

Representing Turkey's Heritage in Art Exhibitions of the 1950s

Abstract

This article aims to explore the intricate interplay between artefacts and identities from the perspective of temporary Turkish art exhibitions planned at American museums in the 1950s by looking into personalities, namely American museum curators and Turkish authorities as agents, and objects that were chosen to be included to represent the artistic and cultural heritage of the Republic of Turkey. The article focuses on the artistic and cultural relations between Turkey and the United States in the 1950s through exhibitions of Turkish art that were planned in American museums to explore how Turkey as a modern republic was represented in art exhibitions that showcased its artistic heritage from the past. To do this, curatorial conceptualisation and objects that were chosen to be displayed in an exhibition that took place in the 1950s as well as an exhibition programme that could not be realised at that time are discussed to understand what was deemed worthy to be represented as Turkey's artistic heritage.

Keywords: Turkish art, Islamic art, exhibitions, travelling exhibitions, national treasures exhibitions

1. Introduction

The decade 1950s marks an important moment for both the United States and Turkey in their engagement with the arts and the potential it provides for cultural diplomacy in the international arena. While the United States emerged as a leader in academic studies in the aftermath of World War II due to the migration of European scholars to the New Continent, it also became more invested in the Middle East as a region politically. Moreover, international travelling exhibitions that showcased national treasures were revived to enhance closer ties between the United States and the exhibiting countries through this soft diplomacy tool.

Around the same time, Turkey as a young republic became more active in the international arena to promote its artistic and cultural heritage through a number of cultural and exhibition programmes in the United States as well as in Europe. The year 1953 marked not only the 30th anniversary of the new Republic but also the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul, and a number of publications and exhibitions were organised in the country to celebrate this important historical moment.

This article aims to understand the dynamics at play in the 1950s by investigating two projects on Turkish art as case studies. The first case study explores an exhibition organised at the Fogg Art Museum in Massachusetts to complement a course offered at the Harvard University in 1954. The second one focuses on an unrealised travelling exhibition planned at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) in New York. Although it was

shelved in the 1950s by the MMA, the exhibition planning process showcases the artistic and cultural politics of the time. However distinct from each other, as one is a small-scale exhibition held at a university art museum whereas the other is a large-scale ambitious project falling into the category of national treasures exhibition at a universal survey museum, these two projects planned around the same time give interesting insights on conceptualisation of exhibitions and perceptions of art from Turkey.

2. Beginnings of Islamic Art History Discipline

The scholarship on the artistic and cultural traditions of the Islamic lands, especially the Near East region, date back to the late 18th century through the exploratory work conducted by European travellers, some of whom were artists while others were architects, engineers or early practitioners of archaeology. While France and Germany became the leading centres of scholarship on Islamic art history, through the World Fairs organized in various European capitals followed by large scale international exhibitions, the general public who could not travel to the region were able to have their first encounters with Islamic art along with the transformation of royal collections into public museums, whose collections from the Islamic lands were formed through activities such as colonial expansion, excavation work and diplomatic gift exchange.¹

By the late 19th century, the notion of Islam as a 'cultural entity' and a 'religious system' was well established leading the way to new forms of scholarship, hence the 'discipline' of Islamic art emerged. Detailed inquiries focused on the early period of Islam with the aim to trace its formation, development and discover its 'essence.'² Another influential trend of the 19th century was the racial theories developed by Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, Ernest Renan, and others. Gobineau in *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–1855), made the claim that 'Indo-Europeans and Semites possessed different racial characteristics' giving superiority to the Indo-Europeans. As Persians belonged to this superior race, Persia came to be seen as 'the principle source of artistic inspiration in the Muslim world.' This view dominated the field for multiple decades placing Persians at the top of the artistic hierarchy in the Islamic world, whereas Arabs ranked second as they 'created a flourishing civilization in medieval times,' and Turks occupied the lowest rank.³

The impact of the racial theories is perhaps most visibly seen in the early scholarship on Islamic ceramics in the mid-19th century. Ceramics found at Lindos on the island of Rhodes were attributed to Persians and called as 'Lindos' or 'Rhodian' ware, although

- 1 In the past twenty-five years, many publications appeared dealing with the historiography of Islamic art, some of these are: Blair and Bloom 2003, 152–84; Carey and Graves 2012; Cuddon 2013, 13–33; Flood 2007, 31–53; Flood and Necipoğlu 2017, 2–56; Gharipour 2016; Junod, Khalil, Weber, et al. 2012; Kadoi and Szanto 2013; Kadoi and Szanto 2019; Komaroff 2000; Lerner and Shalem 2010; Necipoğlu and Bozdoğan 2007; Vernet 2000.
- 2 Vernet 2000, 32.
- 3 *ibid.*, 6–7. For a discussion on this perception of racial hierarchy, see also Necipoğlu 2012, 57–75 and Cuddon 2013, 13–33.

they were originally from Ottoman İznik. In a similar vein, another type of İznik pottery, that of pale-purple, found in Damascus, hence called 'Damascus' ware, were again attributed to Persia.⁴

In the United States, first encounters with the Islamic cultures took place later than that of Europe. Although travel to the Near East and Holy Lands were popular among wealthy Americans, the World Fairs arrived at American cities in the last quarter of the 19th century, a few decades later than the first International Exhibition of 1851 in London. The first fair held in Philadelphia (1876), was followed by Boston (1883), New Orleans (1884–1885), Chicago (1893), and St. Louis (1904). While the fairs organized in Europe after the World War I could not reach to their pre-war glory, the ones organized in the United States were more effective in promoting the arts of the Islamic world and more attention was paid to the aesthetic value of the Islamic artefacts.⁵

Specialized exhibitions on Islamic art by public institutions like museums started with the Exhibition of Persian Art at South Kensington Museum, London in 1876. A number of exhibitions followed in various European centres from Paris to Stockholm, the most prominent one being Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst in Munich in 1910.⁶ While this exhibition with almost 3600 items loaned from multiple countries marked a turning point for Islamic art in Europe, that same year in the United States the very first museum exhibition of Islamic art was organized at the MMA,⁷ which was a loan carpet exhibition with 50 objects.⁸

In the following years, Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston⁹ organized an exhibition of Persian and Indian Manuscripts, Drawings and Paintings (1914), the MMA displayed an exhibition of Oriental Carpets (1921) and a loan exhibition of Persian Rugs of the So-called Polish Type (1930), and the International Exhibition of Persian Art (1926) was held at the Pennsylvania Museum in conjunction with the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition.

4 Vernoit 2000, 8; Lukens 1965, 38–9.

5 Vernoit 2000, 16–8.

6 Sarre and Martin 1912. For more information on the 1910 Munich exhibition, see also Lerner and Shalem 2010; Troelenberg 2011. For the Ottoman participation to this exhibition, see Başak Ünlü 2011 and Berksoy 2020, 173–204.

7 The MMA, founded in 1870, acquired its first Islamic art objects in 1871. In the 19th century, artworks from the Islamic lands were displayed among decorative arts objects divided according to material, such as porcelain, metalwork etc. Collectors' demand for their gifted objects to be displayed together pushed the museum for exhibiting this material as an assemblage. Another factor was the museum's move toward 'specialized temporary exhibitions,' which, for Islamic art, started with the 1910 carpet exhibition. Before that there was no attention given to present these Islamic works consistent in time, place and style. For an evolution of the displays of Islamic art at MMA, see Lindsey 2012.

8 Valentiner 1910, 221–2.

9 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston is founded 1870, the same year as the MMA, and opened to the public in 1876. Denman Waldo Ross (1853–1935) was an important figure in developing the Islamic art collection of the museum in its early years (Vernoit 2000, 25). See also Cuddon 2013, 13–33, for more information on the Islamic art collections of Boston area institutions.

It was only in 1930 that the first comprehensive survey exhibition on Islamic art was organized. Taking place at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), this exhibition was curated by their newly appointed curator, Mehmet Aga-Oglu who arrived at Detroit from Istanbul in September 1929.¹⁰ As the few exhibitions held in the United States focused only on a certain medium and represented the material in ethno-racial terms, such as Persian, Turkish etc., Aga-Oglu's aim to represent the Islamic art tradition as a whole was a first at its time.¹¹ Consisting of 171 objects, the exhibition of Moham-medan Decorative Arts featured works of calligraphy, manuscripts, miniature and lacquer paintings, pottery, glassworks, metalworks, works in ivory, stucco and wood along with carpets and textiles. Among these, Turkish art was represented with 9 objects only: 4 ceramics, 4 brocades and a prayer carpet.¹²

In the early 20th century, Turkish art was a rather unknown, hence understudied subfield of Islamic art history. When wealthy American patrons emerged on the art collecting scene in the 19th century, the restrictions on the export of art and archaeological materials had already come into effect preventing individuals taking cultural artefacts out of the Ottoman lands for private or public collections. Lack of Turkish material in the American collections and inaccessibility of collections in Turkey to researchers due to the shifting political circumstances until the first half of the 20th century as a result of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, and the new regime's transformation of the sites of the Byzantine and Ottoman past into museums played a role in this hiatus on the study of Ottoman art history.¹³ Therefore, even a figure like Aga-Oglu, who had access to the collections in Turkey in the 1920s through his curatorial role at the Evkaf Museum, did not have much to show for Turkish art in the United States and his first survey exhibition echoed the conventions of its time where prominence was given to Persian art in terms of the objects featured.¹⁴

In 1937, a second survey exhibition of Islamic art was organized by Aga-Oglu in San Francisco at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum. Among the 262 objects, Turkish art was again represented with ceramics (11 objects), textiles (2 objects), and carpets (8 objects), with the addition of arms and weaponry (4 objects).¹⁵

The 1930s were quite productive years for Islamic art at other American museums as well. The MMA showcased Turkish art specifically through three exhibitions: Turkish Embroideries of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries (1931–1932), Turkish and Balkan Arms and Armor (George C. Stone Bequest) (1937) and Turkish

10 For Aga-Oglu's contributions to the study of Islamic art in the United States, see Simavi 2012 and Simavi, Cephaneçigil 2023, 463–79.

11 *The Art Digest* on November 1, 1930 announced the exhibition as 'the first exhibition in this country to assemble all branches of Islamic art into a single comprehensive group' (11).

12 Aga-Oglu 1930.

13 For a detailed discussion on the perceptions of Ottoman art in the United States, see Simavi 2023.

14 Simavi and Cephaneçigil 2023, 470–1.

15 Aga-Oglu 1937.

Textiles (1939).¹⁶ In addition to these, Turkish art was also featured in the museum's exhibitions on Islamic arts such as Ceramic Art of the Near East (1931), Plant Forms in Ornament (1933), Exhibition of Islamic Miniature Painting and Book Illumination (1933–1934) and Oriental Rugs and Textiles (1935).¹⁷ However, in these exhibitions there were only a handful examples of Turkish art, and Persian artworks took the lead in the number of objects featured, again mirroring the taste of the period.

In Boston, the Fogg came to fore with exhibitions on Persian art: Persian paintings from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century (1930), photographs of Persian architecture from the collection of Arthur Upham Pope (1934), Persian miniatures, pottery, and textiles (1934), Persian miniatures from the Ross Collection (1935), Persian pottery (1936), and Persian miniatures, pottery, and sculpture (1937).¹⁸ Some other small exhibitions on Islamic art were organized in Brooklyn, New York and Toledo, Ohio.¹⁹ However, none of these exhibitions could match the 1910 Munich exhibition in terms of their scope or grandeur.

The only major international exhibition was the Six Thousand Years of Persian Art exhibition (1940) in New York organized by Arthur Upham Pope, rivalling his own 1931 London exhibition with over 2500 objects on display. This exhibition was followed by other smaller scale exhibitions on Persian art in Baltimore in 1940, on Islamic art at Cleveland Museum of Art in 1944 and again on Persian art at the MMA in 1949.²⁰ The MMA's 1944 exhibition of Turkish art of the Muhammedan period stands out with its highlight of Seljuk and Ottoman artworks from its Islamic art department along with a number of loans.²¹ While it was organized in connection with the Mosaics of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople exhibition (1944), it still was an important first step for Turkish art with its historical contextualization and representation of objects in a variety of mediums in contrast to the earlier exhibitions on a single medium.

World War II inevitably had an impact on the field. Due to the war several European scholars migrated to the New World later on transforming the United States into a leader in academic studies. Also, by the end of the 1940s, many of the scholars that shaped the early period of Islamic art history discipline passed away one after another bringing new names and perspectives to the field in the 1950s and after.²²

16 Goldsmith Phillips 1931, 239–42; Grancsay 1937, 54–8; McAllister 1939, 206–8.

17 Dimand 1933, 133 and 141–5; Dimand 1933, 165–71; Dimand 1935, 97 and 101–6. For a full list of the MMA's exhibitions, see 'The Metropolitan Museum of Art Special Exhibitions, 1870–2022', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://www.metmuseum.org/-/media/files/art/watson-library/museumexhibitions1870-2022.pdf?sc_lang=en (last accessed 12 August 2025).

18 Cuddon 2013, 20.

19 Vernoit 2000, 203.

20 *ibid.*, 47 and 204.

21 Dimand 1944, 211–7.

22 Vernoit (2000) provides a list of these scholars with years of death: Edward Denison Ross in 1940, Robert Byron and Josef Strzygowski in 1941, Laurence Binyon and Marc Aurel Stein in 1943, Alois Musil in 1944, Friedrich Sarre in 1945, Ananda Coomaraswamy in 1947,

Another important development coinciding with this period was the 'fundamental changes' in the relationship between the United States and the Middle East. While the United States emerged as a world power after the war, the Middle East became a critical region due to its rich oil reserves and its risk of falling to Communism during the Cold War, hence making the region a priority for the American foreign policy, which resulted in the establishment of regional studies centres.²³

In fact, a manifestation of this sudden interest and perception change can be traced back to a five-day conference titled 'The Near East, Problems and Prospects' taking place in June 1942 at the University of Chicago, which 'brought together a considerable group of... Americans interested in the Middle East as well as some foreign luminaries,' demonstrating that 'the United States government, faced with a need for regional specialists of many sorts, turned to the universities for help.'²⁴

In 1947, following Michigan University's Research Seminary in Islamic Art programme founded by Aga-Oglu in 1935,²⁵ the second area studies programme on the Middle East was established at the Princeton University. Prior to this endeavour, Princeton offered three summer seminars in Arabic and Persian Studies in 1935, 1938 and 1941, with funding provided by the American Council of Learned Societies and Princeton. In addition to Aga-Oglu, Maurice S. Dimand and Richard Ettinghausen taught in these summer seminars, which were highly reputed since they were 'the first integrated effort to study the Islamic Near East in American higher education' and the young scholars who participated 'later made their mark' in the field.²⁶

In 1954, Harvard University set up the Center for the Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) and Sir Hamilton Gibb became its director in 1955. Gibb was a strong supporter of cross-disciplinary work, hence Islamic art history became a key discipline in studying and understanding the region, making CMES an important centre for the study of Islamic art at Harvard. Even before Gibb's arrival, an exhibition of Turkish art organised in 1954 interestingly signalled a turning point for Islamic art history as a new focus on historical development and contemporary politics were observed in this exhibition's organisation demonstrating the early influence of CMES.²⁷

Ernst Herzfeld and Fritz Saxl in 1948, Mehmet Aga-Oglu in 1949, Jean Sauvaget in 1950, Mehdi Bahrami in 1951, Prosper Ricard in 1952, Ugo Monneret de Villiard in 1954 (47).

23 Cuddon 2013, 25.

24 Winder 1987, 40–63.

25 Simavi 2012, 6.

26 Winder 1987, 41. Winder lists Florence Day, Sydney Nettleton Fisher, Richard Frye, Harold Gridden, Harvey Hall, A.I. Katsh, George Miles, E.E. Ramsauer, George Rentz and Myron B. Smith as participants to these summer seminars.

27 Cuddon 2013, 25.

3. The First Exhibition of Its Kind: The Turks in History

A correspondence dated October 30, 1953 signed by J. V. McMullan²⁸ as the honorary research fellow in Islamic art at Harvard University is the earliest archival record on The Turks in History exhibition at the Harvard Art Museums Archives. In the letter, McMullan informed Emin Hekimgil, Turkish educational attaché in New York, of the new courses on the Turkish culture that the University introduced such as Introduction to the Civilization of the Middle East; the Ottoman Empire and the Near East Since the End of the 13th Century; Old Turkish; and Turkish and Related Languages. McMullan added that a visual exhibition of Turkish culture would also be organised at the Fogg Art Museum in February 1954 divided into three sections dedicated to the Seljuk and early Ottoman period, Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey respectively, and requested Hekimgil's help in providing the material for the Modern Turkey section.²⁹ Considering earlier exhibitions, this was indeed a unique proposal in its inclusion of the Republican era artistic production.

A catalogue was not produced for this exhibition.³⁰ While the full list of exhibited objects and curatorial narrative are not available, exhibition's press release and object loan records provide important information on this undertaking. In the correspondence dated December 29, 1953, sent by the Fogg director John Coolidge to the MMA director, he introduced the exhibition idea in these words:

Early next semester, we are trying an experiment, presenting a major loan exhibition in close connection with a course outside our [Fine Arts] Department. The course is History 157, the Ottoman Empire and the Near East since the end of the 13th century. The exhibition will be called "The Turks in History". The purpose of the exhibition is to show the influence of the Turks upon European culture and of European culture upon the Turks.

A press release from the museum dated January 4, 1954 commented further on the exhibition's scope and contents. Running from February 1 to March 15, 1954, the museum relied on a number of museum and private collections to represent Turkish art as there was not a comprehensive collection existed in the country at the time. While the release reiterated that a section would be devoted to 'the Islamic background of the Turkish empire' and another on 'the modern Turkey and the influence of the West,' it also detailed that the main part of the exhibition would be:

...an attempt to identify visually the characteristics of the Turks themselves. The immense range of their wanderings and their extraordinary importance as conquer-

28 Joseph McMullan (d. 1973) is a prominent collector of Islamic art, especially of rugs, and he was an Honorary Research Fellow in Islamic Art at the Fogg Museum from 1950 to 1951, for more information see Cuddon 2013, 24.

29 All records on this exhibition mentioned here are located in Exhibition Records (HC6), folders 2881–2883, Harvard Art Museums Archives.

30 Phoebe October 21, 1974.

ors and military rulers will be diagrammatically shown; some portraits of their leaders, and objects in some cases specifically associated with historic chiefs; also some weapons, dress, and ornaments will illustrate their rule and style directly. A contrast between Turkish and non-Turkish art in the medieval Islamic style will be the basis of an attempt to connect formal differences with national characteristics.

Cuddon interprets this statement as a continuation of certain pre-existing trends in Islamic art history, e.g. the ethno-racial paradigm as a contrast between Turkish and non-Turkish elements would be made. On the other hand, the exhibition's aim to explore 'the development of the Turks through history in order to understand their position in the contemporary world,' is considered as an indication of a shift in perspective in line with the interest of CMES in contemporary politics. Hence, in its attempt 'to consider objects through their function and meaning in their original historical context... [The Turks in History] signified a moment where the study of Islamic art began to move away from a purely aesthetic approach toward situating objects in the wider sphere of socio-political history.'³¹ Indeed, while the 1944 MMA exhibition also historically contextualized Turkish art of the Seljuk and Ottoman periods, the Fogg exhibition stands out as an attempt to bring in contemporaneity to the exhibition discourse.

Throughout December 1953 and January 1954, the museum secured loans from institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum, Yale University Art Gallery, the MMA, Worcester Art Museum, MFA in Boston, Rhode Island School of Design and Wadsworth Atheneum; from individuals like John D. Rockefeller Jr, Diana Volkmann, Stuart Cary Welch Jr, Mrs. R. L. Wolff, Sevine I. Doblan, Theron J. Damon, Kerekin Beshir as well as from a number of Harvard-affiliated units such as the Semitic Museum, Harvard Law School, Houghton Library and Peabody Museum. Loaned objects were various and in different mediums, ranging from Ottoman and Persian miniature paintings to Colonial portrait paintings that depict Turkish rugs as ornaments,³² from carpets (especially from McMullan's own collection) to textiles and embroideries, from ceramics to metalwork such as arms and armour to accessories such as belts, rings, necklaces etc. (Figure 1 and 2).

Object loan records indicate that the MMA loaned a portrait of Ahmet I (44.30) and tughra of Sultan Süleiman the Magnificent (38.149.1), whereas Worcester loaned an illustrated folio from the Hunarnama of Loqman depicting Bayezid I, 'The Thunderbolt,' Routing the Crusaders at the Battle of Nicopolis (1935.13) and a 16th century Persian painting of a prisoner (1935.9) as works on paper.

MFA in Boston agreed on a number of loans ranging from İznik and Kütahya ceramics (85.482, 95.420, 95.422, 19.1203) to illustrated folios from Ottoman and Persian manuscripts (14.636, 14.691, 14.692, 14.693, 14.694) and a page of 17th century

31 Cuddon 2013, 25–6.

32 The press release as well as loan letters indicate that four Colonial portraits were loaned from the following: Yale Art Gallery, Smibert's 'Bermuda Group'; Harvard Law School, Feke's 'Isaac Royall and Family'; Brooklyn Museum, G. Stuart's 'George Washington'; Wadsworth Atheneum, Copley's 'Portrait of Jeremiah Lee.'

Figure 1. View of gallery installation for 'The Turks in History,' Fogg Museum, February 1– March 13, 1954. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 1.329. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA



Ottoman calligraphy (34.1335). Interestingly, misattributions of some of these folios demonstrate the limited knowledge on Turkish art at the time. For instance, the folios from the *Shahnama-i Selim Han* (14.693 and 14.694) were described as funeral of Murad III in the loan documents, whereas they are now recorded as the accession of Sultan Selim II in Belgrade and the funeral of Sultan Selim II in the museum records. Among the two pieces of metalwork, a 13th century candlestick (50.3628) and a silver salver dedicated to Alp Arslan (34.68), the current museum records define the object as 'Salver dedicated to Alp Arslan (ruled 1063–1072, inscribed with an Islamic date equivalent to 1066–67, but possibly a modern-day forgery.'

Other loan requests included a number of arms and armour from the MMA, such as reflex bow (36.25.2526), priming flask, powder measure and suspension cords (36.25.2444), miquelet rifle (43.82.7), helmet (04.3.461) and two other objects that could not be verified in the MMA collections: a *yatağan* with scabbard (accession number given as 32.75.261 AB) and a flintlock pistol (accession number given as 36.25.22448).

Figure 2. View of gallery installation for 'The Turks in History,' Fogg Museum, February 1–March 13, 1954. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 1.329. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA



Loans from individuals included a Persian miniature painting, a bronze 14th century Persian candlestick, 16th century Persian shirt (textile), puzzle ring, silver necklace, 19th century pin, two Turkish belts (one in silver), three pieces of Turkish embroidery, two pairs of doors, brazier with a stand and a fez mold.

As seen in this extensive list of objects, the exhibition aimed to showcase representations of Turkish art in as many forms as possible. The inclusion of Persian art works must be to provide a comparison and demonstrate the distinctiveness of these two schools of Islamic art (Figure 3), whereas the Colonial portrait paintings must have served to showcase the representation of Turkish rugs in the Western painting tradition and probably with an aim to make the exhibition relevant in an American context.

Although 'Modern Turkey' section is not elaborated on in the press release, McMullan's letter dated February 16, 1954 sent to Nuri Eren, director of the Turkish Information Office, during the run of the exhibition, stated that the exhibition was divided into three sections: 'First. Entrance of the Seljuk Turks into the Islamic World and its far-reaching consequences. Second. The Ottoman Empire. Third. The Republic.' The same letter

Figure 3. View of gallery installation for 'The Turks in History,' Fogg Museum, February 1–March 13, 1954. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 1.329. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA



also confirms that the Information Office contributed material on the Republic section. Eric Schroeder on December 1, 1953,³³ as the co-organiser of the exhibition along with McMullan, had written to İhsan Atakent at the Turkish Information Office in New York with a wish list of objects for the planned exhibition. His list for the 'Modern Turkey' section included a modern Turkish newspaper; an illustrated popular magazine of the Life or Look variety; an example of the best modern Turkish bookmaking; an example of textile weaving, if possible figured; an example of modern figured ceramics as well as two modern paintings shown to him at the Consul's apartment during his visit (Figure 4). While the letter does not specify particular works, the intention is made quite explicit in the wish to include figurative examples of textiles and ceramics as well as Western style publications. Cuddon's comment that 'the entire exhibition was organized to celebrate the emergence of the modern-nation state of Turkey from the Ottoman Empire' may or

33 Eric Schroeder (1904–1971) joined the Fogg Museum in 1938 as 'Keeper of Persian Art,' for more information see Cuddon 2013, 22–3.

Figure 4. View of gallery installation for 'The Turks in History,' Fogg Museum, February 1–March 13, 1954. Photographs of the Harvard Art Museums (HC 22), folder 1.329. Harvard Art Museums Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA



may not be the case, however, there is a clear implication that the exhibition would have a political narrative demonstrating 'a rigid distinction between the premodern Islamic empire and the modern Turkish nation state' in its layout as explained by the organizers.³⁴

The Fogg was not the only place where programmes on modern Turkey were discussed. Around the same time, Turkish Embassy and Turkish Information Office were also in touch with the MMA on a variety of cultural initiatives once again 'to illustrate dramatically the transition that Turkey has made from the old to the new.'³⁵ However,

34 Cuddon 2013, 22–3, fn. 105.

35 Letter from Nuri Eren to Francis Henry Taylor, June 3, 1954, Box 10, Folder 7, Francis Henry Taylor records, The Metropolitan Museum Archives, New York. The same folder has correspondence between the MMA director and the Information Office for requests of collaboration on a variety of programs such as a fashion show of the Turkish Fashion Institute, the arrival of a Turkish good-will ship to New York and hosting an evening event at the MMA restaurant on that occasion. Furthermore, correspondence recorded on "The Turks in History" exhibition of 1954 at Harvard Art Museums Archives (HC6) folder 2883 refer to President of the Republic Celal Bayar and Madam Bayar's visit to the United States in

one project that took attention more than any other was a travelling art exhibition from Turkey, initiated by the MMA curators.

4. Complexities of Planning an International Travelling Exhibition

Earliest records in the MMA Archives discussing cross departmentally the idea of an art exhibition from Turkey date back to 1951. Curators that were involved in this project were Maurice S. Dimand from the Near Eastern art department and James J. Rorimer, director of the Cloisters and curator of Medieval art.

During the Summer of 1951, Dimand and Rorimer exchanged notes on their wish list of objects for a possible loan exhibition.³⁶ Then in September 1951, while in Istanbul for the International Congress of Orientalists,³⁷ Dimand sent a letter to Rorimer giving advice on his upcoming trip to Turkey.³⁸

In a confidential memo dated March 6, 1952, Rorimer reported to Francis Henry Taylor, director of the MMA, all the official steps undertaken on behalf of the MMA for a possible loan exhibition from 1950 onwards.³⁹ According to his account, in 1950 as a first step Taylor and Rorimer had lunch with Feridun Cemal Erkin, Ambassador of Turkey to the United States in Washington, D.C. Taylor contacted Dimand while he was in Istanbul for the Congress of Orientalists informing him of Rorimer's upcoming trip. Dimand and Rorimer met in Paris in early October 1951 to discuss 'the various angles of exhibition.' When Rorimer arrived in Istanbul, he contacted Archibald V. Walker, an old friend of the Byzantine scholar Thomas Whittamore, who introduced him to Aziz Ogan, director of the Byzantine, Ancient, and Hittite Museum in Istanbul. Ogan suggested him to contact Cahit Kınay, acting director general of museums and antiquities in Ankara, as he oversaw both Ogan's and Tahsin Öz's, director of Topkapı Palace, work as well as all excavations and artistic matters in Turkey. Upon the confirmation of this fact by the vice council and the consul general of the United States in Istanbul, Rorimer travelled to Ankara. In his meeting with Kınay, Rorimer conveyed his conversations with his MMA colleagues, Taylor and Dimand. Rorimer further commented on this meeting as:

1954, which most probably is the reason for the cultural programming offers by the Turkish Information Office in the United States.

- 36 Interdepartmental memorandum from James J. Rorimer to Maurice Dimand, June 19, 1951, Box 26, Folder 2, James J. Rorimer records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.
- 37 The Twenty-Second International Congress of Orientalists took place in Istanbul between September 15 and 22, 1951. For more information, see Dandekar 1951, i–xxiv.
- 38 Letter from Maurice Dimand to James J. Rorimer, September 21, 1951, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.
- 39 Memo from James J. Rorimer to Francis Henry Taylor, March 6, 1952, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

Kınay's selection of objects for a Turkish exhibition in America was atrocious. He only wanted to send Turkish objects after 1453 and most of these were unworthy of an international exhibition. I know you don't like beaded bags, mother-of-pearl inlaid tabourets, eighteenth-century studded book covers, some helmets and swords, any more than I do. He said that Dr. Dimand had not discussed anything but Mohammedan art with him. I informed him that Dimand told me otherwise. There followed five amusing hours with Ambassador Wadsworth, who was anxious to have a bang-up, good show in America and to help us with our furthering of "Cultural Relations" – including a mosaic, or a fresco or two. I neither begged for too much, nor asked for too little, but "oiled" up the proposal.⁴⁰

Rorimer went on mentioning the interest of Mrs. Fuat Köprülü on the project, who arranged a meeting with Halim Alyot, director of Turkish press, broadcasting and tourism department. At this meeting, they 'discussed the importance of having a really important Exhibition in America and the need for preserving monuments in Turkey.' Rorimer also met Nuri Gökçe, director of Archaeology Museum (Hittite Museum) and 'discussed the possibility of sending some of their recent finds.' The following day, Rorimer had a conference with Alyot and his associates followed by more conversations at the American Embassy. The same afternoon, he attended a meeting at the Ministry of Education with Reşat Tardu, permanent undersecretary; Emin Hekimgil, director of foreign cultural relations and UNESCO affairs; and Kınay. They reviewed the photographs selected by Kınay for the exhibition and stated that Kınay 'was given forty five days in which to prepare a "decent" list of possible loans. That was on the 26th of November 1951.'

Correspondence exchanged between the American Embassy officers and the MMA staff dating from March 1952 indicates that the intended collaboration between the two countries for an art exhibition was moving much slower than the MMA had anticipated as the loan list did not reach them in the time frame promised by the Turkish authorities. During this period, the project was closely followed up by the American diplomatic staff on behalf of the museum.⁴¹ Enthusiasm expressed by the Embassy officers demonstrates the support from the diplomatic side on such an undertaking. However, from the MMA perspective, already by August 7, 1952, Rorimer was discouraged with the lack of progress, and he decided not to extend another trip to Turkey to further the conversations on the project.⁴²

In February 1953, the exhibition idea was brought up by the American Embassy informing the MMA of an informal conversation they had with Necati Dolunay, assistant director general of antiquities in Turkey, that an exhibition could be arranged for

40 Memo from James J. Rorimer to Francis Henry Taylor, March 6, 1952, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

41 Letter from Alan W. Lukens to James P. Rorimer, March 4, 1952; Letter from Lewis Rex Miller to James P. Rorimer, March 14, 1952, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

42 Letter from James J. Rorimer to Robert Mandel, August 7, 1952, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

the Autumn of 1953 if the museum desired. They explained that the lack of interest on the Turkish side 'was due to the fact that the French government had made a prior request through official channels for an exhibition in Paris, which is now going on, and that it had been necessary to concentrate their efforts on gathering material for this exhibit.'⁴³

The exhibition in question here is the 1953 exhibition of *Splendour de l'art turc* that took place in Petite Palais, Paris, France. Basil Gray in his review of the exhibition in the *Burlington* magazine mentions 776 objects filling five floors of Pavillion Merson, out of which 208 are from the French collections.⁴⁴ The exhibition catalogue lists all 776 objects in a variety of mediums from arms and armour to manuscripts, from metalwork to ceramics, from textiles to carpets and rugs, spanning a long chronology of Turkish art of Seljuk and Ottoman periods from 12th through 19th centuries.⁴⁵ Gray, in the review, refers to Turkish art as little known in Western Europe despite the physical proximity of the country to Europe. Apart from the collections in the United Kingdom, Gray states that there really is not much in the collections in Europe, hence making this first exhibition from Turkey in Europe⁴⁶ particularly important and the content fitting the title of the exhibition, reflecting the splendour of the arts of Turkey.⁴⁷

After Paris, the intention of the Turkish authorities was to exhibit the objects in Istanbul on the occasion of the 500th Anniversary of Istanbul's Conquest.⁴⁸ Dolunay proposed to American colleagues that a considerably better and bigger exhibition could be sent to New York once the Istanbul viewing was over. Rorimer responded by re-emphasizing his interest, 'We very much appreciate your continued interest in the possibility of having an outstanding exhibition from Turkey which would include antiquities other than Turkish art.'⁴⁹ However, Rorimer did not decline the proposal right away. He mentioned the difficulty of arranging an international loan exhibition on such short notice, as they took much longer time to organise at his institution, and he needed to consult with the MMA director, and the director's possible wish to speak with staff policy committee and trustees for a decision on this matter.

43 Letter from Frederick P. Latimer to James J. Rorimer, February 24, 1953, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

44 Gray 1953, 136.

45 *Splendour de l'art turc* 1953.

46 In 1932, an 'Exhibition of Turkish Art' was held in Vienna, which according to Vernoit (2000), gave 'a foretaste of changes to come' (21). Blair and Bloom in *the Grove Dictionary of Islamic Art* also mention this exhibition. However, neither elaborates on the exhibition's content. For detailed information and discussions on the 1932 Vienna exhibition, see Sadberk Hanım Museum Annual VI / 2023.

47 Gray 1953, 136.

48 In addition to exhibition programmes, multiple publication projects were carried out for the 500th anniversary, for a full list of the publications, see Mercanlıgil and Özerdim 1953, 413–28.

49 Letter from James J. Rorimer to Frederick P. Latimer, Jr., March 4, 1953, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

In July 1953, the MMA sent a polite decline letter to their contact at the American Embassy in Ankara saying an exhibition from Turkey was not possible at this stage as their focus was on the reconstruction program of the museum, but they were in touch with the Turkish Ambassador in Washington, D.C. for 'possibilities of mutual co-operations.'⁵⁰ From the beginning Rorimer, on behalf of the MMA, insisted on including works from ancient civilisations of Anatolia, the Hittite, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine periods for a loan exhibition from Turkey and his remarks indicate that the museum was not interested in a project that showcased only works of Seljuk and Ottoman art. This statement, rather than reflecting a matter of personal taste, demonstrated a trend in the museum field at the time. Rorimer, in fact, had a collection of Turkish ceramics, which he loaned to the 1931 ceramic art exhibition at the MMA as well as to the 1937 exhibition held at the de Young Museum.⁵¹ The early 1950s were a time when national treasures exhibitions were revived and received much attention from the public with high visitor numbers. Therefore, bringing an exhibition covering a long chronology and representing multiple civilizations of Anatolia must be seen as more promising along with the perception that an international large-scale exhibition focusing only on Turkish art would not be appealing to large crowds due to the limited knowledge on this field.

A careful look at the exhibition wish list (date unknown) proposed by Rorimer on behalf of the Medieval art department and Dimand on behalf of the Near Eastern art department demonstrates that their list was sourced from publications that refer to the works in question.⁵² Although Dimand seems to have a better grasp of what Turkish national collections contain in his area, Rorimer's list is more general, referring to categories that he wished to be represented rather than specific objects.

For instance, the undated document entitled 'Objects Selected for the Proposed Exhibition of Masterpieces from Turkish Museums' lists 11 objects for the Ancient Oriental Art, sourced from secondary material such as Guide Sommaire and Helmuth Bossert's *Alt Anatolien*; for the Greek and Roman art, the sources are Martin Schede, Gustave Mendel and Pierre Devambez and featured 11 objects in various mediums such as marble sarcophagi, marble statues and reliefs, bronzes and gold objects. While there are specific mentions to the objects, such as a request for the Alexander sarcoph-

50 Draft letter to Frederick P. Latimer, Jr., July 13, 1953, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

51 Simavi 2023, 135.

52 Objects Selected for the Proposed Exhibition of "Masterpieces from Turkish Museums", Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA. This folder also has the library loan cards for the books Rorimer used for his object research in the Turkish collections such as Gustave Mendel's *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines, et byzantines* (Constantinople: En vente au musee imperial, 1912-1914); Jean Bersolt's *Mission archæologique de Constantinople* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1921); Andre Joubin's *Musee Imperial Ottoman: Bronzes et bijoux: Catalogue sommaires* (Constantinople: Typ. Lith. E. Loeffler, 1898); Charles Rufus Morey's *Sardis Sarcophagus of Cladia Antonia Sabina* (Princeton, New Jersey: American Society for the Excavation of Sardis, 1924) and museum catalogues such as *Musees des antiquites de Stamboul and Musees d'Istanbul guide illustre*.

agus, there are also certain categories such as a fine Hittite slab of sculpture in good condition, from Bogaz-Koy or Euyuk, and gold objects from Troy and Sardis. As for the Byzantine art, the list has five items, with only three objects identified and the rest specified as categories such as Byzantine frescoes and mosaics if available and gold objects, jewellery, and bronzes if available.⁵³

While pre-Islamic civilisations list is more tentative, Islamic works are quite well outlined in the list. With a total of 46 objects, it is divided by collections such as Top Kapu Saray general treasury, Top Kapu Saray manuscripts, Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi etc. While in some, general categorisations are used such as *tugras* of Sultans, kaftans of Sultans etc., majority of the objects in the list have tombstone information with inventory numbers. There was also a desire to display non-Turkish Islamic art; for instance, Automata by Jazari is included along with multiple copies of Shah Nama and Kalila wa Dimna in Persian.

In comparison with earlier exhibitions drawn from the material in American private and public collections, this loan exhibition was indeed envisioned to be quite ambitious and larger in scale featuring material from Anatolia all throughout time falling into the category of national treasures exhibitions that were quite popular during the inter-war period and revived especially during the Cold War years in the United States.⁵⁴

5. End of 1950s: Start of a New Era for Turkish Art

The year 1959 was a pivotal moment for art history in Turkey. Suut Kemal Yetkin inaugurated the First International Congress of Turkish Arts (ICTA) in Ankara bringing scholars around the world to discuss Turkish art history.⁵⁵ That same year there was a

53 Memo from James J. Rorimer to Maurice S. Dimand, June 19, 1951, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA. In a memo entitled “re Loan Exhibit from Turkey” to Dimand dated June 19, 1951, Rorimer lists the following for the Byzantine exhibition that were fed into the final object list: “One key big piece such as the Sidamara sarcophagus (Selefkah sarcophagus second choice) and/or the monumental statue of Valentinian II from the Aphrodisias, in the Archaeological Museum Istanbul. (Mendel, Catalogue, vol. II, 504 (2269). A fine portrait head or decorative sculpture in porphyry if available. A choice group of capitals selected from such examples as those published by Mendel, II, 745 (2366), 749 (2253), 750 (2404), 755 (942); III, I244 (2706). Frescoes and/or mosaics if transportable. Jewellery, bronzes and enamels, if they are available and of our quality. It would be interesting to show the decorated gold cup (pokale) from Albania associated in style with our Albanian treasure (Istanbul museum, Inv. no. I53I, acquired March 9, 1902. See Stryzowski, *Altai Iran*, pl. I.).

54 Later on defined as ‘blockbuster exhibitions,’ there is a long list of publications that deal with this trend as well as with specific exhibitions. See especially Spear 1986; Freedberg, Jackson-Stops, and Spear 1987 for an early discussion on this topic in *The Art Bulletin* as well as the 1986 issue of *Art in America*, where a special section is dedicated to the museum blockbusters. In 2016, *Journal of Curatorial Studies* also dedicated an issue on the topic ‘Curating Cultural Diplomacy.’

55 Yetkin 1961, 1–7.

revival of interest for a potential loan exhibition to the United States from Turkey. Nuri Eren, director of Turkish Information Office in New York, wrote twice in a week apart, on January 22 and January 29, urging Rorimer, who by then became the director of the MMA, to go to Turkey and discuss the exhibition project with the officials there.⁵⁶ Eren informed Rorimer that 'there has been a lack of logical sequence in the pursuit of the project' after reading the correspondence and memos on the discussions in 1952 and 1953. Hence Eren wrote:

...since I know you are definitely interested in the project and have already set a tentative date, and because, we, on our part, realize that it is bound to be of great cultural value to us, I am convinced that we should start to proceed in logical sequence, leaving aside generalizations and tackling practicalities.

...I understand that you have in mind representative pieces of art of the Hittite, Phygian, Lydian, Ionian Roman Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman periods. The theme of the exhibit would be to show the rich cultural tradition of the Turkish homeland. As I have already explained to you, I feel that an agreement in principle can best be obtained by extending your trip to Ankara.⁵⁷

In his second follow up letter a week later, Eren in general conveyed the same message and urged Rorimer to travel to Turkey to re-start the conversations in person in Ankara. Despite Eren's urges, and contacts between Rorimer and Osman Faruk Verimer⁵⁸ on a possible meeting in Turkey, this attempt did not result in any solid action.

On April 28, 1959 Rorimer⁵⁹ wrote a letter to Seyfullah Esin, permanent representative of Turkey to the United Nations with whom he seemed to be on a good personal relationship, hence he could be more direct about his sentiments and reservations for this project. Rorimer stated his interest in having an exhibition from Turkey provided that it would not come before the Fall 1961 and requested Esin to 'pave the way for an official request from your Government telling us what they could do and asking we could cooperate.' Rorimer also briefed him on the contacts he made in Turkey back in 1952, his discussions with Kınay at the time, and Hekimgil's letter to Dimand where he requested the museum to pay all the expenses. Rorimer stated that compensating all the expenses were not in accordance with the museum procedures and attached a sample contract for Esin.

56 Letter from Nuri Eren to James J. Rorimer, January 22, 1959; Letter from Nuri Eren to James J. Rorimer, January 29, 1959, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

57 Letter from Nuri Eren to James J. Rorimer, January 22, 1959, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

58 Letter from Osman Faruk Verimer to James J. Rorimer, June 8, 1959; Letter from Executive Assistant to James J. Rorimer Director to Osman Faruk Verimer, June 23, 1959, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

59 This letter is at the National Gallery of Art Archives, (7A2 Central Files, Box 38, C-25 Exhibitions Travelling Exhibitions – Art Treasures of Turkey [Folder 2 of 4]), Washington, DC, United States.

One last attempt to realise a loan exhibition from Turkey recorded in the archival sources came from Ernst J. Grube, curator of Islamic art at the MMA. While Grube was in Ankara for the 1st ICTA, he reported on October 22 to Rorimer that he 'had a long and rather fruitful talk with the General Director of Museums and Monuments in Turkey, Kemal Su, about the planned Turkish Exhibition in New York.'⁶⁰ He passed on the interest from the Turkish side for such an endeavour and outlined the conditions put forth by Turkey for such an undertaking. The list of conditions included that either the MMA, 'or the United States Government covers the expense of the exhibition from Istanbul harbor to New York, the possible travel of the exhibition through the United States, and the transport back to Istanbul' as well paying for the insurance fees. Two scholars would accompany the exhibition during the tour and all their travel and living expenses would be covered by the United States. The MMA would 'prepare and print the catalogue of the exhibition' and make 'postcards of the most important objects in the exhibition' as well as 'a 16 mm colour film should be made of the exhibition (12 to 15 minutes) for educational and propaganda purposes in Turkey.' Grube also stated that the Turks were 'in favor of an exhibition of Turkish art, much more than in an exhibition of any kind of great works of art in their collections.' On the other hand, he assured Rorimer that:

...as the term Turkish art is here understood in a rather vague and general way it seems to be possible to include practically everything which one could relatively sure of being made by Turkish people in Turkey. It may even on this basis be possible to include some Byzantine and late classical material, and naturally some ancient oriental material. But it would nevertheless turn out to become mainly an exhibition of Islamic Turkish art.

Another important point Grube made is the objects in the exhibition should not only include the highest quality but also be not well known to most. In this way, it would not only attract the general public but also would contribute greatly to their knowledge of Turkish and Islamic art in the West.

Grube's letter demonstrates once again the differences of stance between the two parties in this attempt for a joint project. At each contact made between Turkish and American authorities, the Turks' emphasis was on the Turkish and Islamic material whereas the MMA's interest in that material seemed to be the least, with the exception of Dimand and Grube as both being curators of Islamic art and probably somehow familiar with the material in Turkish collections. Rorimer not willing to take on the expenses of an exhibition that he probably deemed too narrowly focused responded to Grube with a definitive no on October 29.⁶¹

In the early 1960s, the conversations on a possible loan exhibition resumed with Walter Heil, director of de Young Museum; Richard Ettinghausen, curator of Near

60 Letter from Ernst J. Grube to James J. Rorimer, October 22, 1959, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

61 Letter from James J. Rorimer to Ernst Grube, October 29, 1959, Folder 26, Box 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

Eastern art at the Freer Gallery of Art; and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Services (SITES). Along with Grube, Ettinghausen also attended the 1st ICTA in Ankara, hence it is likely that Ettinghausen was aware of the conversations between the Turkish authorities and Grube, he may even be a part of these conversations. As indicated in the Congress proceedings, Ettinghausen was selected as the American member of the permanent executive committee of the Congress. This close and firm relationship he had with the Turkish authorities and scholars must have helped in making the first travelling exhibition a reality in the 1960s.

Another important figure in realising this endeavour was Walter Heil,⁶² as seen in his September 27, 1962 dated letter to İlder Türkmen, Counselor at the Embassy of Turkey in Washington, DC. Heil began his letter as a follow up on Türkmen's conversation with Ettinghausen, where he expressed his wish for an exhibition from Turkey in the United States and elaborated on the relationship between the two countries and advantages of having such an exhibition for the American public. Heil wrote:

The chief purpose of the exhibition would be to acquaint the American public with Turkey's great historical past and artistic contributions. Arranging such a show soon would seem to be particularly timely. For, while Americans are fully aware of the military strength and the conspicuous economic progress of their gallant NATO ally, Turkey, they are sorely ignorant of the cultural achievements of the Turkish people, especially of the great art treasures they produced or possess. Even well educated Americans who have visited many of the great art centers of Europe and Asia have never been in Turkey, and are therefore unaware of the immense wealth of great art that Istanbul alone consists.

The proposed exhibition could remedy this situation at once. (For one thing, it would doubtless induce many Americans to include Turkey in their next itinerary).

As Heil introduced the idea of an exhibition's impact to draw travelers to the country, he took this opportunity to re-iterate what Rorimer had been lobbying for since the 1950s to make sure art works from all across Anatolia throughout time would be included in the exhibition. Hence, he resumed with the following:

It [the exhibition] should therefore consist of outstanding masterpieces, with quality not quantity being the determining factor in their selection. In order to enlarge its scope and enrich its variety, the exhibition, in our opinion, should not be limited to Turkish art works exclusively, but should also contain significant tokens of the various cultures which once flourished on Turkish soil: particularly masterpieces of Hittite, Phrygian, Lydian, Greek, Roman and Byzantine art.

Heil continued on with other logistical details that were in line with the points expressed by Grube to Rorimer, probably to make sure that the proposal this time would be lucrative and an agreement could be reached. For instance, expenses of shipping, insurance,

62 Heil was a former colleague of Aga-Oglu at DIA in the early 1930s and he invited Aga-Oglu to organize the first exhibition of Islamic art in the West coast of United States in 1937.

and travel of the accompanying Turkish curators could be borne by the American museums along with a promise to ensure the security of the objects from physical as well as climate related hazards, both during shipment and throughout their display at various museums. Considering how carefully this letter was crafted, outlining all the conditions in a way that would please both parties, Heil might have been informed of the previous exchanges between the MMA and Turkish authorities.⁶³ Moreover, his experience with previous national treasures exhibitions must have provided him the insight on how to navigate diplomatically for such projects.

To further his point on the prospects of popularity and success of such an endeavour, Heil referred to two exhibitions that his museum hosted previously, with solid data on the visitor numbers and the cultural influence that came out of them. Apparently, Vienna Art Treasures exhibition sponsored by the Austrian Government in 1950 received 245, 418 paid visitors ‘while over 250,000 enjoyed the exhibition.’ The following year, in 1951, Art Treasures from Japan exhibition sponsored by the Japanese Government received a similar attendance number overall. According to the museum’s market research, these exhibitions not only reached local audiences but visitors from neighboring locations also made the trip to the museum, underlying the ‘cultural propaganda’ impact of these national treasures exhibitions to new audiences. In this sense, Heil’s letter functions as real time reporting of the blockbuster exhibition phenomenon as it happened in those years. Heil was indeed quite persuasive by providing all the essential information to lure the Turks into an exhibition arrangement with the United States highlighting the significance of the cultural propaganda that could be achieved through the national treasures exhibitions. Immediately after this correspondence, already on December 21, 1962, Turgut Menemencioglu, Ambassador of Turkey to the United States, wrote to John Walker, director of the National Gallery of Art, that the Turkish authorities approved in principle the proposal concerning an exhibition of selected art objects from Turkish museums and collections.

The SITES reached out to the MMA as early as January 1963 to see if they were willing to be one of the participants of the planned traveling exhibition.⁶⁴ After the SITES settled much of the logistical details and shared the object list and exhibition contract, the MMA agreed to be one of the host venues of what came to be called Art

63 The only record which shows that the MMA shared documents with the National Gallery of Art (NGA) of their exhibition planning in the 1950s is a letter dated February 21, 1963, a year later after Heil’s letter to Türkmen, from the executive assistant of Rorimer to John Walker, director of the NGA, sharing with him the copies of their object list of the 1950s proposed exhibition, Rorimer’s memo to Taylor dated March 6, 1952, Rorimer’s letter to the Turkish Ambassador to the U.N. dated April 28, 1959, and a reply received to this letter on June 8, 1959 from Osman Faruk Verimer, the director of the Ministry of Education, located in the Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA; the same document is also in the NGA Archives, NGA-007, Central Files - Subject Files 1939–1970, box 39, Travelling Exhibitions – Art Treasures of Turkey (Folder 3 of 4).

64 Letter from Mrs. John A. Pope to James J. Rorimer, January 31, 1963, Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

Treasures of Turkey becoming the final stop of a ten-venue touring exhibition from 1966 to 1968.⁶⁵

In conclusion, the 1950s was the start of a new era for Islamic art history in the United States as well as in Turkey for Turkish art. With the establishment of Middle East Studies departments at American universities, the scholarship on the region began to flourish. In the case of Harvard, it led to an experimentation at an early phase where an art exhibition is organized to complement a university course outside of the Fine Arts department. The University and the Fogg Museum collaborated with the Turkish Information Office along with multiple public and private lenders on an exhibition aimed 'to identify visually the characteristics of the Turks.' While the Turkish Information Office was in the position of content provider for the Modern Republic section of *The Turks in History* exhibition, the same office is seen as a facilitator between Turkey and the MMA during the conversations to organize the first travelling exhibition from Turkey. Although the exhibition idea could not be realised at the time, its recorded correspondence offers valuable insight on the complexity of organising an international loan exhibition. Having different stances and priorities in terms of the exhibition content as well as not having direct or clear-cut guidelines for a project of this scale at the time seem to be the main reasons for the miscommunications and misunderstandings between the two parties. However, all these interactions still served the purpose of cultivating cultural relationships between the two countries. In the following decade *Art Treasures of Turkey* became the first travelling exhibition from Turkey to the United States showcasing 8000 years of art from Anatolia touring ten venues. While the MMA's vision of displaying works of ancient civilizations of Anatolia, Greek, Roman and Byzantine along with the Seljuk and Ottoman art came true, in contrast to the perceptions a decade earlier, the works of Ottoman art especially from the Topkapı Palace collections received attention more than any others by the press and the public in the late 1960s (Figure 5 and 6).

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65 Letter from James Bradley to James J. Rorimer, September 28, 1965 mentions the MMA 'is seriously considering booking the exhibition TREASURES FROM TURKEY.' In Box 26, Folder 2, Rorimer records, MMA.

Figure 5. The Art Treasures of Turkey - opening (includes Earl Warren), 4 June 1966 (source: NGA-026, Images - General Events). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art Archives



Figure 6. The Art Treasures of Turkey - opening, 4 June 1966 (source: NGA-026, Images - General Events). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art Archives



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