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Changing Face of Ottoman Imperial Image: Carpets of Dolmabahçe Palace, Türkiye

Elvan Anmac  
*Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi*, elvan.anmac@deu.edu.tr

Filiz Adıgüzel Toprak  
*Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi*, filiz.adiguzel@deu.edu.tr

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As a result of Westernization act within the State, flourishing from the end of 18th century, essential alteration took place in the social and cultural life in the Ottoman Empire. Western influence asserted itself intensively as soon as Sultan Abdulmecid (1839-61) was enthroned; it was Western style which was immediately imitated in State Governance as well as in every aspect of life, in architecture, architectural decoration, in furnishings, in clothing and home textiles such as upholstery fabrics and carpets used in Sultan Palaces. One of the most striking references of this alteration is the Dolmabahce Palace which was built in 1842-56. The Palace shows disparity from decorative and functional aspects compared to the former palaces with its interior decoration and the textiles (carpets, draperies, upholstery fabrics).

In duration of Westernization Period, Ottoman Empire defined the visual images of authority in Western style so as to be accepted as a legitimate state in the international system. Ottoman Empire, not willing to lose prestige against the prevailing political power of West, started to imitate it in cultural domain consciously and used carpets with motifs of European style. In this paper, it is intended to explain the changing visual image of authority and imperial objects in Ottoman Empire in view of European style carpets held by the Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul.

Within the 600 years lifetime of the Ottoman Empire, the location of the palace, which was the centre of the government, had been changed a few times. First, the palace in Bursa moved to the capital in Edirne, and then moved to Istanbul. When Istanbul became the capital of the Empire, the first palace established in this city was the Old Palace - Saray-ı Atik-i Amire (1453-1478). Topkapı Palace (1478-1456) followed this first central government, and then the sultan used the Topkapı Palace, the Old Çırağan Palace, Beşiktaş Coastal Palace and the Old Beylerbeyi Palace at intervals. The central government moved finally to Dolmabahce Palace as its construction was completed in 1856 (fig. 1).1

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1 Ihsan Yucel and Sema Oner, Dolmabahce Sarayı (İstanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar Daire Başkanlıkları, 1995), 9.
Dolmabahce Palace was an important sign of the transformation in the Ottoman administrative system as well as it reflected the new formation of the Palace organization. On the other hand, Topkapı Palace was a functional complex symbolizing the powerful authorities of the sultans. In the second half of the 15th century, Mehmed the Second (The Conquerer) conceived its layout and had its major buildings constructed. In the sixteenth century, during the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, Topkapı Palace reached its definitive form. Thereafter, for hundreds of years its basic structure remained astonishingly intact. Except being a living space for the Empire and for the government administration, the Topkapı Palace had a symbolic function as the stage for royal ceremonies that displayed the splendour and power of the political authority. Palace structuring that was expanded to the dimensions of a world empire, stayed intact until the 19th century that was a time when the Ottoman system had accepted the Westernization.

By the first half of the 19th century, Ottoman Palace went out of its actual model, which was the Topkapı Palace. The Administrative Reforms of Sultan Abdulmecid (1839-1861), who was rejecting the traditional thought, had to be presented with a European style palace that displayed the Empire’s historical power. The Ottomans rapidly imported modernization without constructing its infrastructure, and built the Dolmabahce Palace (1845-1855) with the same rapidity. Dolmabahce Palace, which was the largest complex of the Reform Period, constructed as a one unit block by the Balyan family, was a Western style building with its intense baroque decoration inside and outside.

In 1877 the state administration was moved to Yıldız Palace and the statesmen stayed at this palace till 1909. Thereafter, they moved back to Dolmabahce Palace, and till the abolition of sultanate in 1922, the palace regained its important position as the centre of state governance. Completed in 1856, Dolmabahce was the third major palace of the Ottoman sultans in Istanbul. It was an architectural complex represented the cultural and the social context of the period, and also it reflected the artistic influences and tendencies with the alteration in the palace organization. This palace was built on the coast of Dolmabahce as a prestigious structure in the course of 19th century, changing the panorama of a rapidly extending city. The layout of the Dolmabahce Palace was different from the Topkapı as its design programme was determined in the first place unlike the structures which were built additionally according to new requirements in the Topkapı Palace.

Dolmabahce Palace was built by the architects Garabet and his son Nikogos Balyan. Interior design was later completed by Séchan and Gadre, who were the decorators of Paris Opera. Guilding decoration was completed by Bedros Sivaciyan (Monsieur Pirerre), wall paintings and ceiling ornamentation was completed by the palace’s head artists Hacı Mığırđıç Çarkiyan, Sopon Bezciiyan. Landscape of the gardens was designed by Sester, Fritz Vensel, K. Minich. There are three flats in the building, 285 rooms, 46 salons, 6 balconies, 6 baths sit onto 16,670 squaremeters. Total of 131 Turkish and European carpets and total of 99 prayer rugs sit onto an

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2 Deniz Esenmenli, *Osmanlı Saray ve Dolmabahce* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi ve Yay., 2002), 1.
5 Deniz Esenmenli, *Osmanlı Saray ve Dolmabahce* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi ve Yay., 2002), 37.
6 İlhan Yucel and Sema Oner, *Dolmabahce Sarayı* (İstanbul: TBMM Millî Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı, 1995), 9.
area of 4452 squaremeters. 14,500 kilograms of gold was used for decoration in the Harem section. The whole palace cost 70 million franks (fig. 2).  

Figure 2. Dolmabahce Palace, Stairs of the Sultanate.

The place, where Dolmabahce Palace is situated, was a bay and it was filled in 17th century. However, different sultans were mentioned about the filling of the bay, it is probable that the bay was filled in the reign of Ahmet I. or Osman II. Its architectural plan followed the Ottoman architectural tradition and the arrangements were made according to the customary lifestyle of the Ottomans. However, in the interior and exterior decoration, Western style was the model, which there was a clear tendency towards the intense ornamentation and the pompous style. Dolmabahce Palace is a product of an eclectic conception that became fairly an issue of discussion about its style throughout the 19th century. While the plan was arranged according to Turkish and Western styles, the interior and exterior decoration displays baroque, rococo and empirical features. The pure Western aspects of the palace are the monumental stairs and the gates of sultanate. Both Ottoman and European masters worked together to built this palace. The interior and exterior decorations of the palace, which are quiet conspicuous, were designed by using motifs from diverse periods of Western art. It is possible to see the motifs of cartridges, medallions, oyster shells, garlands, vases, “C” and “S” curves that display Baroque, Rococo and Empirical features on the frontline, gathered in the same composition. Thus, by using diverse motifs in the same composition, it was intended to constitute an eclectic style. Ottoman art was familiar with the Western originated movements, however, such an intense combination was for the first time seen in the Dolmabahce Palace. It is probable to speak of eclecticism in the interior decoration of the palace, and in the interior, we can find the motifs that were used on the frontline, on the walls and on the ceilings. Different from the frontline, there are paintings, still lifes, animal figures and landscapes inside the cartridges. From the mid of 18th century, Baroque and Rococo influences were seen in the traditional stucco calligraphy works of the Ottoman art.

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7 Ihsan Yucel and Sema Oner, Dolmabahce Sarayı (İstanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı, 1995), 62.  
8 Celik Gulersoy; Dolmabahce-Caglar Boyu Istanbul Gorunumleri III, (İstanbul Kitaplığı, 1984), 6.  
9 Ihsan Yucel and Sema Oner, Dolmabahce Sarayı (İstanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı, 1995), 11.
As seen in different structures of 19th century, it is possible to see these influences in Dolmabahce Palace.10

The furnishings of the palace show varied styles and in general, they are from European origin. Some of the furnishings were produced during the palace’s building process, and some others were acquired as gifts from the European countries, and other countries such as China, India and Egypt. Moreover, they did not give up the use of traditional floor cushions and mattresses. One of the significant features of the palace is the common use of crystal material. 36 crystal chandeliers, candlesticks, some of the fireplaces, banisters and all the mirrors were made up of crystal. Vases are one of the most attractive objects among the decorative objects of the palace. Vases were products of Yıldız Porcelain Factory, and some of them were Chinese, Japanese and French porcelains that were sent as gifts. Apart from these objects, there are clocks that compliment the decoration. The clocks are 158 in number and they are products of Turkey and Europe. Department of Upholstery (Mefruşat Dairesi) was the place where the essential material design for the furnishings of the palace were prepared and stored, and the purchasing procedure was executed. It is a two floor building that sit onto a 900 squaremeters area (fig. 3).11

Figure 3. Dolmabahce Palace, The Blue Room.

In 19th century, palaces’ carpet requirements were met by the carpets that were woven in Uşak, İzmir, Gördes and Bursa according to the pictures and samples given to the weavers. Department of Upholstery and Manager of Hereke Factory Akif Bey were in charge of providing these requirements. Furthermore, there are documents in the archives of Millî Saraylar (National Palaces) that some carpets were bought from England and France. After the foundation of Hereke Factory, carpets for the palaces were produced in this factory by the will of sultans. Founded in 1843 as an exclusive factory to provide upholstery fabrics for the palaces, Hereke Factory was registered in the name of Sultan Abdulmecid in 1845. Thereafter, in the reign of Abdülhamid II, Hereke Factory began to produce carpets according to the palaces’ needs in 1891. There exist information about the managerial organization of the factory in the staff

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10 Ihsan Yucel and Sema Oner, Dolmabahce Sarayi (İstanbul: TBMM Millî Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı, 1995), 30.
11 Ihsan Yucel and Sema Oner, Dolmabahce Sarayi (İstanbul: TBMM Millî Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı, 1995), 78.
records dated 1893. According to these records, it is known that the patterns and designs of carpets and fabrics were prepared by Monsieur Emil Meinz, who was a painter in the Tamirhane-i Hümayun in Yıldız Palace. Meinz prepared those patterns and designs in respect of the characteristics of the places. Another record found in the National Palaces Archives (Milli Saraylar Arşivi) is the decision that was given about the production of new carpets to be woven in the Hereke Factory, instead of buying English or French carpets to be used in the palaces (figs. 4 and 5).12

Figure 4 (left). European Hand Woven Carpet, Dolmabahce Palace, The Yellow Room. Inventory No: 52.122.

Figure 5 (right). European Machine Made Carpet, Dolmabahce Palace, Room 62.

Dolmabahce Palace is also a monumental structure that exhibits the textiles of the Ottoman Empire which were technologically developed. Because, in the Ottoman court life, specially woven Hereke carpets have an important place along with the upholsteries.13 Most of the carpets, which are on display in Dolmabahce Palace at present, are called “Gördeskari”. They were mostly woven in Hereke during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909). These carpets were decorated with different hatai (stylized plants) and rumi motifs. Apart from these carpets, there are also examples of Feshane Factory carpets, Iranian, Uşak, Gördes and Ladik carpets. Carpets with the inventory number of 52.122, 14.233 and 52.45 were described as European carpets in the records; however, there is not any information about when they were acquired. In the Dolmabahce Palace, there is another group of carpets, which are called as Hereke carpets; they look similar to European carpets in respect of motif and composition styles. These were produced in Hereke Factory different from today’s Hereke style. Carpets with the inventory number of 11.1618, 13.195, 13.189, 51.294, 11.1069, 11.1026, 52.2785, 52.2787, 52.2786, 52.2788 are some examples of these carpets (figs. 6 and 7).14

12 Vahide Gezgör, “Hereke Fabrika-i Hümayunu’nda Halı Üretimi”, Catalogue, (İstanbul: Milli Saraylar Koleksiyonunda Hereke Dokumaları ve Halıları, 1999), 173-177.
13 Vahide Gezgör, “Hereke Fabrika-i Hümayunu’nda Halı Üretimi”, Catalogue, (İstanbul: Milli Saraylar Koleksiyonunda Hereke Dokumaları ve Halıları, 1999), 173.
There is also another group of carpets which were woven with a relief effect by cutting the motif and border piles high (11.1618, 13.289, 11.1069, 11.1026, 93.635). It was written in the archive documents that the relief English and French carpets were the first samples of these European style carpets. They were woven by the order of Abdülhamid II; because the former carpets were used and old, he wanted new ones but with the same style. In the recent collection of the Dolmabahce Palace, there are carpets woven in different regions, and also there is a group of carpets woven in Europe and in Hereke with European style patterns. Apart from the regional carpets, neo-classical, Baroque and Rococo featured motifs were used in the other group. Varied garland motifs, acanthus leaves, varied flowers, oyster shells, rosettes, curved branches, flower bouquets, vases, olive and daphne leaves, architectural motifs were used in this group. Pictorial elements such as shadowing and the use of light was used to form a three dimensional appearance (fig. 8).  

Throughout the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire saw its power slowly but inexorably drain away. Europeans seized on the occasion to take charge of the country. So great was this social and political upheaval that it even affected the court, where the taste for European styles gained a stronghold. The new Turkish carpets, with their naturalistic foliage and flowers, reflected the influence of European carpets. One of the striking references of this alteration is the Dolmabahce Palace, its architecture, architectural decoration, furnishings, upholstery fabrics and carpets.\textsuperscript{16}

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