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Gardens in the Air: A Reexamination of the Ottoman Tulip Age

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Gardens in the Air: A Reexamination of the Ottoman Tulip Age

Abstract

Scholars have long considered the “Tulip Age” to be a sort of Ottoman renaissance—a golden age initiated by the 1718 Treaty of Passarowitz and lasted until the Anti-Tulip Rebellion in 1730. However, recent scholarship has questioned the objectivity of the field’s founding historian, Ahmed Refik, who based his theory off of the twofold concepts of a marked increase in tulip culture and a movement toward westernization in the Ottoman Empire. Because of this shaky foundation, this research reexamines the debate from the beginning: the tulip’s connection to earlier Turkic arts and the actualities of Ottoman “modernization.” This perspective on the “real” Tulip Age is instrumental in suggesting a new hypothesis—that the Tulip Age did not exist in the way historians have accepted for a hundred years.

Keywords

Tulip Age, Ottoman, Lale Devri

Disciplines

Islamic World and Near East History | Near Eastern Languages and Societies

Gardens in the Air

A Reexamination of the Ottoman Tulip Age



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History 330

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*I affirm that I have upheld the highest standards of honesty and integrity in my academic work
and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code*

Scholars have long considered the “Tulip Age” to be a sort of Ottoman renaissance—a golden age under the tenure of Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha during the early 18th century. It occupied the twelve year period initiated by the July 1718 Treaty of Passarowitz that ended the Ottoman-Venetian War by confirming the Ottoman victory over Venice, and lasted until the Anti-Tulip Rebellion in 1730. As an era of relative political tranquility and economic productivity, the Tulip Age is seen as a high watermark of Ottoman urbanity that produced technological innovation, an advanced consumer culture, and new social outlets via festivals and gardening culture. Historians such as Ariel Salzman have even referred to it as one of the Empire’s “most enlightened regimes.”¹

However, recent scholarship has questioned the objectivity of the field’s founding historian, Ahmed Refik, author of the *Lale Devri*, literally “Tulip Age.” Refik wrote as part of the Ottoman-sponsored *Tarih-i Osmani Encumnei* (TOE), an academic organization devoted to recording the Empire’s history. Because of the TOE’s financial dependency on the Turkish government, current scholars contend that documentation was not consistently done in an unbiased manner—Refik wrote the *Lale Devri* to combat the negative memory of Ibrahim Pasha’s regime as gluttonous and indifferent of the commoners’ plight.² The conclusions of these arguments speculate whether the Tulip Age actually existed, or if the idea of an Ottoman golden age in the wake of the Ottoman-Venetian War is nothing more than a historiographical fabrication meant to spin history into a pleasanter story.

In examining the plausibility of a *lale devri*, an inspection of its foundational hallmarks becomes necessary. Firstly, the Tulip Age assumes an explosion—or at least noticeable

¹ Ariel Salzman, “The Age of Tulips: Confluence and Conflict in Early Modern Consumer Culture (1550-1730).” In *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922: An Introduction*, edited by Donald Quataert, 83-106. (New York: SUNY Press, 2000) 83.

² Cemal Kafadar, “The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post-Suleymanic Era.” In *Suleyman the Second and His Time*. Edited by Halil Inalcik and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993).

increase—of tulip culture between 1718 and 1730.³ Secondly, credit for this is largely due to an increased economic connection with Europe, the beginning of Ottoman westernization and modernization. Without these constructs (both proposed by Refik), the Tulip Age cannot exist in the way in which historians have conceptualized it for the last hundred years.⁴

As such, there is room for scholarship that reexamines the debate from the beginning: the tulip, its uses and iconographies on Ottoman decorative arts, and its connection to earlier Turkic nomadic arts. I propose that the tulip's prominent role in Turkish culture was always a large one, and that the years between 1718 and 1730 did not see a significant enough change in that role to merit its own era. Furthermore, the function of the tulip as facilitator of westernization and modernization is also questionable—there is much evidence to suggest that the Ottoman regime was not looking westward for administrative inspiration, as has been often assumed. This perspective on the “real” Tulip Age is instrumental in proving a new hypothesis—that the Tulip Age did not exist.

Trends in Tulips

Roots and Bulbs

Tulips are not naturally occurring flowers—they are the result of centuries of cross-pollination and intentional breeding. Advances in horticulture have traced tulip genes to various species of wild flowers native to Central Asia and Iraq.⁵ These flowers were the ancestors of the contemporary Turkish tulip, with their fluted blossoms, tapered petals, and variety of colors (see Fig. 1.) From there, they migrated in all directions climatically conducive to growth. Despite this, the tulip remained a purely Middle Eastern and Asian phenomenon until Ottoman diplomat

³ Salzmann, *The Age of Tulips*, 93.

⁴ Can Erimtan, *The Sources of Ahmed Refik's Lale Devri and the Paradigm of the “Tulip Age:” A Teleological Agenda*, (n.p., 2011) 2.

⁵ Anna Pavord, *The Tulip: The Story of the Flower That Has Made Men Mad*. (New York: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2001) 25.

Ogier Ghislin de Busbecq introduced it to Europe in the sixteenth century.⁶ This is made clear to us by surviving artworks—the tulip never emerges in Greek, Roman, or even Byzantine decorative arts, but definitively appears numerous times in Turkic nomadic art.⁷

The earliest surviving Persian rug, the Pazyryk carpet, was discovered in 1949 in Siberia. Dated to the 5th century BCE, it is thought to be an artifact of either the Achaemenid Empire or Iraqi nomads within its sphere of influence.⁸ The visual evidence that it integrates numerous tulips into its design is a remarkable testament to the tulip's appeal even in the ancient period (see Fig. 2.) By the twelfth century when more evidence survives, fourteen different tulip

Figure 1



T. humilis is believed to be one of the closest ancestors to the Turkish tulip.
Via Google Images

Figure 2



Note the similarity to *T. humilis* in Figure 1: pointed petals (green), central stigma (orange), striped anther (blue/pink), and overall symmetry.

Via Google Images (color enhancements are my own)

⁶ That Busbecq introduced the tulip to Europe is widely accepted by scholars but nearly impossible to conclusively prove. We do know the relative period that the tulip migrated west via its appearance in material culture, however, which is consistent with Busbecq's travels.

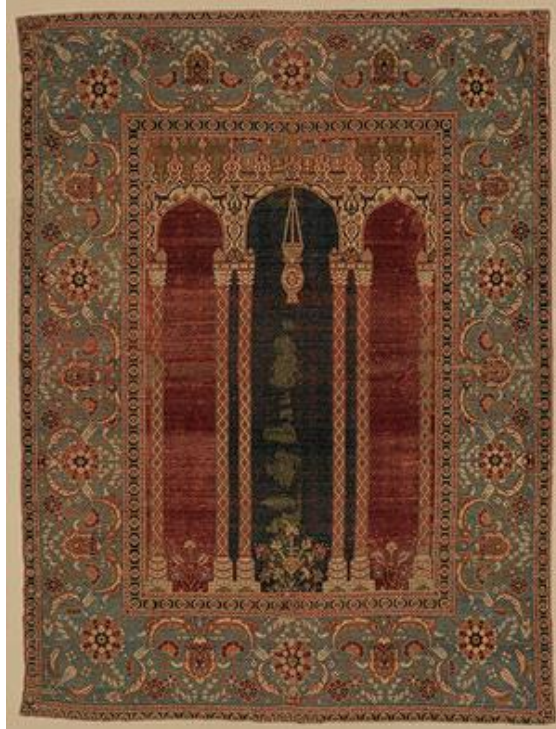
⁷ Ismail Yardimci, "The Tulip in Turkish Art." *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, Vol. 3, no. 1, (2001) 116.

⁸ Sergei I., Rudenko, *Frozen Tombs of Siberia, The Pazyryk Burials of Iron-Age Horseman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) 42.

varieties grew in the Turkish mountains, but only four of them were actually native to the soil.⁹

The Seljuk Turks who had migrated to Anatolia to find pasturelands for their sheep left many traces of a well-defined tulip ornamental style in their material culture. At this time tulips also began to appear in Turkic literature, such as in 13th century mystic Mevlana Celaeddin-I Rumi's poetic line, "Tulip soul always speaks of the tulip garden...come tulip and take color from my cheek" as well as metaphors relating tulip meadows to battlefields strewn with red turban-wearing dead.¹⁰ Tiles decorated with tulips have been excavated at the palace of Aleddin Keykubad I, the 13th century Seljuk ruler of inner Anatolia.¹¹

Figure 3



Prayer carpet, late 16th century Ottoman;
Woven tulips at the base of the triple-arched prayer niche.

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Stems and Buds

By the time of the Ottoman Empire's establishment in 1299, tulips were already deeply-rooted within Turkic art. Like any new polity, the Empire created both a fresh venue and opportunity for novel applications of tulip iconography. Tiles, fabrics, murals, manuscripts and miniatures overflowed with depictions of the flower.¹²

⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹⁰ Yardimci, "The Tulip in Turkish Art," 121.

¹¹ Pavord, *The Tulip*, 30.

¹² A brief survey of Fetvacı's monograph details tulips present in all of these mediums from the 14th century onward. Emine Fetvacı, *Picturing History at the Ottoman Court*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press) 2013, 211, 252, 276.

The theocratic element of the Ottoman state was instrumental as well. Islam provided an outlet for tulip art in the forms of mosque decoration and various religious pieces. Figure 3 depicts a 16th century prayer rug from Istanbul that would have been used by an Ottoman courtier.¹³ The famed Iznik tiles were especially noted for their ceramic renderings of the flower. The Rüstem Pasha Mosque in Istanbul is an excellent example of the predominance of the tulip through this medium. Constructed between 1561 and 1563, the mosque's interior is completely covered in tulip images (see Fig. 4.)

As evidenced by the mosque, this period is the time during which the Ottoman elite

Figure 4



The Rüstem Pasha Mosque interior Iznik tilework.

Via Google Images

began to have an increasing affinity for tulips. Suleiman the Magnificent's reign is credited with bringing the images to life—his regime saw the first efforts to cultivate tulip bulbs and make gardening into an art of its own. This “Kefe tulip,” later to become the Istanbul Tulip, was a well-known genus of flower in the Ottoman capital of the 1500s.¹⁴ Elite schools sprung up as a product of the new interest in

tulip growing. One popular story explains that Sultan Bayezid II was hunting in the Beyoğlu forest when he was forced to shelter from a storm in a hermit's hut. So impressed was he by the hermit's tulip garden that the sultan granted to him one wish: to build and teach at a school in the

¹³ 22.100.51, *Carpet with Triple-Arch Design*, ca. 1575–90, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed November 9, 2013, <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/447509>.

¹⁴ Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588-1662) As Portrayed in Evliya Celebi's Book of Travels*. (New York: SUNY Press, 1991) 77.

area, resulting in the founding of the Galata Saray College.¹⁵ Perhaps the Turkish obsession with the tulip during this period is best summarized by Ogier Ghislin de Busbecq's comment on the flower's inexorable pull, "the Turks are very fond of flowers, and, though they are otherwise anything but extravagant, they do not hesitate to pay several *aspres* for a fine blossom."¹⁶

Full Bloom

Despite its incredible popularity during the early-middle Ottoman Empire, the tulip's time in the sun was not nearly over. The gardening trend begun in the time of Suleiman the Magnificent became a larger fad than anyone predicted. Cross-breeding and developing new varieties of tulips became the sport of the gentry who had both the time and funding to participate in such endeavors, and new strains of the flower became highly demanded and extremely profitable. Bulbs were valued for their mature flower's color composition, petal shape and symmetry, and stem length and thickness.¹⁷ The

ideal tulip was almond-shaped and dagger-petalled, and tulips with both of these qualities were placed on the "magic list" to be universally feted (see Fig. 5.)¹⁸

Tulip mania swelled so that social patterns revolved around their growing season. Tulips symbolized "ephemeral pleasures and seasonal rhythms of Ottoman public life," and gardens

Figure 5



The ideal Istanbul Tulip, with almond shape and dagger petals

Via Google Images

¹⁵ Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, "Ottoman Era," Istanbul: European Capital of Culture, November 10, 2013, accessed November 10, 2013, <http://www.ibb.gov.tr/sites/ks/en-US/0-Exploring-The-City/History/Pages/TheOttomanEra.aspx>.

¹⁶ Edward Seymour Forster, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2005) 25.

¹⁷ Wilfrid Blunt, *Tulipomania* (New York: Penguin Books, 1950) 11.

¹⁸ Pavord, *The Tulip*, 40.

“enclosed a model of the imperial state within an earthly paradise.”¹⁹ The culmination of this trend existed in garden reveries and festival parades. Mehmet II’s grand construction of Topkapi Saray Palace following the conquering of Constantinople included twelve luxury gardens that eventually required 920 gardeners to maintain their prized tulips, which were sold regularly in the city’s flower bazaar.²⁰

The first tulip festival was held in Istanbul in the early 1700s under the light of the full moon and crystal lanterns. Such festivals and parades drew foreign diplomats, courtiers, and other members of the elite—all of whom were required to dress in colors that complimented the flowers among which they were mingling.²¹ It was at this time that tulip mania reached its height—court officials were valued by their horticultural, not diplomatic achievements. Eventually, the price of tulips inflated, causing the state to intervene. Ahmed III made it punishable by death to trade them outside of the capital, leading many to whisper that the regime valued the flower more than human lives.²²

This evidence makes it clear that the tulip had successfully conquered the hearts of men for centuries. So too did many of the Ottoman state’s cultural achievements predate the Tulip Age—even the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent was termed such because of the golden age he oversaw. Tulip mania during the *lale devri* was by no means sudden or novel—it was simply the culmination of a trend hundreds of years in the making.

Economic Prosperity?

Of the two main hallmarks of the Tulip Age, we have slowly chipped away at the first assumption that there was a noticeable increase in tulip culture between 1718 and 1730. The

¹⁹ Salzmann, *The Age of Tulips*, 83, 85.

²⁰ Pavord, *The Tulip*, 30.

²¹ Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montague*. (Project Gutenberg, 2006) Letter XXVIII.

²² Cemal Kafadar, “The Myth of the Golden Age: Ottoman Historical Consciousness in the Post-Suleymanic Era.” In *Suleyman the Second and His Time*. Edited by Halil Inalcik and Cemal Kafadar (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993.)

second notion assumed a simultaneous modernization and westernization of Ottoman society driven by the leadership of Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha. Inherent in both concepts is the supposition of increased economic prosperity and copying of European cultural forms. While this is considerably more difficult to tangibly address, I will attempt it through examining the increasing level of income inequality between the elite and lesser classes and by arguing that the Ottomans were not looking west as much as previous scholarship has thought.

The Ninety-Nine Percent

The early 18th century saw a massive population increase in Istanbul. With the city's residential community expanding within limited space, Ottoman officials were forced to participate in migration control.²³ This mostly took the form of making it progressively more expensive to live in Istanbul. High taxes and the devaluation of silver currency only inflamed the poverty of the lower class, of which the majority of new immigrants consisted. While meant to discourage immigration, these economic measures had other consequences as well, including a decline in merchants' wealth and a silver shortage in 1719 that prevented the Mint House from being able to inject currency into the market. The resulting crisis heavily impacted trade and craft guilds, effectively reducing what was left of the middle class and increasing the wealth divide between the elites and everyone else.²⁴ Merchants attempted to siphon some of the courtesans' wealth into their own pockets by raising tulip prices to a small fortune per bulb. The state under Ahmed III soon intervened, however, and forced price regulation.²⁵

Fortunately for the upper class, the abundant poverty in their society gave them the opportunity to invest their excess funds in extravagant philanthropy projects, increasing their

²³ Rhoads Murphy, "The Growth in Istanbul's Commercial Capacity, 1700-1765: The Role of New Commercial Construction and Renovation in Urban Renewal," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hung.* 61, no. 1-2 (2008) 147.

²⁴ Ali Uzay Peker, *Constructing Cultural Identity, Representing Social Power* (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press) 2010, 145-146.

²⁵ Salzmann, *The Age of Tulips*, 94-95.

public and spiritual outlooks by doing so. A fire in 1701 had damaged some of the city's commercial property and provided the opportunity for extensive renovation work that would have the effect of beautifying the capital. Construction documents from the period agreed that Istanbul's modern look should more closely resemble other great Middle Eastern market cities such as Aleppo and Damascus, whose buildings were made of fireproof stone and mortar facades.²⁶ Refik, the originator of the *lale devri*, cites these building projects in his argument for the great prosperity of the Tulip Age, but fails to mention this important context. Also, it is noteworthy that Ottoman architects' inspiration for the city's improvements came from other Middle Eastern influences, not western architecture—a reliance on western forms to modernize Ottoman society is one of the main arguments for the existence of the Tulip Age.

As such, the only type of “modernization” that took place during the Tulip Age was the rise of consumerism. The Mint was centralized and relocated to Topkapi Palace, and the building the Mint had occupied (the *Simkeshane*) was renovated for commercial use and outfitted with 164 storage rooms and 29 shops. All of this took place via Ahmed III's royal funding. The Grand Bazaar was also renovated by Ibrahim Pasha to celebrate his marriage to Fatma Sultan in 1717. Other commercial improvements to the city included a new shopping complex in the Seyhzade district that included a row of shops that featured 82 booths.²⁷

All of these reforms were purely lotus-eating, though unintentionally valuable to the economy. Still, the stimulation of the market and subsequent prosperity was really no more than a façade—the poor could hardly participate in the lavish extravagance the new bazaars provided, and the merchant class was struggling to regain its economic footing.²⁸ The Grand Vizier had no scruples about razing homes to make room for shops. Therefore, the courtesans and elites were

²⁶ Murphy, “Growth,” 150.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 150-1.

²⁸ Peker, *Constructing Cultural Identity*, 146.

the true beneficiaries of these reforms. It is no surprise, then, that discontent grew within the lower class. Indeed, the crowded inner districts of the city near Aksaray, the Grand Bazaar, Hagia Sophia, and the Golden Horn (where the population easily exceeded 500,000 residents) witnessed the most riots.²⁹ Popular opinion of the regime held that it was full of hedonistic Sybarites who cared nothing for the masses. It was these officials who faced the wrath of the Anti-Tulip Rebellion and its leader Patrona Halil, which culminated in the death of Ibrahim Pasha and the deposition of Ahmed III in 1730. Tulip gardens were destroyed and courtiers were given three days to raze their estates to the ground.³⁰

In many ways, the “Tulip Age” actually resembled feudalism. The rich became richer, the poor became poorer, and while not quite serfs, they labored to provide the upper class with the luxuries it required. This is evidenced by the fact that the great majority of consumer demand was driven purely by the tastes of the elite.³¹ In 18th century Turkey, feudalism was not “modernization”—it was regression to medieval Europe. Refik’s assertion that the Tulip Age existed because it was a new era of modernity does not hold.

The Legend of Ibrahim Pasha

Refik designed his argument of modernization and westernization to pivot around one man: the Grand Vizier. It was Ibrahim Pasha’s vision and strategy that made the Tulip Age possible at all. He looked to the West for the innovations that would save his state from stagnation, and for the first time, the Ottoman Empire had hope of true peace with its European neighbors. He appropriated European technologies such as the printing press, clocks, and military organization and seamlessly grafted them to Ottoman culture. The result was a brilliant

²⁹ Salzmann, *The Age of Tulips*, 95.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

golden age of economic prosperity, social opportunity, and a consumer revolution tangibly measurable via the demand for the tulip—the fetish of the era.

This is the legend that previous historians have bought hook, line, and sinker. The resulting image of Ibrahim Pasha as champion of industry, modernity, and diplomacy with the West was one Refik created to overpower the negative memory of Ahmed III's regime. In order to develop the Grand Vizier as an innovator of western technologies, Refik had to leave some pages out of the story.

A movement in the 20th century contended that much of Ottoman material culture during the Tulip Age was stimulated by European concepts. Parallels between European and Ottoman art and architecture have been drawn, but the latter models are always assumed to have copied the former. Even furniture and gardening were claimed to be imitations—historian Ahmed Evin wrote that, “along with French architecture, the French garden also appeared in Turkey,” effectively crediting Turkish innovations in horticulture to Europe.³²

Another commonly-cited artifact of western-facilitated modernization in the Ottoman court is the mechanized clock. The Ottoman interest in clocks is well-documented. Western ambassadors would present clocks and pocket watches as gifts to the Sultan and his advisors hoping to curry favor amongst them.³³ However, it is unfair to say that the Ottomans had no proficiencies in this technology beforehand. Historian Touraj Atabaki notes that, “the genesis of the mechanical clock in the Western Europe of the early fourteenth century was certainly influenced by the idea of the water clock, which was known in pre-Safavid Persia and pre-

³² Ahmet Evin, “The Tulip Age and Definitions of ‘Westernization,’” In *Social and Economic History of Turkey, 1071-1920*, Edited by Halil Inalcik and Osman Okyar (Ankara: Meteksan, 1980) 140.

³³ Fatma Muge Gocek, *East Encounters West: France and the Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 105.

Ottoman Asia Minor.”³⁴ As far as the Ottomans were concerned, European timekeeping was simply the advancement of a technology already belonging to the Middle East.

Because it did not already feature Ottoman technologies, the adoption of the printing press alone could similarly be considered an element of westernization. However, Refik does not document the intense debate surrounding its inclusion into Ottoman society. Following Mehmed Efendi’s diplomatic mission to Paris, the Grand Vizier worked behind closed doors for two years before the printing press could become an Ottoman commodity. Economic reasons motivated this struggle, namely that the press would put many calligraphers out of work and the state wished to keep them employed.³⁵ This testifies that any desire to westernize was not universal—it was Ibrahim Pasha and a minority who solicited the change.

Finally, Ibrahim Pasha did not revolutionize the military with western ideas. Again this idea is due to Refik’s misuse of his sources. He claimed that a Hungarian convert to Islam compiled a discourse on the art of war so innovative that the Grand Vizier used it to enhance the entire Ottoman army. The Hungarian’s western perspective enabled him to do so. The treatise, most likely *Usul-ul-Hikem fi Nizam ul-Umem*, was intended to be an updated *Nasihatname*-like book of wisdom. It stressed the importance of an infantry because of its versatility—infantrymen could either be foot soldiers or mounted cavalry. He thus argued for a standing army with central administration. However, the *Usul-ul-Hikem* was actually printed in 1732 after the overthrow of Ahmed III and during the rule of his nephew, Mahmud I.³⁶

³⁴ Touraj Atabaki, *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society, and the State in Turkey and Iran* (I.B. Tauris, 2007) 3.

³⁵ Gocek, *East Encounters West*, 81.

³⁶ Ibrahim Muteferrika as quoted in Can Erimtan, *The Sources of Ahmed Refik’s Lale Devri and the Paradigm of the “Tulip Age:” A Teleological Agenda* (n.p., 2011) 14-16.

So far, this argument has not included western influence within the marketplace. It is true that the consumerism surge caused European commodities to be sold at local bazaars—watches, furniture, binoculars, telescopes, glassware, and other luxuries.³⁷ But did that denote a universal aspiration to become western? Previous historians have contended as much, but such arguments can hardly defend against the above evidence.

The Great Mystery of Sa'adabad

Perhaps the greatest building project of all the Tulip Age was the completion of Sa'adabad, the “abode of happiness.” If there were doubts about the debauchery of the social elites, they were put to rest by the construction of this ostentatious new palace. However, scholars such as Fatma Muge Gocek claim that the Sa'adabad was directly copied from French designs:

The intense construction activity during the Tulip Era was epitomized in the construction of the Sa'dabad (the site containing palaces, gardens, and canals at Sweet Waters of Europe in Constantinople) complex. Its construction was also indicative of the French influence in architecture. The whole construction tried to imitate Versailles and Fontainebleau, which Mehmed Efendi had visited. Mehmed Efendi brought back plans of these palaces to apply them in Constantinople.³⁸

However, her work is directly contradicted by architectural historian Sedad Hakki Eldem, who affirms that the Turkish palace was simply a new embodiment of Ottoman tradition.³⁹ There are engravings of Versailles in the Topkapi Museum Library, but it is unclear whether Mehmed Efendi brought them back to serve as artistic inspiration. Few depictions of Sa'adabad survive, so a side-by-side comparison is unattainable.⁴⁰

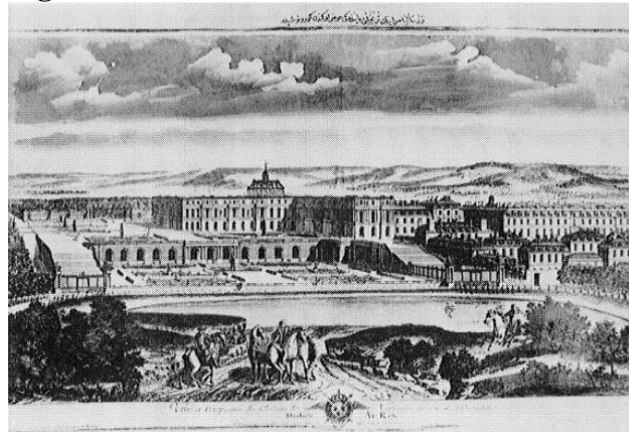
³⁷ Salzmann, *The Age of Tulips*, 95.

³⁸ Gocek, *East Encounters West*, 75.

³⁹ Eldem as cited in Can Erimtan, *The Appearance of Saadabad: The Perception of the “Tulip Age (1718-30)” and the Impact of the Ottoman-Safavid Rivalry*, (n.p., 2010) 3-4.

⁴⁰ I have not yet been able to find a single depiction of Sa'adabad other than Charles Perry's *A View of the Levant* (1743) that merely describes the palace. I suspect this is because of the palace's relatively short lifespan.

This element of westernization is deeply-ingrained in the debate because of its inclusion in the *Lale Devri*. Refik attributes the instigation of western tendencies to Ibrahim Pasha himself, but this part of his work curiously lacks sources. Specifically concerning Sa'adabad's suspected French imitation, historian Can Eritman delved extensively into Refik's sources and determined that

Figure 6

One of the engravings of Versailles (as viewed from the orange orchard) possibly commissioned by Mehmed Efendi during his travels to France.

Via Gocek (Topkapi Museum Library, Istanbul)

instead of looking to Turkish predecessors who wrote extensively on the palace, Refik instead relied upon Albert Vandal, a French contemporary and prominent academic fully confident of his country's supremacy over other cultures.⁴¹

Gardens in the Air

The Tulip Age is quite the romantic notion. It hearkens to a world in which the poor do not exist, and the gentry live in luminous spheres of endless gaiety and color. All politics, economy, and social status rely solely on the elegance of flowers. It is an easy fantasy to become lost within.

Unfortunately, there was neither a definitive change in tulip culture nor a push to westernize and modernize Ottoman society that the idea of the Tulip Age necessitates. Tulips were ingrained within Turkish culture ever since the first nomad noticed them growing in a nearby field and was inspired to include them in her carpet design. The elite consumer culture

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

that grew up around them had been developing for centuries and was not bounded by the years between 1718 and 1730.

Nor was Ibrahim Pasha the paragon of modernization and westernization. His administration's inability to manage changing class composition resulted in the Ottoman society's reversion to the Dark Age institution of feudalism. His efforts towards "modernity" benefited the upper strata alone, and even in this his attempts at technological advancement were sometimes openly combatted. The "Tulip Age," then, is merely the historiographical construct of a republican author who built a castle—or rather garden—in the air, when his nation's history failed to live up to his ideals.

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