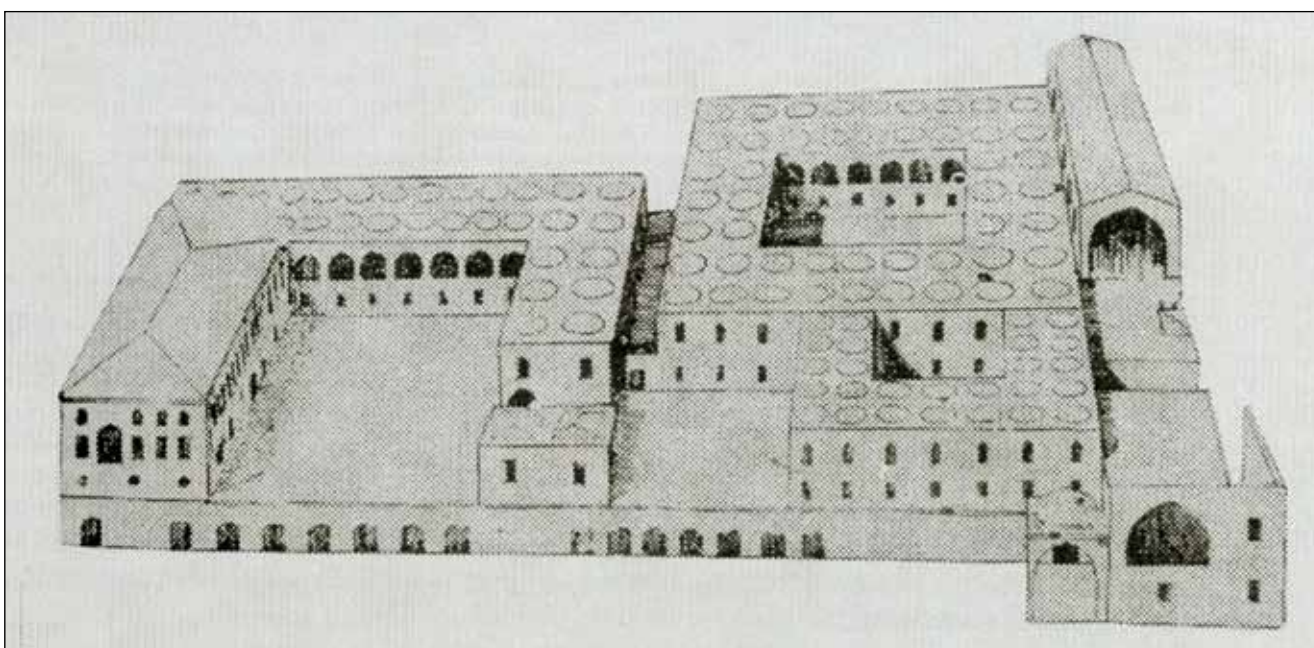


Figure 7: Illustration prepared by Architect Sedat Çetintaş depicting the general view of the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha.

floor on three sides with its front side overlooking the square. The miniatures indicate the presence of a long-gone timber construction for watching the spectacles in the square. This construction and other timber structures later built in its place were consumed in the fires the palace suffered. The Small Kiosk at the same level as this courtyard houses the library of the Museum today and faces the square. The Small Kiosk is divided by two arches supported by a single column into two sections covered with mirror vaults. Before the west wall of this courtyard is a baroque fountain with the *tughra* of Mahmud II dated to 1831/31. On the north and west sides of the upper floor are domed and vaulted rooms with a portico in front (Figure 8).

Divanhane, where the sultans had their conversations, meetings, and watched the entertainment and processions in Atmeydani, is the most important part of the palace and its short side facing the square features a timber balcony, where a throne was placed for the sultan to watch the ceremonies. Traces on this balcony attest to its former tile decoration. The divanhane comprised two sections as the larger outer part and the smaller inner part. As inferred from miniatures and various sources the outer divanhane was divided into two with timber posts; there was a balcony on its façade overlooking the courtyard; the windows here had timber shutters; all the timber details were painted in red. Behind the outer *divanhane* is the inner *divanhane* comprising a large room with a hearth and suitable for housing feasts (Figure 9).

The third courtyard, again built with stone masonry just like the rest, was the smallest one of the four and communicated with the square through several windows. The third courtyard joins the fourth one at the back, making a U; the rooms on the ground floor are vaulted whereas the domed rooms of upstairs open into a portico in front. In the corner is the gate with pergola whose construction is told by Selaniki in his *History*. This gate is also depicted in the miniatures of *Surname* depicting the circumcision festival of Prince Mehmed, son of Murad III. The sultan or prince entering through this gate could reach the *divanhane* on a horse (Figure 10).

The fourth courtyard located at the back was similar to the other three. Almost square in shape it was pulled down for the construction of the Palace of Justice and only a tiny portion remains. Between the fourth and second courtyards is a two-storied oblong building with barrel vaults, thought to be the tower and treasury of the palace. Although the first, third and fourth courtyards cannot be perceived easily today due to destruction and later annexes, the second courtyard has been luckier and survived in good condition. In the later periods of its history the palace also served as a military sewing workshop and prison. Following the restorations initiated in 1965, the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art moved here in 1983 opening a new era in the history of the palace.

The Museum housing works of art brought together from various regions of the Islamic world owns very important



Figure 8: Inside the second courtyard of the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha.



**Figure 9:** The façade of the Palace of Ibrahim Pasha's Divanhane and view of the balcony.



**Figure 10:** Miniature showing the entry of the sultan and his sons to the palace on horseback.

collections of the world and Turkey. For instance, the Museum has 13,000 manuscripts and 1700 hand-woven rugs, which make it one of the richest in its field. The time range of the collections covers a long span from the beginnings of Islam through the present day and the collections include manuscript Qur'ans and pages, inscriptions on stone, column capitals and murals from the Umayyads (661-750), Abbasids (754-1258) and Fatimids (909-1171); metal and terracotta lamps, censers, vases and figurines from the Great Saljuqs (1040-1157); Qur'ans, metal mirrors, trays and ewers as well pottery from the Zangids (1127-1250) and Ayyubids (1171-1246); manuscripts, brass astrolabes from the Islamic states in North Africa and Spain (750-1492); wooden door wings and bronze doorknockers of the Great Mosque in Cizre (Turkey) as well as numerous metal artifacts from the Artuqids (1081-1608); rugs, stone sphinxes, jars with relief décor, wooden bookstands, bronze candlesticks, tiles, wooden door wings and window shutters, marble cenotaphs, glass and brass lamps from the Anatolian Saljuqs (1077-1308), Anatolian Emirates (1081-1608) and Mamluks (1250-1517); and manuscripts illuminated with miniatures, ceramics, Iznik tiles, rugs, Qur'an boxes with mother-of-pearl inlay, *tombak* artifacts and gold jewelry studded with precious gems from the Ottomans (1299-1922). Furthermore, the ethnographic section of the Museum has a very rich collection of examples of garments for men, women and children, tents made from animal hair, daily use wares, artifacts of Turkish bath culture, figures of Turkish shadow theater Karagöz-Hacivat and numerous other ethnographic items collected from all over Turkey (Figures 11-14).

This monument with a grand history is still in use as the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art. A recent restoration and new exhibition arrangements initiated in 2013 launch a new era matching its grand history.



**Figure 11:** View of the museum exhibition.



**Figure 12:** The door of Divriği Great Mosque.



**Figure 13:** Qur'an box with mother-of-pearl inlay.



**Figure 14:** Crests of Ottoman Period decorated with precious stones.