

THE **MOON** A Voyage  
Through Time

Edited by Christiane Gruber

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# From Auspicious Ornament to State Symbol

## The Crescent Moon in Ottoman Art and Architecture

Ünver Rüstem

The star and crescent of Turkey must rank among the most effective national symbols in the world, as recognizable as it is semiotically rich. Famous also for its association with the Islamic world at large, the crescent moon in particular has achieved iconic status as a religio-political emblem rooted in Turkey's Ottoman past (ca. 1299–1922). Yet the crescent's place and meaning in Ottoman history are more complicated than modern perceptions may suggest, not least because the motif did not cement itself as the state's preferred insignia until the 1800s. Against this perhaps surprising background, the present essay considers the multifaceted role that the moon — especially in its crescent form — played in the Ottoman Empire's art and architecture, touching on its various illustrative, decorative, and symbolic uses as they developed and intersected over the centuries.

As a highly conspicuous celestial body that looms large in the human experience, the moon maintained an important position in Ottoman visual, scientific, and popular culture. Its physical impact and metaphysical appeal made it an irresistible object of interest and inquiry, a fascination whose artistic aspect reveals itself most directly in pictorial renderings of our world and the universe to which it belongs. Such images, which take the form of paintings in illustrated manuscripts, range from narrative and literary scenes set against the night sky to more complex depictions that explore the moon's cosmological and astrological significance.<sup>1</sup> Although sometimes shown in its full phase, the moon in these works more often appears as a crescent (*hilal*), its most distinctive manifestation.

Fine examples of this kind of imagery can be found in the opening astrological section of the *Metali'üs-sa'ade ve menabi'üs-siyade* (Ascension of Propitious Stars and the Sources of Sovereignty), a compendium of treatises that Sultan Murad III (r. 1574–1595) commissioned for his daughter, Ayşe Sultan (d. 1605), in about 1582 (see Cat. Nos. 31 and 33).<sup>2</sup> One of the book's more striking paintings — dominated by a roundel showing a harp-playing Venus riding Taurus — features at its base a personification of the moon, who, flanked by the figures of Mercury and Saturn, presents herself to us as a seated woman with an upturned closed crescent framing her round face (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> Mirroring the



Fig. 1: *Taurus Ridden by Venus, with Mercury, the Moon, and Saturn Below*, artist(s) unknown, *Metali'üs-sa'ade ve menabi'üs-siyade*, folio 9v, Istanbul, Ottoman lands, ca. 1582, opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper. The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, purchased from Demotte and Company, 1935, MS M.788.

manuscript's text, which is translated from an older Arabic source, this iconography draws on much earlier Islamic models, themselves rooted in the long-established poetic and pictorial trope of the



Fig. 2: Cushion cover decorated with nested crescents and tulips, Bursa or Istanbul, Ottoman lands, ca. 1625–1650, voided and brocaded silk velvet, gilt- and silver-metal thread, and cotton. The Cleveland Museum of Art, purchase from the J.H. Wade Fund, 2009.282.

moon-faced beauty.<sup>4</sup> The conflation of female and lunar qualities here takes on greater resonance in light of the book's dedication, where Ayşe Sultan is dubbed "in sublimity higher than the Sun and Moon."<sup>5</sup> As this praise suggests, and as the zodiacal content of the painting and its accompanying text makes clear, the moon was much more to the Ottomans than a thing of visual splendour; it was also reckoned among the most influential — and auspicious — forces governing human fate, and it is notable in this regard that the final part of the *Metali'* is dedicated to fortune-telling.<sup>6</sup>

These powerful associations with beauty and prosperity were by no means unique to the Ottomans, whose lunar interests were (and remain) shared across the world's cultures, Islamic and non-Islamic alike.<sup>7</sup> What makes the Ottoman case remarkable, however, is the sheer extent to which the crescent moon flourished as an artistic device beyond the illustrative realm. At once simple and arresting, the shape found widespread application in the arts of the object, where it functioned not only as a versatile and inherently attractive design element but also as an allusion to the moon's welcome bearing on human affairs. The crescent had thus emerged by the seventeenth century as a favoured motif for brocaded velvet cushion covers, usually occurring as a bold repeat pattern and sometimes further multiplied to form sets of nested sickles, with floral designs always part of the mix.<sup>8</sup> In one particularly beautiful example of the nested type, the largest crescents — executed in silver and gilt thread on a red ground — contain vines issuing stylized tulips (Fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> With their offset circular cores, the cushion's crescent groupings each give the effect of a *nazar*, the famous eye-shaped amulet descended from ancient Mediterranean tradition and still used throughout the lands of the former Ottoman Empire to ward off the evil eye.<sup>10</sup> That the crescent shape itself had also long served as a regional talisman strengthens this apotropaic connection.<sup>11</sup> Providing an additional layer of meaning is the design's incorporation of the tulip, another beloved Ottoman motif that, together with images of flowers more generally, may well have carried connotations of paradise.<sup>12</sup> This evocative floral component harmonizes aptly with the dominant lunar pattern, and the two themes are fully amalgamated along the cushion's arcaded borders, where rows of downturned crescents — each crowned with a tuft resembling the calyx of a pomegranate — grow like rosebuds from stems flanked by tulips.<sup>13</sup>

Widely acquired among the upper classes, such cushion covers afforded a luxurious yet practical medium by which to bring lunar and other favourable motifs into the homes of well-to-do Ottomans.<sup>14</sup> Clothing, too, secured the moon's place in the iconography of elite life, as exemplified by a seventeenth-century royal caftan whose crimson silk surface bears strikingly large gold-thread appliqué of nested crescents alternating with tulip silhouettes (Fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> This sumptuous garment would have rendered its wearer

both an impressive sight and a living embodiment of good fortune, combining the moon's positive symbolism with the tulip's paradisaical redolence.

Other silk and velvet items display crescents in triangular sets of three together with pairs of wavy stripes.<sup>16</sup> This curious design is a distinctly Ottoman take on a more widespread triple-ball pattern that art historians have dubbed *chintamani* in reference to its presumed (though doubtful) Buddhist origins. Most likely a Central Asian talismanic composition based on spotted animal skins, the *chintamani* motif underwent several elaborations in Ottoman art, where the three balls — besides being joined by waves resembling tiger stripes — assumed a number of guises: in some cases left as solid circles, they also (and perhaps more usually) appear as closed or open crescents, as if to redouble the original design's auspicious properties.<sup>17</sup> Examples of this crescent-*chintamani* hybrid can be found in a range of media, including polychrome tiles made in the renowned factories of Iznik during the second half of the sixteenth century. One such tile recalls



Fig. 4: Tile with *chintamani* (ball-and-stripe) decoration, Iznik, Ottoman lands, 1560–1590, fritware, polychrome underglaze painted. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 425-1900.



Fig. 3: Royal caftan with appliqué nested crescents and tulips, traditionally associated with Sultan Süleyman II (r. 1687–1691), probably Istanbul, Ottoman lands, seventeenth century, silk, cotton, gold thread, and silk gauze. Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul, 13/514.

the cushion cover discussed above, with each *chintamani* “ball” fashioned out of nested crescents that enclose a small circle, an arrangement that might also be read as three *chintamani* balls placed one within the other (Fig. 4).<sup>18</sup> The design's colour scheme — dark red inside turquoise inside white on a cobalt ground — here makes the resemblance to the *nazar* unmissable, though the trilobed red ornament affixed to each outermost crescent is more difficult to interpret. As its oblong shape tells us, the tile once belonged to a repeating border pattern that probably framed an expanse of floral tilework within a mosque or palace, settings that warranted decoration as propitious as it was beautiful.<sup>19</sup>

A more blatant invocation of the moon's beneficial force is at play in banners (*sancaks*) that were carried into battle or on the pilgrimage to Mecca. Shaped

like pentagonal shields and typically made of brocaded red, green, or white silk, these flags bear Qur'anic and other religious inscriptions together with a variety of recurrent motifs that more often than not include the crescent moon.<sup>20</sup> It is no accident that analogous designs were used for both warfare and pilgrimage: the Ottoman sultans framed their military exploits as holy endeavours that advanced the cause of Sunni Islam, a claim bolstered in the sixteenth century by their assumption of the caliphate and acquisition of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.<sup>21</sup> Such banners thus demand to be understood as religio-political statements whose ornamentation must have carried a semantic charge that built on — and went beyond — its more generically talismanic import.

There is, however, no obvious ideological significance to the banners' incorporation of the crescent, whose variability from piece to piece further complicates the issue. Although sometimes granted pride of place in the design, the motif is more usually subordinated to depictions of Dhu'l-Fiqar, the legendary bifurcated sword that the Prophet Muhammad is supposed to have given to his son-in-

law — and the fourth Sunni caliph — ‘Ali (d. 661).<sup>22</sup> The relationship of these forms to one another is epitomized by a handsome red standard now housed in the Topkapı Palace, which for four hundred years served as the main residence of the Ottoman sultans in the empire’s third and final capital, Istanbul. Traditionally ascribed to Selim I (r. 1512–1520) but more likely produced in the seventeenth century, this banner is decorated down its long sides with six thick crescents filled with Arabic inscriptions, four of them clasping star-like sunbursts (Fig. 5).<sup>23</sup> Rising between these stacked moons and dominating the banner’s main axis is Dhu’l-Fiqar, whose pommel is itself shaped as a little crescent. Despite their number and eye-catching designs, the crescents here play second fiddle to the sword, and this should not surprise us: Dhu’l-Fiqar provides a far more literal reference to the theme of holy warfare.

Yet the crescent enjoyed too much prominence in the banner tradition not to have taken on certain meanings tied to the Ottoman imperial project. We might be tempted to seek an explanation in the story of Osman’s Dream, a fifteenth-century foundation myth that tells of how the dynasty’s progenitor, Osman I (r. ca. 1284–1324), had a vision of the moon sinking into his chest before a tree sprang from his naval and grew to encompass the whole world. Suggestive as this story is, however, it cannot alone account for the crescent’s popularity, especially since the moon described in the dream is not explicitly identified as a sickle.<sup>24</sup>

More relevant to elucidating the crescent’s ideological value to the Ottomans is its long-standing function as a symbol of Islam.<sup>25</sup> This, too, is a far from a straightforward matter, for the crescent, unlike the Christian cross, has no intrinsic religious meaning beyond its possible evocation of the Islamic lunar calendar, which regulates many facets of Muslim

practice. Nevertheless, the motif was already among the insignia brandished on the battle standards of Islamic polities long before the Ottomans inherited it, having been adopted — probably from Sasanian royal iconography — in the seventh century.<sup>26</sup> Its well-known and widespread use as a finial on mosques is likewise very old, the earliest recorded instance dating back to the 1160s, when the Seljuqs converted the Armenian Cathedral of Ani.<sup>27</sup> That the crescent replaced a cross at Ani prompts us to wonder whether the motif’s connection with mosque architecture came about at least in part because of the strong visual contrast it presented to its Christian equivalent. Indeed, with no overt religious credentials of its own, the crescent seems to have acquired its Islamicness in a somewhat accidental and cumulative manner: used and reused in the contexts of holy war and congregational prayer, the motif gradually transcended the factors behind its original embrace — its kingly

and auspicious overtones and aesthetic appeal — to become an emblem more firmly tied to Islam itself.

Such were the associations with which the crescent came to the Ottomans, who, as the dominant Islamic power between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries, did much to consolidate its existing religious symbolism. Evident already from the motif’s routine appearance on imperial banners, this symbolism found still more compelling expression in Ottoman architecture, where the crescent finial — though employed alongside a number of alternative designs — reigned supreme as the pinnacle of choice for mosques and other religious buildings.<sup>28</sup> A magnificent case in point is the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, now popularly known as the Blue Mosque, which was constructed between 1609 and 1617 in the heart of Istanbul by the young and pious Ahmed I (r. 1603–1617). Unrivalled in number in the Ottoman tradition, its



Fig. 5: Battle standard decorated with Dhu’l-Fiqar (bifurcated sword of ‘Ali) and crescents, traditionally associated with Selim I (r. 1512–1520), probably Istanbul, Ottoman lands, probably seventeenth century, silk with metal thread. Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul, 1/824.



Fig. 6: View of the entrance facade of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque (Blue Mosque) showing the crescent finials of its central dome and minarets, architect Sedefkar Mehmed Agha, Istanbul, Ottoman lands, 1609–1617. Photograph courtesy of Güven Erten.

six soaring pencil-shaped minarets each hold aloft a gilt baluster-shaped finial that culminates in an upturned crescent (Fig. 6). A bulkier version of the finial crowns the mosque’s mighty central dome, whose completion was celebrated with a grand ceremony at which local and foreign spectators eagerly watched the crescent’s installation.<sup>29</sup> It is notable that, inside the mosque, the motif is not to be found among the tilework and paintwork that coat the walls, occurring only as a finial on the stone *mihrab* (“prayer niche”) and *minbar* (“pulpit”).<sup>30</sup> This again indicates that the crescent derived its religious significance less from any concrete iconographic connection with Islam than from its repeated use in certain contexts. By the eighteenth century, the lunar finial had become such an entrenched expectation that the Ayazma Mosque — a smaller royal foundation erected between 1758 and 1761 on Istanbul’s Asian side — reduplicates the motif on its outer walls, where a series of crescent-topped balusters are self-referentially carved in high relief between the mosque’s windows (Fig. 7).<sup>31</sup>

Another art form demonstrating the extent to which the Ottomans both capitalized on and cultivated the crescent’s religious potential is the *hilye-i şerif*, a kind of calligraphic portrait of the Prophet Muhammad that was often carried or displayed on walls. A specifically Ottoman invention, the *hilye* owes its canonical layout to the famous seventeenth-century calligrapher Hafız Osman (d. 1698), who arranged its Arabic text — a description of the Prophet’s appearance and virtues that is attributed to ‘Ali — in a characteristic composition centred on a large roundel with four smaller medallions around it.<sup>32</sup> The central roundel, which contains the bulk of the description, is typically set within a crescent, as can be seen in a



Fig. 7: Southwest facade of the Ayazma Mosque, carved with decorations in the form of crescent finials, Üsküdar, Istanbul, Ottoman lands, 1758–1761. Photograph by Ünver Rüstem.

beautiful folding example executed by Hafız Osman himself (Fig. 8; see also Cat. Nos. 22–23).<sup>33</sup> There is nothing in the standard *hilye* text to necessitate this lunar frame, whose combined appearance with the roundel instead evokes other writings that compare the Prophet to the sun and moon.<sup>34</sup> Beyond its reference to this trope, however, the crescent is also serving in its wider capacity as an Islamic marker, its slender form and upward orientation inevitably bringing to mind the finial of a mosque.<sup>35</sup> In a manner that recalls the motif’s proliferation at the Ayazma Mosque, an eighteenth-century *hilye* by İsmail bin İbrahim Bosnavi (d. 1748) takes the lunar theme even further than Hafız Osman’s prototype, arranging the description in four crescent-framed roundels across two pages and augmenting ‘Ali’s text with another that calls the Prophet “more beautiful than the moon” (see Cat. No. 22).<sup>36</sup>

These numerous Ottoman experiments with the Islamic crescent paved the way for its emergence as the definitive emblem of state toward the end of the eighteenth century. As we have seen, the crescent before this time was neither the only nor the most important imperial device, being second in rank to the Dhu’l-Fiqar. Western images and conceptions of Ottoman insignia, however, had long given greater prominence to the crescent than to ‘Ali’s sword, perhaps because the former was more readily intelligible to European viewers.<sup>37</sup> The Ottomans showed varying — and ultimately increasing — levels of awareness of this foreign perspective. Gülru Necipoğlu has suggested that Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481), nicknamed for his capture of Constantinople in 1453, deployed the crescent “as a heraldic emblem” in gifts he sent abroad, a move that would have been consistent with the cosmopolitan

visual culture nurtured at his court.<sup>38</sup> A rather different situation is implied by the report of Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi (d. 1731), the first Ottoman ambassador to France, who in 1721 saw the crescent used to represent his homeland at a French firework display and found the conceit unfamiliar enough to write, “Our sultan’s mark is apparently the moon.”<sup>39</sup>

By the start of the nineteenth century, however, the crescent’s identification with the Ottoman state had become a matter of consensus, as vividly signalled by a well-known portrait of Selim III (r. 1789–1807, d. 1808) that was executed in 1803 by the Ottoman Greek painter Konstantin Kapıdağlı (fl. 1789–1806). Here, the sultan sits regally on a sofa and commands our attention with his gaze, while behind him hangs a black oval panel emblazoned in gold with his *tuğra* (calligraphic monogram) and a thin open sideways crescent facing a little star (Fig. 9).<sup>40</sup>

What had happened since Mehmed Efendi’s report to bring about this strengthening of the crescent’s political symbolism among the Ottomans? As already hinted by the Ayazma Mosque, the eighteenth century was a time of momentous aesthetic introspection and innovation for the Ottoman Empire, which now entered into closer visual dialogue — and hence competition — with the arts of Western Europe. This change was tied to larger processes of institutional modernization by which the empire was seeking to reaffirm its place in the European political landscape.<sup>41</sup> Kapıdağlı’s portrait is a striking testament to these shifts: a large-scale naturalistic oil painting quite unlike traditional manuscript depictions of the sultans, the image presents Selim in internationally prestigious terms while still celebrating his Ottoman identity

through his costume and pose.<sup>42</sup> This careful balance is encapsulated by the oval panel, which employs authentically Ottoman elements to create a new heraldic design capable of appealing to both foreign and local tastes (Fig. 10). The transcultural currency of the crescent is here fully instrumentalized, for though on the one hand intended

to answer long-established European expectations, the augmented emblematic status accorded to the motif also builds on its existing cachet in Ottoman eyes. A similar approach can be seen in the *tuğra*, whose swirling lines, in an ingenious play on European perspectival conventions, are shown as if three-dimensional.<sup>43</sup> More openly related to Western models is the oval’s gilt garland frame, which is surmounted by a miniature trophy of weapons and standards that emanate from a European-style crown. Even this, however, is suitably Ottomanized, since the crown and some of the standard poles terminate in crescent finials.<sup>44</sup>

It is no coincidence that the sultan shown sitting beneath this panel is Selim III. An enthusiastic modernizer, Selim presided over a series of ambitious military reforms, and it was in this context in 1793 that the ancestor of today’s Turkish flag — a white star and crescent on a red field — was born as a naval ensign.<sup>45</sup> The choice of red in preference to green, which had predominated in earlier ensigns, was determined both

by the colour’s durability and by its magnificence, as explained in the imperial decree ordering the change.<sup>46</sup> As for the star, which we saw anticipated in the sunbursts of Selim I’s putative standard, its addition brought greater specificity to the crescent device, distinguishing it from other kinds of lunar imagery.<sup>47</sup> Already a motif of venerable religio-political heritage and widespread



Fig. 8: Verbal portrait (*hilye-i şerif*) of the Prophet Muhammad, calligraphed by Hafız Osman, probably Istanbul, Ottoman lands, dated 1099/1687–1688, decoration and mounting later (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), ink and pigment on paper mounted on three folding panels. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Special Collections, Hatcher Graduate Library, Isl. Ms. 238.





Fig. 9: Portrait of Selim III seated on a sofa by Konstantin Kapıdağlı, Istanbul, Ottoman lands, oil painting on canvas. Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul, 17/30.

recognizability, the crescent was thus acknowledged and showcased as the emblem most suited to furthering the empire's global image in an age of heightened cross-cultural interaction. This development, which may have followed on from slightly earlier official implementations of the star and crescent,<sup>48</sup> proved decisive: the motif soon became ubiquitous in the empire's visual culture, used in everything from royal portraits (as we have just seen) to military decorations and processional standard finials (see Cat. No. 42).<sup>49</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, a version of the red naval ensign — its star now invariably five-pointed — had become the principal Ottoman flag. Coupled with its green-backed counterpart, which stood for the caliphate, the flag was subsequently incorporated into a new imperial coat of arms (*Arma-ı Osmani*) consisting of an elaborate trophy of weaponry and state attributes below a crescent-framed *tuğra* (Fig. 11).<sup>50</sup> This design expands on the more tentative heraldry of Kapıdağlı's earlier portrait, and it is significant that the crown, which was evidently felt to be too Western, has been discarded in favour of a turban.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 10: Detail of Fig. 9 showing the heraldic panel that hangs behind the sultan.

So successful was the late Ottoman flag that it not only survived the empire's fall in 1922 to serve the Republic of Turkey but also inspired a host of other flags created for newly formed countries in the Islamic world.<sup>52</sup> Capturing the transition from imperial to national symbol is an extraordinary portrait of Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal (d. 1938), painted in 1923 by Hüseyin Tahirzade Behzad (d. 1961) (Fig. 12).<sup>53</sup> In an arrangement indebted both to the *hilye* and to the Ottoman coat of arms, Kemal's bust rises from an upturned crescent braced by two little medallions that bear the words *peace* (*sulh*) and *victory* (*zafer*), written in the as yet unreformed Ottoman script. The crescent itself is inscribed "The Great Warrior, His Excellency Mustafa Kemal Pasha" (*Gazi Büyük Mustafa Kemal Paşa Hazretleri*; the honorific title of "Atatürk" would not be granted until 1934). Above the portrait fly green and red versions of the star and crescent flag, their convergence marked by another instance of the motif in gold. More remarkably, the flags' poles — each bearing an additional star and crescent — are carried by angels adapted from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Persian paintings of the Prophet Muhammad's celestial ascension (*miraj*), and this borrowing from the arts of the book is echoed by the portrait's lavishly illuminated borders.<sup>54</sup> Tahirzade, who himself hailed from Iran, has here invoked classical Islamic precedent to imbue his image with the authority of tradition, and he is helped rather than hindered by his use of the late Ottoman lunar emblem, which, by the early twentieth century, already passed as an age-old device in spite of its recent ascendancy.<sup>55</sup> Reproduced through the modern technology of colour printing, Tahirzade's simultaneously inventive and historicizing portrait contributed to the process by which the young Turkish republic grappled with and selectively absorbed its Ottoman heritage. The crescent moon, accompanied by its latterly added star, endures today as one of the most outstanding and generative legacies of this imperial past. ❁



Fig. 11: Marble panels decorated with the Ottoman imperial coat of arms (*Arma-i Osmani*) and bearing the *tuğra* (monogram) of Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). Left: Late nineteenth or early twentieth century, original context unknown, now displayed at the Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul. Right: Dated 1314/1896, with modern repairs and overpainting and with its original turban missing, fitted above the Nuruosmaniye Gate of the Grand Bazaar, Istanbul. Sergey Pristyazhnyuk/Alamy Stock Photo (left); Picade LLC/Alamy Stock Photo (right).

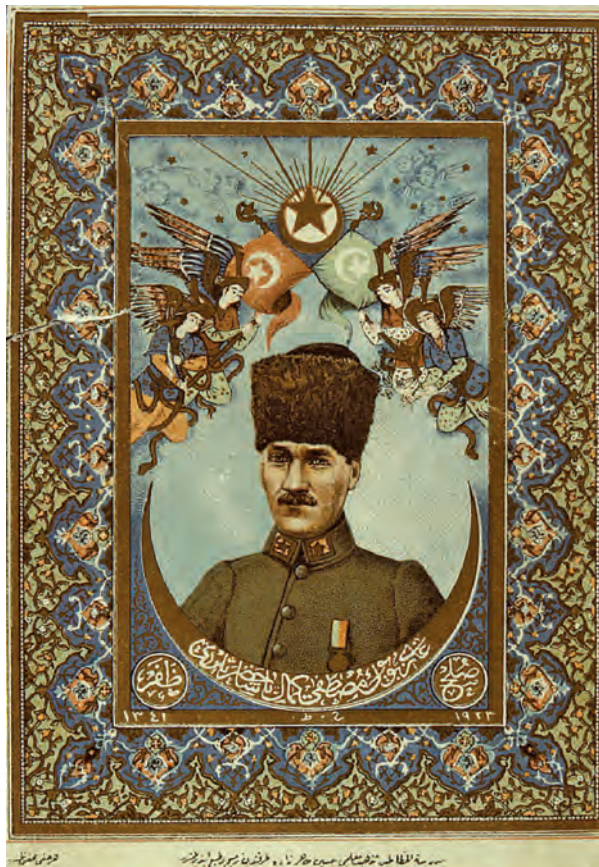


Fig. 12: Printed reproduction of a portrait of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) by Hüseyin Tahirzade Behzad, original painted in Istanbul, Turkey, and dated 1341/1923. Private collection. Photograph courtesy of Irvin Cemil Schick.

#### NOTES

1. Night scenes of the narrative and literary variety are comparatively rare. For some sixteenth- and eighteenth-century examples, see Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2013), 195; Esin Atil, *Levni and the Surname: The Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festival* (Istanbul, 1999), 164–165, 200–201, 218–219; and the final image in Sunil Sharma, “The Ottoman Turkish Zenanname (‘Book of Women,’” *Asian and African Studies Blog* (British Library), Accessed January 18, 2019, at <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2016/11/the-ottoman-turkish-zenanname-book-of-women.html>.
2. For this manuscript, see Barbara Schmitz, *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts and Paintings in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (New York, 1997), 71–84. An analogous copy was given to Ayşe’s sister, Fatma Sultan; for a modern facsimile with commentaries, see Manuel Moleiro Rodríguez, ed., *The Book of Felicity*. 2 vols. (Barcelona, 2007).
3. Schmitz, 78.
4. The manuscript’s immediate textual and pictorial prototype is the *Kitab al-Bulhan*, a late-fourteenth-century Jalayirid miscellany that must have been in Ottoman hands at the time that Murad III ordered the Turkish version made. See Stefano Carboni, “The ‘Book of Surprises’ (*Kitab al-bulhan*) of the Bodleian Library,” *The La Trobe Journal* 91 (2013): 22–34; Schmitz, 72–74. For examples of earlier models for the lunar personification, which is often depicted as male or androgynous, see Joseph Schacht and Richard Ettinghausen, “Hilal.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden, 1986), vol. 3, figs. 3, 4, 11 (discussed by Ettinghausen on page 382); Willy Hartner, “The Vaso Vescovali in the British Museum: A Study on Islamic Astrological Iconography,” *Kunst des Orients* 9 (1973–1974): 112 and fig. 5; and Francesca Leoni’s essay in this volume. For another late-sixteenth-century Ottoman instance of this iconography, see the entry by Serpil Bağcı in Massumeh Farhad with Serpil Bağcı, eds., *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, D.C., 2009), 214–215, Cat. No. 66.
5. Schmitz, 72.
6. On the benevolent reputation of the moon in the Ottoman and wider Islamic context, see Serpil Bağcı and Massumeh Farhad, “The Falnama in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.” In Serpil Bağcı and Massumeh Farhad, eds., *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington, D.C., 2009), 37; Hartner, 103. The *Metali*’s zodiacal and divinatory imagery connect it to a wider tradition of illustrated books of prognostication that flourished in early modern Ottoman and Safavid lands: see Farhad with Bağcı, *Falnama*.
7. For an overview of the moon’s significance in the Islamic world, see David Pingree and Maxime Rodinson, “al-Kamar.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden, 1997), vol. 4, 517–519.
8. On Ottoman cushion covers and their use, see Amanda Phillips, “A Material Culture: Ottoman Velvets and Their Owners, 1600–1750,” *Muqarnas* 31 (2014): 151–172. Figs. 2 and 3 show examples with crescent(-like) decorations. For some of the motif’s many permutations in this art form and other velvet and silk brocades, see Nurhan Atasoy et al., *İpek: Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvets* (London, 2001), pls. 92–93 and

- figs. 198, 329, 331, 359, and 365; Walter Denny, "Textiles." In Yanni Petsopoulos, ed., *Tulips, Arabesques and Turbans: Decorative Arts from the Ottoman Empire*, ed. (New York, 1982), pl. 133 (corresponding entry on page 141).
9. For this cover, see Louise W. Mackie, *Symbols of Power: Luxury Textiles from Islamic Lands, 7th–21st Century* (Cleveland and New Haven, 2015), 294 and fig. 8.12. Mackie gives an earlier date and describes the flowers as roses. While it is true that they have serrated leaves and petals, their form is that of the classic Ottoman tulip. I am grateful to Christiane Gruber for sharing her valuable observations on this piece with me. For an identical cover in the Victoria and Albert Museum, see <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85112/cushion-cover-unknown>, accessed January 18, 2019; Dalu Jones and George Michell, eds., *The Arts of Islam: Hayward Gallery, 8 April–4 July 1976* (London, 1976), 85, Cat. No. 29.
  10. This resemblance was brought to my attention by Christiane Gruber. The eye-like quality of the design is noted also in Mackie, 294.
  11. Scholars have noted that the Ottoman and modern Turkish word for the evil-eye amulet, *boncuk* ("bead"), derives from an older Turkic term, *moncuk* (found in Ottoman in the Persianized form *mançuk*), that denotes the finial of a standard pole. One may be tempted to see this as a point of connection between the amulet and the moon, since it is often assumed that Ottoman standard poles terminated in crescents (and, indeed, the Persian word for such finials, *mahcha*, translates literally as "little moon"). Partly as a result of this assumption, the term *moncuk* has been employed in some of the literature also to describe mosque finials, which, as I discuss later, frequently take the form of crescents. Most Ottoman pole finials, however, are not shaped as crescents (see note 37 below), which means that the term *moncuk* (together with its derivatives *mançuk* and *boncuk*) is unlikely to have carried any lunar significance in the Ottoman context. Even so, crescent-shaped amulets were often strung with blue beads that belong to the *boncuk* tradition, underscoring the perceived talismanic properties of the moon motif. For further discussion of this topic, see Sargon Erdem, "Alemin Tarihi ve Monçuk, Hilâl, Boynuz Alemlerin Menşeleri Üzerine," *Sanat Tarihi Araştırmaları* 1, no. 3 (1988): 106–108 (where *moncuk* is presumed to denote a round lunar finial); Emel Esin, "Tös and Moncuk: Notes on Turkish Flag Pole Finials," *Central Asiatic Journal* 16, no. 1 (1972): especially 31, 33; Riza Nour, "L'histoire du croissant," *Revue de Turcologie* 1, no. 3 (February 1933): especially 3/232–5/234; William Ridgeway, "The Origin of the Turkish Crescent," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 38 (July–December 1908): 241–258; Zdzisław Żygulski, *Ottoman Art in the Service of the Empire* (New York, 1992), 41. For the history of the evil-eye amulet, see Önder Küçükerman, *Glass Beads: Anatolian Glass Bead Making, the Final Traces of Three Millennia of Glass Making in the Mediterranean Region*, Maggie Quigley Pinar, trans. (Istanbul, 1988).
  12. On the various contextually determined meanings of Ottoman floral motifs, see Patricia Baker, "Textile Patterns on Royal Ottoman Kaftans: Visual and Poetic Metaphors." In Patricia Baker, Hülya Tezcan, and Jennifer Wearden, eds., *Silks for the Sultans: Ottoman Imperial Garments from Topkapı Palace* (Istanbul, 1996), 31–44; Gülru Necipoğlu, "Early Modern Floral: The Agency of Ornament in Ottoman and Safavid Visual Cultures." In Gülru Necipoğlu and Alina Payne, eds., *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local* (New Haven and Oxford, 2016), 132–155.
  13. For a comparable design, see Atasoy et al., *İpek*, fig. 260.
  14. On the consumption of Ottoman cushion covers, see Phillips, especially 160–168.
  15. For this caftan, which is traditionally associated with Süleyman II (r. 1687–1691), see Patricia Baker, Hülya Tezcan, and Jennifer Wearden, *Silks for the Sultans: Ottoman Imperial Garments from Topkapı Palace* (Istanbul, 1996), 216, 220–221 (and for other crescent-decorated examples, 172–175, 210–211); J.M. Rogers, trans. and rev. from the original Turkish of Hülya Tezcan and Selma Delibaş, *The Topkapı Saray Museum: Costumes, Embroideries, and Other Textiles* (London, 1986), 155, no. 51; and the entry by Zeren Tanındı in David J. Roxburgh, ed., *Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600* (London, 2005), 468, Cat. No. 367 (illustrated on page 371). On the sartorial culture of the Ottoman court more generally, see Atasoy et al., *İpek*, 21–35; Baker, "Textile Patterns on Royal Ottoman Kaftans."
  16. For examples (including without the wavy stripes), see Atasoy et al., *İpek*, figs. 192 and 289; Baker, Tezcan, and Wearden, *Silks for the Sultans*, 212–215; Rogers, *The Topkapı Saray Museum*, 153, no. 22.
  17. For the *chintamani*'s history, use, and significance, see Baker, "Textile Patterns on Royal Ottoman Kaftans," 41–42; Denny, "Textiles," 126–128; Yuka Kadoui, "Çintamani: Notes on the Formation of the Turco-Iranian Style," *Persica* 21 (2006–2007): 33–49.
  18. For other ceramic wares with *chintamani* decorations, including a tile made in Damascus rather than Iznik, see John Carswell, "Ceramics." In Yanni Petsopoulos, ed., *Tulips, Arabesques & Turbans: Decorative Arts from the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 1982), pls. 54 and 107 (corresponding entries on pages 90 and 96). Also see Walter Denny, *Iznik: The Artistry of Ottoman Ceramics* (London and New York, 2004), pls. on pages 138–141 (discussed on page 150).
  19. Sixteenth-century Iznik tiles with *chintamani* elements can be found in the Pavilion of the Holy Mantle (1459–1473) at the Topkapı Palace and in the Rüstem Pasha Mosque (ca. 1563), both in Istanbul. See Carswell, 90 (entry for pl. 54); Walter Denny, *The Ceramics of the Mosque of Rüstem Pasha and the Environment of Change* (New York, 1977), pls. 68 and 100; Denny, *Iznik*, pls. on pages 22 and 33.
  20. Walter Denny, "A Group of Silk Islamic Banners," *Textile Museum Journal* 4, no. 1 (December 1974): 67–81; Fevzi Kurtoğlu, *Türk Bayrağı ve Ay Yıldız* (Ankara, 1938), 70–98; J.M. Rogers, *Empire of the Sultans: Ottoman Art from the Collection of Nasser D. Khalili* (London, 2000), 132–137, Cat. Nos. 79–81; Żygulski, 1–67. The majority of surviving examples are datable to between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries.
  21. Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth," *Turcica* 19 (1987): 7–13.
  22. Denny, "A Group of Silk Islamic Banners," 77; Kurtoğlu, 70–98; Żygulski, 46–50. For examples in which the crescent is the dominant motif, see Denny, "A Group of Silk Islamic Banners," 75–77 and fig. 1; Rogers, *Empire of the Sultans*, 132–135, Cat. Nos. 79–80.
  23. For this banner, which has evidently been patched and altered, see Denny, "A Group of Silk Islamic Banners," 70–71; Kurtoğlu, 76–78.
  24. For a translation and analysis of the story, see Rudi Paul Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in Medieval Anatolia* (Bloomington, 1983), 37–38; Imber, 21–22.
  25. There is a curious tendency in the literature to dismiss the religious significance of the crescent on the basis that the motif also appeared in secular contexts, including on nineteenth-century Ottoman medals awarded to non-Muslims (for which see the reference given in note 49 below). But this argument, whose corollary is that the crescent as a Muslim symbol is a Western notion, ignores the fact that the Christian cross was likewise frequently used for non-religious purposes. For examples of this viewpoint, see the discussion by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 383; Arménag Sakisian, "Le croissant comme emblème national et religieux en Turquie," *Syria* 22, no. 1 (1941): especially 80.
  26. See the discussion by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 381; Martin Hinds, "The Banners and Battle Cries of the Arabs at Siffin (A.D. 657)." In Jere Bacharach, Lawrence Conrad, and Patricia Crone, eds., *Studies in Early Islamic History* (Princeton, 1996), 108, 109, and figs. 18, 23, 26.
  27. See the discussion by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 383; Vladimir Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History: I. New Light on the Shaddadids of Ganja. II. The Shaddadids of Ani. III. Prehistory of Saladin* (London, 1953), 83–84.
  28. Other finial designs include inscribed cartouches, modified crescents that turn outward in the manner of animal horns, palmettes recalling the fleur-de-lis, and bulbous spikes. For examples (including Mamluk and Pre-Ottoman ones), see Nour, pls. 1–17. In rarer instances, finials took the form of personal devices symbolizing the building's patron: see Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*, 2nd ed. with corrections (London, 2011), 68.

29. Ünver Rüstem, "The Spectacle of Legitimacy: The Dome-Closing Ceremony of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque," *Muqarnas* 33 (2016): especially 276–279. For the mosque and its impact, see Emine Fetvacı, "Music, Light and Flowers: The Changing Aesthetics of Ottoman Architecture," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 32, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 221–240.
30. This observation holds true of mosques and their furnishings more generally, as noted by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 383.
31. Ünver Rüstem, *Ottoman Baroque: The Architectural Refashioning of Eighteenth-Century Istanbul* (Princeton and Oxford, 2019), 178, 182.
32. M. Uğur Derman, *Letters in Gold: Ottoman Calligraphy from the Sakıp Sabancı Collection, Istanbul* (New York, 1998), 34–37; İrvin Cemil Schick, "The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 53–54 (Spring-Fall 2008): 212–214; Tim Stanley, "From Text to Art Form in the Ottoman Hilye." In Ayşe Erdoğan, Zeynep Atbaş, and Aysel Çöteliolu, eds., *Filiz Çağman'a Armağan* (Istanbul, 2018), 559–570; Mohamed Zakariya, "The Hilye of the Prophet Muhammad," *Seasons* 1, no. 2 (Autumn-Winter 2003–2004): 13–22.
33. For this *hilye*, see Christiane Gruber and Ashley Dimmig, *Pearls of Wisdom: The Arts of Islam at the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, 2014), 80–81, Cat. No. 58.
34. Derman, 36; Stanley, 566–568; Zakariya, 16.
35. The *hilye*'s very layout has been likened to the floorplan of a mosque: see Stanley, 569.
36. See the entry by Aysin Yoltar-Yıldırım in Mary McWilliams, ed., *In Harmony: The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 251, Cat. No. 117a–b.
37. For an overview of this European focus on the crescent, see Nurhan Atasoy and Lâle Uluç, "The Crescent as a Symbol of Things Ottoman." In Nurhan Atasoy and Lâle Uluç, *Impressions of Ottoman Culture in Europe: 1453–1699* (Istanbul, 2012), 367–375. For further discussion and examples, see Denny, "A Group of Silk Islamic Banners," 70; Edhem Eldem, "Geç Osmanlı Döneminden Günümüze İntikal Eden Bir Kitsch Numunesi: Arma-i Osmanî," *Toplumsal Tarih* 192 (December 2009): 4–5; the discussion by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 384; Yuka Kadoi, "Crescent (Symbol of Islam)." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three* (Leiden, 2014), vol. 2014-4, 48; Gülru Necipoğlu, "Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry," *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (September 1989): 412 (including note 46); Gülru Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 27, 50, and fig. 5; Sakisian, 77–99. While I strongly disagree with the view that the crescent's association with the Islamic world was a Western invention, it is true that the motif was sometimes imagined in contexts it did not belong. Telling in this regard is a group of Ottoman horsetail standards taken by the Habsburgs in battle and subsequently fitted with crescent finials that are fancifully carved with faces. The Ottomans themselves did not typically use the crescent for battle standard finials, whether of the horsetail or banner variety; the former usually terminated in balls, and the latter in elaborate palmette-shaped pinnacles to which miniature Qur'ans were fastened. Only in the late nineteenth century, in keeping with broader developments discussed below, did the crescent (coupled with the star) become a common kind of Ottoman standard finial. See Atasoy and Uluç, "The Crescent as a Symbol," fig. 370 and the accompanying caption on page 370; Sakisian, 74–77; Heather Coffey, "Between Amulet and Devotion: Islamic Miniature Books in the Lilly Library." In Christiane Gruber, ed., *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2010), 78, 81–84; Kurtoğlu, 131–138.
38. Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism," 33–34, 73–74n146.
39. "Bizim padişahımızın 'alamenti kamer imiş." Mehmed Efendi [Yirmisekiz Çelebi]. *Yirmisekiz Çelebi Mehmed Efendi'nin Fransa Sefâretnâme-si*, Beynün Akyavaş, trans. (Ankara, 1993), 55, 148. Scholars who have referred to this episode have in my opinion overstated the extent to which Mehmed Efendi's reaction reads as one of outright surprise. See the discussion by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 384; Sakisian, 67–68; Żygulski, 42. Another eighteenth-century observer of the difference between French and Ottoman perceptions of the crescent was Baron de Tott (d. 1793), a Franco-Hungarian aristocrat who served the Ottomans as a military adviser. In 1764 he wrote a letter disputing the claim in Denis Diderot's famous *Encyclopédie* that the Ottomans employed the crescent as a coat of arms. See Eldem, "Geç Osmanlı Döneminden Günümüze İntikal Eden Bir Kitsch Numunesi," 4–5.
40. For this portrait and its wider context, see Serpil Bağcı et al., *Ottoman Painting*, Melis H. Şeyhun, trans. (Ankara, 2006), 294–295; Gülsel Renda, "Portraits: The Last Century." In Selmin Kangal, ed., *The Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, Priscilla Mary Işın, trans. (Istanbul, 2000), 442–543, especially 467, Cat. No. 134. For an actual panel resembling the one depicted by Kapıdağlı and bearing the *tuğra* of Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839), see Schacht and Ettinghausen, fig. 20 (discussed by Ettinghausen on page 384). For an analogous carved version, supposedly produced as early as 1791–1792, see Semavi Eyice, "Ay-Yıldız'ın Tarihi Hakkında," *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* 13 (1983): 45 and fig. 26.
41. For these artistic and political developments, see Rüstem, *Ottoman Baroque*.
42. For Ottoman royal portraiture over the centuries, see Selmin Kangal, ed., *The Sultan's Portrait: Picturing the House of Osman*, Priscilla Mary Işın, trans. (Istanbul, 2000).
43. The inscription of a *tuğra* on a large hanging panel was itself something of a novelty, for though long employed to head imperial documents, the monogram seldom appeared on panels or as an architectural ornament before the eighteenth century. See Bora Keskiner, "Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703–1730) as a Calligrapher and Patron of Calligraphy," Ph.D. thesis (SOAS University of London, 2012), 235–237.
44. A similar design was used for Selim's imperial seal: see Tülay Artan and Halil Berktaş, "Selimian Times: A Reforming Grand Admiral, Anxieties of Re-Possession, Changing Rites of Power." In Elizabeth Zachariadou, ed., *The Kapudan Pasha: His Office and His Domain* (Rethymno, 2002), 18–19 and pls. 12–13.
45. M. Fuad Köprülü, "Bayrak." In *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul, 1943), vol. 2, 418; Kurtoğlu, 110–117 and figs. 90, 93. See also Artan and Berktaş, especially 16–20.
46. Kurtoğlu, 110–111.
47. For further examples of precursors to the official star and crescent, see Douglas Brookes, "Of Swords and Tombs: Symbolism in the Ottoman Accession Ritual," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 5 (referring to the Topkapı Palace's Gate of Felicity [Babü's-sa'ade], rebuilt 1774–1775); Semavi Eyice, "Ay-Yıldız'ın Tarihi Hakkında," *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* 13 (1983): 40–45. A comparable star-and-crescent emblem was used in ancient Byzantium, ancestor of Byzantine Constantinople, and this has given rise to the suggestion that Mehmed the Conqueror appropriated the motif upon his conquest of that city. As we have just seen, however, the combination of star and crescent was not usual in the Ottoman context until the end of the eighteenth century, besides which the Byzantines themselves had not retained the emblem. Given how widespread and ancient the star-and-crescent motif was, the Ottoman version of it is unlikely to have been developed with reference to any specific model. See Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, William Hickman, ed., Ralph Manheim, trans. (Princeton, 1978), 108; the discussion by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 384; Kurtoğlu, 23–49.
48. Semavi Eyice argues that the motif was already being used on Ottoman cannons in the 1770s, though his evidence is far from definitive. See Eyice, especially 36–38.
49. For the use of the motif in the designs of orders, medals, and decorations (themselves new art forms for the Ottomans) and in official and popular visual culture more generally, see Edhem Eldem, *Pride and Privilege: A History of Ottoman Orders, Medals and Decorations* (Istanbul, 2004).
50. On the development of this official flag and the forms taken by its star, see Köprülü, 419; Kurtoğlu, 126–131; Artan and Berktaş, 18–20. On the evolution of the coat of arms, see Selim Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908,"

*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 1 (January 1993): 6–7; Eldem, “Geç Osmanlı Döneminden Günümüze İntikal Eden Bir *Kitsch* Numunesi”; Eldem, *Pride and Privilege*, 281–285.

51. It is interesting to note that the coat of arms of khedivial Egypt, which was an autonomous tributary state of the Ottoman Empire, bears a crescent-topped, Western-style crown. Whether this design derives from the same model as the trophy depicted by Kapıdağlı is unclear (see also note 44 above). A more obvious relationship to Istanbul is demonstrated by the khedivate’s flags, most of which were adapted from naval ensigns instituted under Selim III. See Hubert de Vries, “Egypt: Vice-Kingdom & Kingdom,” *National Arms and Emblems Past and Present*. Last modified December 22, 2011. Accessed January 18, 2019, at [www.hubert-herald.nl/EgyptKingdom.htm](http://www.hubert-herald.nl/EgyptKingdom.htm).
52. See Köprülü, 419–420; Kurtoğlu, 138–141; and the discussion by Ettinghausen in Schacht and Ettinghausen, 384–385.
53. I am extremely grateful to Yasemin Gencer for providing me with references on the portrait and to İrvin Cemil Schick for sharing with me a digital image of it. Tahirzade, who was teaching the arts of miniature painting and illumination in Istanbul at the time, made the portrait of his own accord and sent it as a gift to Mustafa Kemal, who responded with a thank-you note that Tahirzade went on to illuminate. See Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle and London, 2001), 44; Gültekin Elibal, *Atatürk ve Resim-Heykel* (Istanbul, 1973), 183–184; Hüseyin Gündüz, “Atatürk ve Geleneksel Türk Sanatları.” In İrvin Cemil Schick, ed., *M. Uğur Derman Armağanı: Altmışbeşinci Yaşı Münasebetiyle Sunulmuş Tebliğler = M. Uğur Derman Festschrift: Papers Presented on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Istanbul, 2000), 343. As Yasemin Gencer has pointed out to me, images from 1923 onward usually associate Mustafa Kemal with the sun rather than the moon: see Yasemin Gencer, “Reform, Secularism, and Nationalism in the Cartoons of the Early Republican Period in Turkey (1923–1928),” Ph.D. thesis (Indiana University, Bloomington, 2016), 247–249, 258–259, 341–346.
54. The relationship to *mi’raj* imagery is noted in Bozdoğan, 44. For such imagery, see Christiane Gruber and Frederick Colby, eds., *The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi’raj Tales* (Bloomington, 2010).
55. Arménag Sakisian noted the prevalence of this perception in his article of 1941: see Sakisian, 66.