

## ARTICLE

# The Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror Museum: The museumization of a cultural asset for an Ottoman conqueror

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## Abstract

Conversion to a museum is a common destiny of many cultural assets that cannot continue to serve their original functions. They are usually re-functioned to provide public benefits in return for the expenditures made for their preservation. However, their architectural features may not always meet the expected results when functioning as a museum. The spatial limitations arising in such conversions are the main design gaps in the museumization projects. This article aims to address these gaps using a sample project of a museum on Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror converted from a medieval education structure.

## KEYWORDS

cultural asset, diorama, Mehmed II, museumization, Ottoman, visualization

## INTRODUCTION

The cultural assets are usually re-functioned to provide public benefits in return for expenditures made for their preservation. These conversions mostly involve museumization interventions (Garzillo et al., 2020). Museumization, which is a common use for historical buildings that cannot serve their original functions, might also be evaluated as a manifestation of political pressures. The spatial limitations of museum converted cultural assets are often key design gaps in museumization projects. This article aims to address these gaps using a sample project of a museum on Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror converted from a medieval education structure.

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Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II was born in Edirne, the capital of the Ottoman Empire before Istanbul. He conquered Istanbul in 1453 when he was 21 years old. The Saatli Madrasah, a medieval education structure in Edirne, was converted into a museum introducing the life of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror that opened on May 28, 2021. This is the first museum dedicated to Mehmed II (or to any Ottoman sultan) in Turkey. As a museum space should provide various artistic works to be installed or performed (Younan, 2015, 57), it was necessary for the selected structure to be re-functioned as a museum of Sultan Mehmed to have displays about his life. Although there was nothing to exhibit at the beginning, the cultural asset in question was museumized along with its specifically new designed dioramas, models, animation movies, and visuals for it.

In this article, the museumization of cultural assets is first discussed. This discussion will focus on one of the most famous Ottoman Sultans Mehmed II, which was the reason for the museumization of the cultural asset. The evolution of the museum is then followed from its requirement to its realization. This is followed by an analysis of the emergence of museological decisions along with current limitations. That section includes the approaches and tools used in the design. Finally, the current context and importance of this museumization project are evaluated. The exhibition spaces and displaying objects mentioned in the article were designed by the author.

## MUSEUMIZATION OF CULTURAL ASSETS

Cultural assets inevitably have the potential to develop a manipulation of the past for the “cultural” or “heritage tourism.” But museumization involves a more subtle intervention of the retention of buildings and urban spaces. Therefore the aspects of heritage that cannot be marketed easily are usually excluded both from the cultural reality and conservation policy (Ulbricht & Schröder-Esch, 2006). As the current legal and ethical manners do not allow the phenomena of museumization to modify or transform those aspects of heritage such as the authentic fabric, architecture, and decoration; these features may generally be regarded as the “unwanted elements” because they prevent a new conversion. Accordingly, the mentioned aspects of the focused cultural asset may be disregarded and filtered and are dressed by a desired fiction of the past in the name of the tourism-related use of culture, powered by a new generation of agendas and interests. Consequently, the picture is presented to the visitors is what they expect to see (Camprag, 2017, 166–167; Ulbricht & Schröder-Esch, 2006). Many cultural assets function as museums with the goal of mobilizing selected and desired histories in the service of present-day agendas and interests (Daugbjerg & Fibiger, 2011). In order to commodify culture for touristic purposes, cultural assets are mobilized and manipulated to justify the fictionalization of the past (Camprag, 2017, 176).

Interest in an intentional monument can decline, because the aim of such a monument is always to put the past into the present, to make it pertinent and topical at every moment. But the perception of the event or figure it was dedicated can weaken and even alienate the present as time goes by. As known for the ages, the intentional monument itself can be more durable than the perception it was expected to recall. On the other hand, as a non-intentional monument, a cultural asset can refuse absolutely to partake in a past–present, to work in a memorial way and to erase its age, contrarily, because it is a monument of the past exclusively dedicated to time elapsed (Poulot, 2012, 6). So, romanticizing a certain “glorious” moment of the past for current political purposes is found functional for museumization of the cultural assets.

According to Benjamin “whoever dominates always holds the heritage of the victors. (...) All those who have claimed victory participate in this triumphal procession where today’s masters walk on the bodies of those to this day vanquished. As has always been customary, it is to this triumphal procession that the booty belongs; that one might define as cultural

property.” (Benjamin, 1983). Cultural heritage, as a representation of the past, can easily be appropriated for exclusively instrumentalized ends and dedicated to promoting a local or identity driven past. This past is hardly concerned with authenticity and even less with truth but rather devoted to glorifying a voluntarily mythicized memory (Lowenthal, 1999).

As it is also responsible for the out-of-use historical structures, private organizations and official administrations intend to profit from them when creating public services. Although it is an old fashion and unexciting issue, the museumization of cultural assets still makes use of contemporary functions as a legitimate and riskless choice. These sorts of populist conversions responding to the agendas and expectations of political powers are favorable to present not only touristic, but also political profits. Yet irrelevant architectural features of the historical structures used as museums may not always meet the expected results after these conversions. In addition, some conversions defined as “reluctant museums” may also cause political polemics because of the inconvenient exhibitions organized within them (Stylianou-Lambert & Bounia, 2012).

Today, museumization continues to be viewed as providing the most convenient way to present any historical theme, as adumbrating a historical theme within a historical space is preferred as a safe and comfortable way. Yet museumized historical buildings cannot easily present and hide the new functions that are not and cannot be unique to them. The fact that they were not constructed as exhibition areas is already the proof that they cannot be suitable for any museum purpose. So the cogency of the story that is told in a cultural heritage is dependent on the aura of this space and as a manipulated past, this produced narration requires the compatibility with the selected heritage's architecture. Here, the manipulation of the past is not involved with the bad intentions of relevant actors, but it concerns with the inevitable and unavoidable nature of the museumization process as a production of fictionalized historical narrations supported by the official authorities.

No matter how different the themes ascribed to the museumized structures are, the physical interventions are generally more or less the same: filling existing gaps as exhibition areas. Here, designers are also under the pressure of spoiling the authenticity of these historical spaces they ought to museumize with their interventions. Regarding the nature of the process they are inevitably forced to decide between making a dominant design that could manipulate perceiving the original architecture and proposing a noncompetitive weak intervention in order to respect the history. On the other hand, the lifetimes of museumization interventions might last more or less a few decades comparing with the museumized cultural assets that survived centuries, because museumizations can be updated perpetually according to the technological, aesthetical, political, or arbitrary reasons, unlike the museumized building. So, within a dilemma, the utilization of past brings along neglecting the previous. Museumization can enable the creation of infinite expectations, but also it is a risky, even difficult to defend for museum designers.

## A MUSEUM FOR AN OTTOMAN CONQUEROR

Topkapı Palace is the best-known museum on Ottoman history as well as Ottoman sultans in Turkey. It was the second built palace after the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Mehmed II and, museumized in 1924 after the establishment of Turkish Republic. This complex where Ottoman Palace treasury, sacred relics, palatial clothing, arms and armor, porcelains, and manuscripts are exhibited is responsible for informing the public about Ottoman history. Regarding information about the conquest of Istanbul, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality built Panorama 1453 History Museum in 2009. This panoramic museum lacked original objects and focused on the conquest of Istanbul as understood from its title. There has been no museum dedicated to Sultan Mehmed II or another Ottoman sultan in Turkey. In 2020, Ekrem Canalp, the former

governor of Edirne, made preparations to establish a museum dedicated to Sultan Mehmed II in the city where he was born.

## Museumization process of the madrasah building

The restoration of Saatli Madrasah was already completed by the General Directorate of Foundations in 2017, and it served no function until the Edirne Governor's Office decision to use the building as the Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror Museum in 2020. Regarding the issue of commodifying the culture for touristic purposes, this cultural asset had already received attention by the governorship in that period. So, this historical building was both to be preserved with a new and maybe the only “public” use within the bounds of possibility of that period and to be taken under the service of glorifying a mythicized memory, voluntarily by addressing the *zeitgeist*.

However, the proposed museum theme brought with it the cogency and compatibility problems with the authentic function of the building. The issue of decontextualization here was originating from *fait accompli* of bringing together the new fictionalized past with the present historical authenticity, and in order to create a new story, it was preferred to ignore the constant truth and conditions again. As a result of the fact, the architecture of Saatli Madrasah, however, was a serious problem for a museum conversion regarding its small interior spaces and discontinuity of the circulation. The volumes of its spaces looked distant from meeting the expectations such as contemporary digital installations popularly desired.

Edirne Governor intended the Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror Museum to be designed by the university that had taken Sultan's name and he contacted with the rector of Fatih Sultan Mehmet (Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror) Vakıf University in Istanbul. Site visits and negotiations were organized by assigned academic staff and the governorship officers. Although it was reported that the building was not really suitable for use as a museum building in the preliminary interviews, the decision of the governorship did not change. Following the protocol signed by the Edirne governorship and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University on July 16, 2020, the museum project and installation works were given to the same university. A research conference and workshop were held with relevant experts and academicians on the script and content for the museum, in Edirne between September 3 and 4, 2020.

An advisory board for the museum was formed to develop academic and objective approaches regarding the museum texts to be scripted and objects to be displayed. The participants of the board were the experts<sup>1</sup> on Mehmed II and his period. As a result of the evaluations made at the research conference, the information and suggestions were made for the exhibition and the contents of the museum were presented to the advisory board in periodic meetings and feedback was received. The project was implemented in line with the script and content approved by the advisory board. The script text and visual designs were prepared and presented to the board in periodic meetings, and feedback was received. Despite the lockdown process of the pandemic conditions, the museum works were completed with the official permissions obtained for the employees. The official opening of the museum was held on Friday May 28, 2021, one day before the 568th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul.

## The Saatli Madrasah

The Saatli Madrasah is known to have been built by Sultan Murat II (father of Mehmed II), who ruled between 1421–1441 and 1446–1451, but the exact construction date of the structure is not known. According to an urban legend in Edirne, it is known to be the school where Mehmed II was educated when he was a prince. Yet this is not historically accurate, because

Ottoman princes were educated by private lessons in the palace. As an early and unassuming Ottoman education structure, it has an immature, nonsymmetrical plan and four different elevations. The outer surfaces of the madrasah are built of cut stone, but the inner spaces are plastered and whitewashed. The main entrance of the madrasah (Figure 1) is in the middle of the southwest facade and has a stone ceiling richly decorated with muqarnas. The southwest, northwest, and northeast wings of the building consist of 18 rectangular planned rooms with an area of between 12 and 17 m<sup>2</sup>. These cells surrounding a rectangular courtyard were allocated to the madrasah students. The southeast wing of the madrasah consists of one iwan (D1) and one square-planned room (D2) with an area of 35 m<sup>2</sup> facing the courtyard. The iwan was used as a summer classroom, while the other as a winter classroom. Each cell has a hearth (excluding B5 and D1) and is covered with a dome. The courtyard is surrounded by a wooden vaulted portico on three sides. The roof of the building is covered with lead sheets.

After the last restoration and partial reconstruction was completed in 2017, the structure lost some of its authentic architectural features. While the columns and capitals surrounding the atrium were renovated, their authentic order was altered. In addition to these interventions, complemented lost wall surfaces and reconstructed arches of the porches hide the age and future value of the structure. Fortunately, the location of the madrasah helps to recover its historical value. It is just in front of Üç Şerefeli Mosque which is an early classical Ottoman mosque from the 15th century, and is also close to many Ottoman monumental structures. Being on the touristic route, this museumized medieval structure awaits visitors of the historical fabric of Edirne. Accordingly, the reliable location of this new museum would also give a new sense of the historical context.

## Image of Sultan Mehmed II

Conquering Constantinople at the age of 21 in 1453, Mehmed II was always appreciated by official Turkish history and therefore is considered to be an iconic example, at every education level in Turkey. Along with his successes, he is also well-known for his interest in arts and science. The multiple languages he could read and speak not only express his curiosity to history and the world but also enable him to be defined as a Renaissance intellectual (Ortaylı, 2006, 2007). He was also the first Ottoman Sultan who had his portrait painted; the painter was Venetian Gentile Bellini.

It is typical for conservative politicians and people to boast about the glorious victories of idealized history. Mehmed II, to whom the Turks owe their residence in Istanbul for the last six centuries, and his charismatic personality has led for him never losing popularity in Turkish culture; so that the title of “Conqueror” (*Fatih*) which he was given after his conquest of Istanbul, became one of the most 20 popular names of Turkey in 1970s, 80s, and 90s (Yıldırım, 2016). Naming sons with the title of Mehmed II was never been so popular in other decades of the Republic era, which can be associated with the rise of political Islam in Turkey since the 1970s. Even it can explain how Ottoman revivalism resonates with the conservative rank and file, especially in terms of the heroic perception of Mehmed II. However it is not possible to say this unattainable image of him that is perpetually constructed, addresses only with conservatives in Turkey. As the transfer of his narrative fed with many of his intellectual, scientific and artistic interests, he is respected by all sides of Turkish public.

The use of the Conqueror title for historical figures is extremely rare because of the exceptional achievements it entails. As an unrepeatable success, Mehmed II's conquest of Istanbul caused his fame to exceed his life therefore Turkish history did not require another conqueror. Nevertheless the era of conquests fell behind long since, as today history is not expected to create new conquerors. To provide the nostalgic and reassuring comforts of the past (Younan, 2015, 234), the creation, and depiction of the story of Mehmed II was required for the



FIGURE 1 Entrance of the Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror Museum.

project. This means the museum content was expected to be filled with his features leading him to be a conqueror, rather than his conquest.

## MUSEOLOGICAL DECISIONS

The unassuming architecture of the madrasah was already incapable of glorifying heroic perception of the Sultan with its small modest spaces and could just enable limited and unassuming presentations focused on the specific sections of his life. It was intended that simplicity would win over complexity per museum wisdom (Phillips, 2021). The premodern structure of the building seemed more inclined to be installed by labor-intensive installations rather than digital and synthetic productions. Thus attracting the attention of the visitors could only be possible with unpredictable and decontextualized presentations. The absence of any original objects in this new museum made it necessary to exhibit history and to produce various visual historical adaptations, meaning every item to be exhibited had to be designed and produced from scratch.

### Museum's vision

The perceptual design supports such multiple narratives as large extent a matter of design possibilities (Dimitropoulou, 2021, 3). While visualization of various *mise-en-scènes* of Mehmed II's life with their spaces thought, narrative style required could not be put forward the ahead of the historical space and the story. Therefore, transforming this cultural asset into a showroom and leaving synthetic senses for the visitors was avoided. Various artists participated in this project which was supposed to recuperate ideologically obsolete, defunct aspects, and instead reshape them into aesthetically powerful forms that generate questions (Bouquet, 2013, 189). As it would function as a museum by mediation and education, this historical asset would have, as its target attendees, children and young people in the historical fabric of Edirne.

Rather than creating a familiar or expected warrior Sultan image that follow current fictions, the use of documents (albeit limited), information, and visuals from Mehmed II's and near contemporary eras were preferred. As the interpretation of art has been elevated globally to a multimedia domain that is more critical and engaging (Tissen, 2021, 121), the partially or completely disappeared architectural and ethnographic materials of the period, intended to be revived through pictures, videos, and dioramas. Thus, the utilization of the labor-intensive and restrained dynamism was intended to draw more attention to the museum. Especially, the handcrafted dioramas accompanied with historical information, and animated Ottoman miniature paintings that decontextualized aimed at enlivening the spaces.

### Spatial organization

The authenticity itself is a creature of circumstance and could provide only a semblance of stability (Buskirk, 2003, 44; Younan, 2015, 36). The lack of authentic objects to display compelled this empty building to be used as a display case for exhibiting only the story of Mehmed II. While the term “empty” can denote absence and loneliness, it may also be representative of the potential and the flexibility to become anything (Salen, 2018, 9). This emptiness can inspire the script to refer to the museum as a whole as part of a broader visual culture (Bouquet, 2018, 3). Hence, for the museums that lack authentic objects, the predominant element was intended to be its discourse and the overall script of the exhibition as a whole seeking to expound (Bozia, 2018, 97; Montaner, 1990, 18–21).

The spatial organization of the madrasah was composed of side-by-side cells surrounding a rectangular court. Each cell had a separate door allowing both entry and exit, so this discontinuity of the structure required each cell to be adopted a different theme. As the side-by-side cells consist of a wing, each wing could also constitute a main title. The plan of structure was already unable to have another arrangement other than in this manner. The script of the museum was determined within the four main titles, as the architecture of the building consists of four wings. Relevant to the unchangeable architectural features of the cultural asset, the pragmatic nature of museumization limited very few or only one spatial choice for the designer and script writer.

## Thematic framework

For the museum script, the life of Mehmed II was evaluated chronologically, while his political and administrative achievements, interest in science, and art were dealt with thematically. The wings of the structure were defined according to this sequence clockwise from the entrance, and each of them was used to depict different periods of his life (Figure 2). The cells of Wing A were used to display the period from his birth to education and the cells of Wing B showed the period from his becoming the sultan to the conquest of Istanbul. The cells in Wing C were used as thematic spaces for describing his political, military, and legal aspects, as well as his interest in science, literature, and art. The iwan, known as the summer classroom (Room D1) was reserved for a giant bust of him to be viewed from the entrance and the courtyard, which was hung from the dome. The D2 room, as the main classroom of the Saatli Madrasah, was arranged with animations of an academic discussion made in his presence. The center of the courtyard was used to display a scaled model of the army of conquest, which went on an expedition from Edirne to Istanbul. Finally, the cells in Wing E dealt with administration, playing room, and museum shop.

## Presentation approaches in relation to the heritage building

The empty interior can be perceived as an in-between place that provokes a new narrative about memory and anticipation (Salen, 2018, 17). For this museum, the existing interior architecture was dealt with as “white cubes” to be served art to direct the gaze and to reflect institutional politics (O’Doherty, 1986; Wiencek, 2018, 105). The white-lime-covered surfaces of the interior created a plain effect, while also creating a very suitable base for indirect lighting. But, the limited depth (20–25 cm) of niches weakened the cubic effect of the cell volumes. To provide integrity on the interior walls, the niche surfaces were covered with white MDF boards in a way that they would be flush with the wall surface. However, to express the presence of niches, a 2-cm gap was left between the niche contour and the coverings, allowing the authentic architecture of the space to be read. The dimensional limitations of the small quadratic interior spaces did not allow a display case to be ergonomically placed in the center. Therefore, the use of niches was a necessity. The hearth niches with semicircular plans and depths of about 35 cm were preferred as the most convenient displaying spaces among the other niches for dioramas, so the displaying objects did not occupy any space in the circulation route (Figure 3).

The aim was to objectify the written and visual information to be presented to the museum visitors, just as the subjectivity of manually written and painted medieval manuscripts was objectified by the printing press. Hence, while the original exterior of the madrasah building was treated as a valuable historical book cover, the interior walls could be interpreted like the

EXHIBITION PLAN OF THE SULTAN MEHMED THE CONQUEROR MUSEUM IN EDIRNE

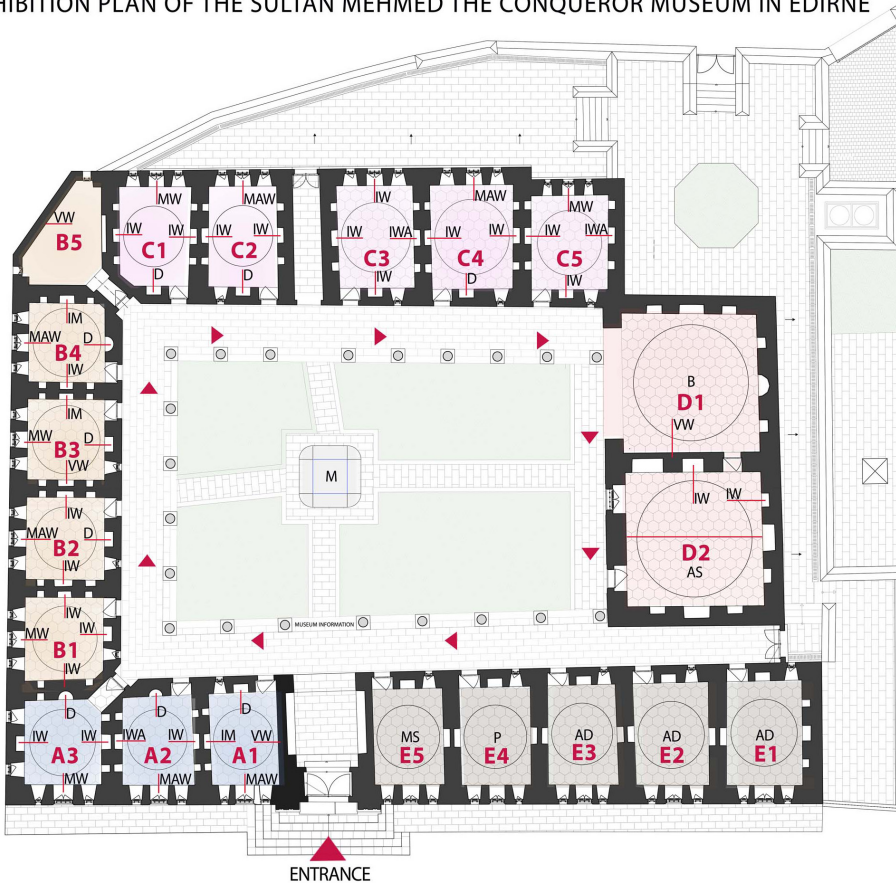


FIGURE 2 Exhibition plan of the museum (AD: administration, AS: animation sculptures, D: diorama, IM: infographic map, IW: information wall, IWA: information wall and animation movie, M: model of conquest army, MAW: miniature animation on the windows, MS: museum shop, MW: miniature images on windows, P: playing room, VW: video wall).

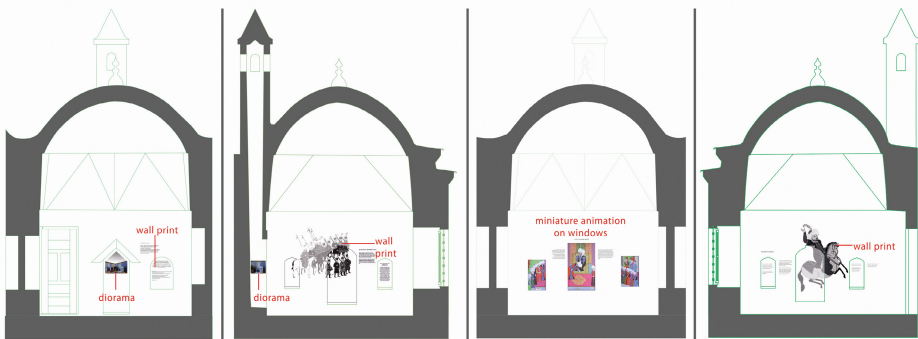


FIGURE 3 Interior elevations of Cell B2.

pages of a newly printed picture book. As a result, contrary Victor Hugo's worries mentioned in his *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Hugo, 2021, 125), here the architecture was not killed by a book, but rather gave birth to a new book.

The plastered and whitewashed interior walls and the window blanks of the structure were meant to be seen as white pages of an illustrated book. The effort to create an uninterrupted cubic interior in the madrasah cells was related to the concern of using the walls as a direct information board. The concern that any information board to be hung or nailed on the walls of a cultural asset would alienate the space to the present and push it into the background brought to mind a paradoxical solution: wall printing. No doubt, this approach was not to be applied in this project for the first time. Each of the wall printings applied on the skin of this cultural asset as if temporary tattoos in a sense as official graffiti at the same time.

In the exhibition design, reinterpreting the window spaces as virtual windows for the theme attributed to each cell is preferred as the way of reproducing the space. As the blanks of the triple windows were used to present the dynamic or still images, the interior spaces also were isolated from the existing built environment outside. Such kinds of technologies and methods can be used by museums in the support of greater engagement with a more diverse and complex group of visitors to focus them on multiple auras instead of on only one (Tissen, 2021, 122).

## Multivision strategies

As the impact of digital remixes can extend to the original objects, they can be charged with new energy (Younan, 2015, 233), thus the imagination is able to allow the past to actively persist in the present. These kinds of digital adaptations are in favor of personal interpretations and fluidity of meaning rather than accepting institutional narratives and permanence (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, 65; Younan, 2015, 237). The speed of visitors moving through the museum is conditioned by the scale of the building, artworks, and exhibitions, but also by display technologies. So, the use of films in the exhibitions may slow down the pace of the audience by attracting and keeping their attention (Bal, 2007; Bouquet, 2018, 3). These films are intended to bring objects or the people associated with the museum to life into the space of representation, thereby rendering them visible to the spectator. In so doing, they introduce a set of dynamics that partly contradict those of museum time and space (Bouquet, 2018, 19).

Ottoman miniature paintings offered very inspiring content for exhibiting the story of Mehmed II. A sensitive selection of relevant Ottoman miniatures was used in multivision screens and on the wall surfaces to emphasize the themes attributed to the rooms. These cartoon-like visuals were collected from various manuscripts of different museums and converted to narrators as living Ottoman witnesses. The triple windows of the selected cells were equipped with multivision screens where moving pictures would flow from one to the other, and the rest were covered with still views. *Watch-out* technology was used for the motion pictures to flow from one window to the other on the multivision screens. The application of this kind of digital elements to the museums makes use of less static exhibitions, but the quickly changing technology may also cause these exhibitions to only be used for a few years, rather than decades (Jensen, 2018, 72).

## Two-dimensional animations

In classical Ottoman art, it is possible to come across figurative painting not on building walls, but only in miniatures of albums. In this project, the miniatures in the manuscripts were taken out of their context and applied in large scales both graphically on the walls and animated on the screens placed in the window spaces. So, they also were used for out of their production

purpose like the building in which they were used. Cartoons of these sultanic representations, which were depicted to the extent permitted by the official authority at the time can only be legitimated in such a museumized historical space.

Selected Ottoman miniature paintings were used in the animation films regarding the themes of cells. The miniatures depicting Murat II shooting an arrow in front of the foreign ambassadors (Seyyid Lokman, 1584–1585, 138a) in Cell A1, enthronement ceremony of Mehmed II (Seyyid Lokman, 1584–1585, 153b) in Cell B2, Belgrade expedition (Seyyid Lokman, 1584–1585, 165a) in Cell C2, and the Sultan, his father, and his son telling about themselves (Yusuf b. Abdüllâtif, 1595–1600, 14a) in Cell C3. Miniature artists prepared authentic miniatures according to the script for animation films, playing in cells A2, B4, and C4.

### Three-dimensional animations

It was intended to describe Sultan Mehmed II with his human characteristics whom every person can see sections from his own life instead of reproducing a taboo of him. Thus, he could act as one of the visitors to the museum where he could get to know himself in the 3D movies telling about himself. The use of modest forms of expression similar to the structure could also have made the sultan's story more convincing. Various computer programs were used to design the figures. The drawings made in the Procreate program and by hand were transformed into three-dimensional models in the Maya program. Required organic details (such as costume, face, and hair) were processed with the Zbrush program for the clarity of the poses. Bellini's portrait of Mehmed II (Bellini, 1480) was rejuvenated with the *Faceapp* program, and a sketch of his images at a young age was obtained (Figure 4).

There is a notebook (Anon., 47b–48a) supposed to be written and drawn by Mehmed II when he was a prince, in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library. This album inspired a 3D movie to be played in the cell where his birth and childhood are told. With a childlike joy, Prince Mehmed was animated as lying on the ground and making drawings in his notebook in the movie (Figure 5).

The first years of the reign of Mehmed II, who ascended to the throne at his father's request at a young age, were very difficult for him. During this period, he frequently came into conflict with his grand vizier, Çandarlı Halil Pasha, whom he would execute after the conquest (Aktepe, 1993). In the movie played in Cell B1, his tension with his vizier was told by bringing them face to face without making them talk. In the background, the old city of Edirne, which burned at night during the revolt, was depicted as a panoramic view.

It is known that the portrait of Mehmed II, who is known to have died at the age of 49, was made by Bellini 1 year before his death (İnalçık, 2020, 515–517, 612). As being the first Ottoman Sultan who had his portrait made by posing in the manner of western painting, it

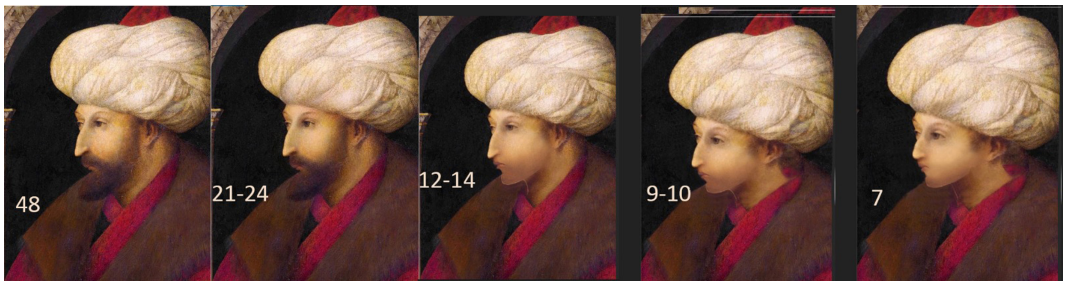


FIGURE 4 Retrospective rejuvenation of Sultan Mehmed II from the Bellini painting.



**FIGURE 5** Interior view of Cell A2 (2d animated miniature playing in the windows of the left wall, 3d animation playing in the middle niche, and wall-printed drawings of Prince Mehmed on the right wall).

can be considered how special both himself and this portrait are for Ottoman history. In Cell C5 where the personality of the poet and art lover Sultan was explained, Bellini was animated while painting Mehmed II.

### Utilization of plastic arts

One way of putting critical viewing into action is to use artistic strategies (Wienczek, 2018, 117). Images, like objects, can have a virtually instantaneous impact and emotional effect. They can be variously interpreted because their expressions are less categorical than the explanatory kinds of knowledge conveyed in texts. As rational arguments and evidence are not sufficient to motivate change, the support of objects and images combined with text may open intellectual and intuitive ways of knowing, drawing on rationality, emotion, and empathy (Walker, 2019, 9). The digital and analogue mediation practices should be regarded as a unity, not as competitors when it comes to mediation offers of a museum, because, each method and media has its own strength, its own and different target groups, and places (Wienczek, 2018, 348).

Today, the use of multivision elements in museums has become quite common. However, considering the operating difficulties, and the synthetic experiences they give to the visitors, the obligation to tell a historical figure in a historical place necessitated using classical plastic arts. Therefore, it was evaluated that the visible privilege of handicrafts, together with the care that can be shown, will attract visitors. In this context, it has been decided to utilize plastic tools intensively in informative units, which might not cause errors related to hardware or software.

## Dioramas

Although “diorama” is a more commonly used term, it can also be called a “room box” alternatively (Heljakka & Harviainen, 2019, 359). Dioramas remain a museological tool largely used in museum displays, despite the concerns about their use. The discussion is open on whether the object on display is “authentic,” but its effects are real. Producing holistic and nuanced meanings, relations, emotions, and information, they may seem more than propaganda tools. If the diorama is accepted as the expression of the unfulfilled desires of human beings to turn into manipulable, docile objects, it may be a bridge between ideology and reality (Varutti, 2011, 9, 12–13). Acting as a form of magic, it may guarantee the presence of an absent other through contagion or representation (Stewart, 1984, 126).

Dioramas may be expected to be “accurate” representations of history to justify their role. But, it is also a fact that the support for their continued use is waning despite their visual impact, because dioramas are static representations that are not easily adapted. They are products of the age that spawned them with their messages and manner (Kerby et al., 2017, 354, 356, 358). They produce stereotypes regarding the singular visions (Moser, 1999, 110) and rarely change unlike the world that produced them (Kerby et al., 2017, 359). Nevertheless they are old fashion, visitors experience them anew, because the ubiquitous nature of technology can enable a viewer looking for something new to find it in something old. The reality that dioramas create is evidence, of viewers struggling to understand their own predicaments with the impossible task of recovering the past (Kavanagh, 1996, xiii; Kerby et al., 2017, 362). Yet in the 21st century museum messages have become focusing on discussion and debate rather than didactic, and uncontested facts (Insley, 2008, 27; Kerby et al., 2017, 369). So dioramas may seem to insufficient for the ones who find this new world brave (Kerby et al., 2017, 369). Even so, they activate a physical response that flat images, isolated sculptures, and even holography cannot, while they are removed from us by display cases. They impel our sense of depth perception and a bodily awareness of space (Ralph & Kamps, 2000, 6). That is why dioramas are dealt as one of the most significant elements used in this museumization project regarding the visualization purpose of the historical *mise-en-scènes* relevant to specific themes.

If dioramas in Turkish museums are generally evaluated, their quantifications and qualifications can both be found problematic. The reasons for this issue mainly involves artistic, bureaucratic, and intellectual negligence. There are not so many diorama artists in Turkey, and they do not have an exciting competitive environment to improve themselves as well. So, this not well-known craft was also not requested by the museum administrations, which did not show much interest in the subject. Beyond the artistic sensitivity, the demand and production of a diorama also makes it a difficult to standardize process in terms of bureaucracy. For this reason, the demanding authorities may not seem so enthusiastic to create a budget for an unpredictable small-scaled craftsmanship.

Diorama artists whom are expected to lack knowledge about the case they ought to produce should be given academic knowledge and visuals in order to reveal a satisfactory product in aesthetic, technical, and historical manners. This visualization process is the last coercive field and really requires sacrifice. This final stage, which requires intense academic research and rigor, requires visualizing the facts as accurately as possible. The set of dioramas prepared for this museum was a significant sample in Turkish museology in the context of design and production manners. All of them were designed and crafted according to the visual and narrative historical documents in a manner to create the most “accurate” presentations as possible.

The museum includes nine different dioramas in 1/5, 1/20, 1/30, 1/50, 1/100 scales, presenting different periods of Mehmed II's life. The scales of the dioramas and figures were

determined regarding the dimensions of niches. Dioramas were all scratch built for this project and equipped with a total of 60 different digitally sculptured figures specially designed for them. The poses of all the figures were modeled separately, and they were dressed in clothes suitable for their period according. The greatest figures are the figures of Sultan Murat II, Hüma Sultan, Baby Prince Mehmed, Prince Mehmed, and Molla Gürani, at 1/5 scale. These figures in different scales and poses were designed in the same computer programs as the figures modeled for 3D animations. They were produced by 3D printers. It took about 6 weeks to print them out by using two types of 3D printing techniques. The body parts of 1/5 figures were produced with FDM (fused deposition modeling) and the rest were printed using the stereolithography method. The figures were all hand-painted. The anti-reflective glass was used for reflection problems that may arise from natural and artificial lighting for displaying. The dioramas regarding the exhibition row are listed below.

#### *Construction of Saatli Madrasah (A1)*

As the first cell of the museum was dedicated to Sultan Murat II, the construction of this structure was also prepared to commemorate him. The dimensions of the hearth niche in Cell A1 allowed for a display of a partial model of the madrasah on a 1/50 scale. In this diorama, the construction story of the madrasah building was described according to the construction stages. Many activities such as the use of a human-powered medieval crane, the construction of walls and arch and dome, and the lead coating of the dome were shown within it. Figures used in the diorama were drawn separately according to their original clothes depicted in Ottoman miniature paintings (Gelibolulu, 1582, 199a; Gelibolulu, 1584, 195b) and were modeled in their poses of actions. The purpose of this diorama was to inform the visitors about how the structure they were in, which was built during the medieval era with traditional construction methods (Figure 6).

#### *Baby prince with his father and mother (A2)*

In the diorama of Cell A2 where the period in which Mehmed II was born is described, he was animated as a baby in a cradle, together with his father Murat II and his mother Hüma Sultan. As the facial expressions were considered, the figures were modeled on a



FIGURE 6 Diorama depicting the construction of Saatli Madrasah in Cell A1.

1/5 scale. However, there are no portraits of either Murat II or Hüma Hatun made in their own time. Therefore, the models of the figures are imaginary designs. Although the lack of original clothes of the characters portrayed in the diorama, the closest sources were preferred in terms of the fashion of the period. The cradle of Prince Mehmed was inspired by the mother-of-pearl inlaid wooden cradle (Padişahın Evi Harem, 2012, 268–269) in the collection of the Topkapı Palace Museum in Istanbul. Murat II's outfit was adapted from the miniature painting of himself, which was depicted in the Ottoman manuscript (Roxburgh, 2005, 270) from the 16th century, and Hüma Hatun's outfit was adapted from the portrait of Hürrem Sultan ([https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C3%BCrrem\\_Sultan#/media/Dosya:Haseki\\_Huerrem\\_Sultan\\_Roxelane.jpg](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%C3%BCrrem_Sultan#/media/Dosya:Haseki_Huerrem_Sultan_Roxelane.jpg)), who was the wife of Sultan Suleiman in the 16th century. There is no architectural trace of the Old Edirne Palace, where Mehmed II was born. However, the pieces of 16th-century ceramic tiles (Akar, 2014, 44–45) with their unique 3D style unearthed during the Edirne Old Palace excavations, were the inspiration for the design of the interior wall used in the background, albeit from a period one century later. The window cover in the wall also was inspired by the window cover of the Selimiye Mosque (Uluengin et al., 2010, 194) in Edirne, dated to the 16th century, which is one of the masterpieces of architect Sinan (Figure 7).

### *Prince with his scholar (A3)*

Prince Mehmed spent his princedom in the Manisa Palace and took lessons from one of the famous scholars of the period, Molla Gürani, who was assigned by his father. In this 1/5 scale diorama, Molla Gürani, who is known for keeping his stick with him during his lessons (Hoca Sadeddin Efendi, 1979, 71), was modeled with Prince Mehmed. The clothing of the prince, lectern, censer, tulip vase, hanging oil lamp, and book bag were modeled based on the objects from the Topkapı Palace collection (Padişahın Evi Harem, 2012, 254, 257, 282, 361, 362, 410)



FIGURE 7 Diorama of the baby prince Mehmed with his father and mother in Cell A2 (The pieces of 16th century ceramic tiles from the Edirne Old Palace, the window cover of the Selimiye Mosque, the portrait of Hürrem Sultan, and the mother of pearl inlaid wooden cradle are the visuals of the selected original objects modeled for this diorama.)

for the diorama. As the Manisa Palace did not survive, except for its tower, an interior wall of the present madrasah was chosen for the background.

#### *Conquest plans in the Kum Kiosk of Edirne Palace (B2)*

It was assumed that the conquest plans were made in this structure which does not exist today. This one of the most magnificent Kiosks of the Edirne Palace was built by Mehmed II. The Edirne New Palace was used as an arsenal in the last periods of the Ottoman Empire and burned during the Russian occupation in 1877/1878 so that the arsenal would not fall into the hands of the enemy. So the Kum Kiosk, like many of the palace's buildings, was destroyed by this fire (Eldem, 1964, 27). Based on the last photographs (Eldem, 1964, 45–53; Ünver, 1940, 255–256; <http://nek.istanbul.edu.tr:4444/ekos/FOTOalbum/90631---0017.jpg>) of the structure taken before the fire, the diorama depicts Mehmed II making his plans for conquest with his entourage in the Kum Kiosk. The diorama was built of 1/20 scale regarding the diagonal dimensions of the niche. The tiled hearth taken away from Edirne Palace during the Russian occupation of Edirne and reestablished in the Hermitage Museum (Akar, 2014, 88–91) and the painting of Jean Leon Gerome ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-L%C3%A9on\\_G%C3%A9r%C3%B4me\\_-\\_A\\_Chat\\_by\\_the\\_Fireside.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-L%C3%A9on_G%C3%A9r%C3%B4me_-_A_Chat_by_the_Fireside.jpg)) also guided the decoration of the diorama (Figure 8). The figures and their clothes were prepared based on relevant historical sources (Ârifî, 1558, 71a; Bellini, 1480; Cenkmen, 1948, 33, 106–110; Diker, 2021, 251; Seyyid Lokman, 1584–1585, 153b).

#### *Bâbüssaâde (Gate of Felicity) of New Edirne Palace (B3)*

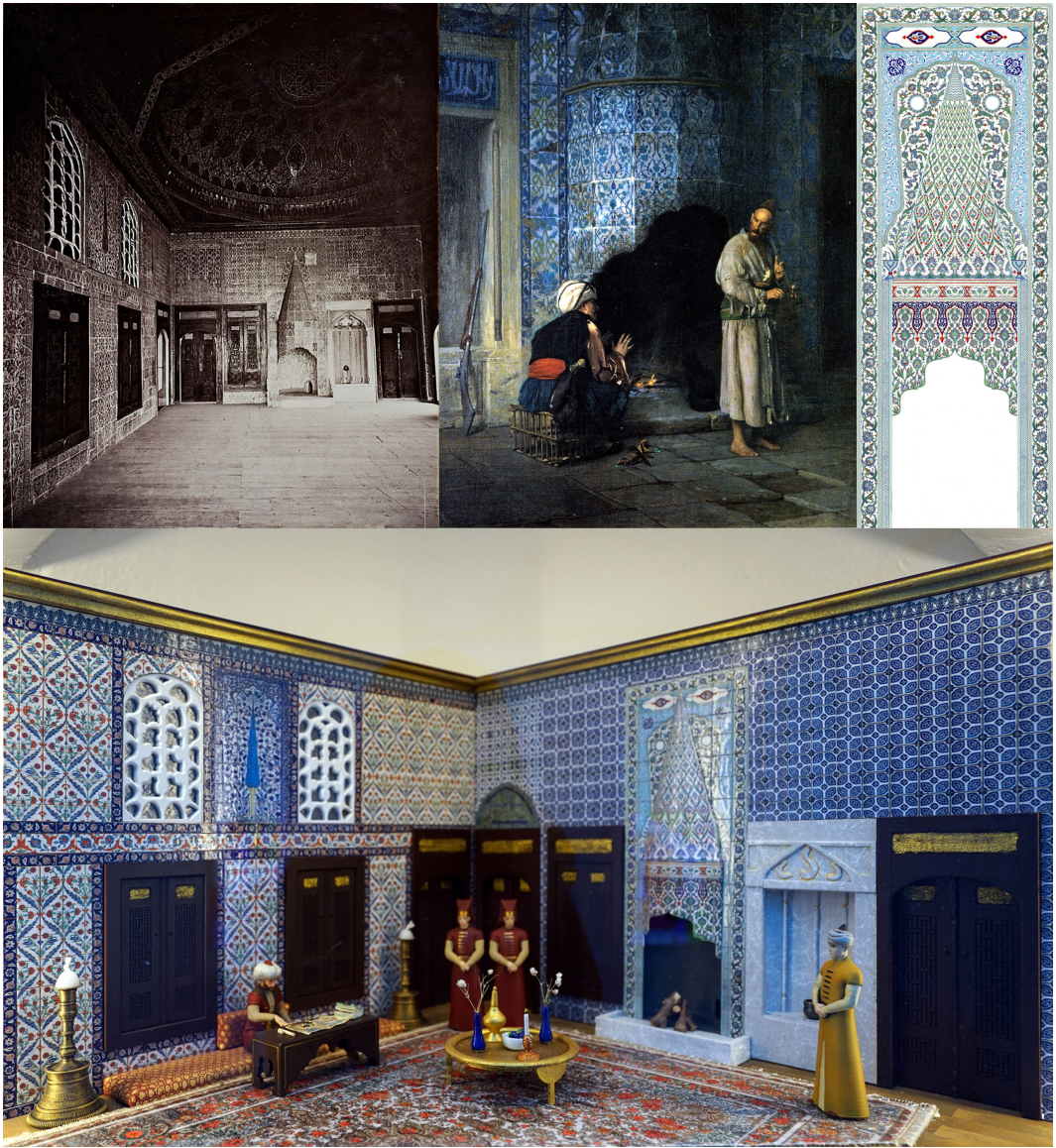
The construction activities carried out by Mehmed II in Edirne are depicted in Cell B3. The Edirne New Palace which was completed by him and does not exist anymore, is also recalled again with the diorama of its monumental gate called Bâbüssaâde (Gate of Felicity). Only the door jamb and the arch of the gate could survive until today. The last photograph of Bâbüssaâde taken (Osman, 1957, 171; <https://haberlerankara.com/haber/3285570/edirne-sarayini-ayaga-kaldirma-calismalari-hizla-devam-ediyor>) before its destruction was colored using the *colorize* program, and the approximate color of the decorations characterizing the door was revealed (Figure 9). The dimensions of the niche allowed the use of a scale of 1/30 for the diorama. The figures of doorkeepers were modeled on the basis of Ottoman and Western sources (Cenkmen, 1948, 223–224, 230; D'Ohsson, 1787, pl. 40; Seyyid Lokman, 1584–1585, 15b).

#### *Land walls of Istanbul and war tower (B4)*

In Cell B4 where the conquest of Istanbul was themed, the struggle of Ottoman and Byzantine soldiers on the impenetrable walls of Byzantium was depicted within a diorama. As the dimensions of the hearth niche enabled the diorama to be built on a 1/20 scale, only the low land wall in the front of the double-tiered land walls could be included in the model. The poses of the Ottoman soldiers attacking the walls with the attack tower and stairs and the Byzantine soldiers in the defense were designed to resemble a war movie. While the existing preserved wall texture of the land walls of Istanbul became a precedent for the model of the city wall, the attack tower and the clothes of the Ottoman and Byzantine soldiers were based on relevant sources (Meyer-Plath & Schneider, 1943; Roberto Valturio, 1483; Nicolle & McBride, 1983; Turnbull, 2004a, 2004b).

#### *Bâb-ı Hümayun (Imperial Gate) of Topkapı Palace (C1)*

The diorama of Bab-ı Hümayun (Imperial Gate), the main entrance of the Topkapı Palace, was depicted in the hearth niche of Cell C1, where the new state was established after the conquest of Istanbul was described. The niche dimensions enabled the construction of a 1/100 scale diorama of this monumental entrance door. The most important thing about



**FIGURE 8** Diorama depicting Sultan Mehmed II planning the conquest at the Kum Kiosk in Cell B2 (Top left is the last interior photograph of the Kum Kiosk, top middle is the painting by Jean Leon Gerome, and top right is the restitution of the tile hearth in the Hermitage Museum).

this diorama is that it was built according to the first construction of Bâb-ı Hümâyün in the 15th century, whose upper floor was destroyed in the 19th century (D'Ohsson, 1787, pl. 138; Fossati, 1852, pl. 22–23).

### *Count Dracula in Bran Castle (C2)*

In Cell C2 where the contemporaries and enemies of Mehmed II were narrated, a figure perhaps at least as famous as him was depicted in a diorama. This figure was Vlad III Dracula, known as Count Dracula, who also inspired world literature and cinema numerous times. Raised with Prince Mehmed II in the Ottoman Palace of Edirne Dracula, had rebelled after ascending the throne of Wallachia. He was also known as Vlad the Impaler because of his



**FIGURE 9** The last photograph of Bâbüssaâde, the diorama of Bâbüssaâde (Gate of Felicity) of New Edirne Palace in Cell B3, the drawing of the head doorkeeper by D'Ohsson, and the detail from the diorama with the head doorkeeper in front of the doorkeepers in a row.

tortures. Therefore, he was modeled in a rebellious pose based on his well-known portraits ([https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/III.\\_Vlad#/media/Dosya:Vlad\\_Tepes\\_002.jpg](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/III._Vlad#/media/Dosya:Vlad_Tepes_002.jpg)), at the tower of his Bran Castle, in Romania, for the diorama. The size and height of his castle allowed to be modeled at 1/50 scale by the vertical use of the niche.

#### *Casting cannon in the presence of sultan (C4)*

The casting scene of the cannons was depicted with a diorama in the niche of Cell C4, where the weapon technology of the period is explained. Mehmed II, who made the conquest by demolishing the walls of Istanbul with the giant cannons he used for the first time, was portrayed while supervising the casting of cannons in the diorama. As there were no architectural traces of the cannon foundry where the cannons were cast before the conquest, the wall of Tophane-i Amire (the Imperial cannon casting building in Istanbul) was used as an inspiration.

## Installation of Sultan Mehmed II

To be made to look, or to try to get someone else to look at something, entails a play of power (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, 10). The museums are the battlefields of perceptions that are in a show of strength. On the other hand, the physical location of an object in the museum can influence its meaning (Younan, 2015, 215, 56). Or there may be matchless spaces searching for a convenient icon to display. Another design made for the museum visitors is the giant bust installation of Mehmed II, which consists of aluminum spheres suspended from the ceiling of the summer room (D1). Although it may evoke the perceptual art of Michael Murphy (<https://www.perceptualart.com/>) at first sight, this bust was an outdoor installation, unlike his works, and required robust hardware.

One of the most famous portraits of Mehmed II (Babinger, 2010, 325; [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Sultan\\_Mehmed\\_II\\_The\\_Conqueror.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/51/Sultan_Mehmed_II_The_Conqueror.jpg)) made by Bellini or his student inspired this installation. Based on this portrait, the bust model and texture were prepared with the use of Maya and photoshop programs. After the surface of the portrait was modeled, the rear part was erased in order not to create visual confusion, with the front part facing the courtyard. The selected part was enlarged to the scale required by the space and was gridded with 5 cm axes in the  $x/y$  plane on the plan. Then, the points where the model surface intersected with the virtual vertical lines suspended from these axes were defined, and the centers of the spheres were positioned at these points in the size required by the portrait contours. These spheres were determined in three different sizes and two colors positioned in the virtual environment at appropriate points. Thus, the final image (snap) was created. After the simulation of the installation, the suspension system and connection mechanisms to be hung were arranged (Figure 10).

## Mise-en-scène of sultan with his scholars in the madrasah

As Mehmed II was known to value science and art, the main chamber (D2) of the Saatli Madrasah was used to exhibit this aspect of his life. One of the most important visuals depicting that case was in the Ottoman manuscript (Taşköprülüzâde, 1558, 90b) from 16th century. In the visual, Mehmed II was depicted with his grand vizier and the mullahs in a scientific discussion made in his presence. For the museum, this scene was reenacted in the main room of the madrasah. Sculptures of the figures were made of silicone polyester in exact dimensions, and dressed according to the miniature painting. A 16th-century carpet resembling the carpet depiction in this miniature is being exhibited in the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum in Istanbul. According to this sample, a new carpet with a dimension of 3 m/6 m was specially woven in İzmir Selçuk to use in the *mise-en-scène*. This carpet, in which root dyes are used and woven as wool, has 28/28 stitches per square centimeter (Figure 11).

## Miniature army of conquest

Different sources give different figures and information about the composition and number of the army of conquest (Babinger, 2010, 88–89; Emecen, 2015, 136–137; Emecen, 2020, 237–240; İnalçık, 2020, 181), so it took a long time to design the model. After long negotiations with the advisory board, it was evaluated that the total number of figures in the army on the way from Edirne to Istanbul could be around six thousand excluding the support units that joined later, along with the carrier camels, donkeys, and oxen. As the number of figures also determined the area that the model covered, the area in the middle of the madrasah courtyard allowed the

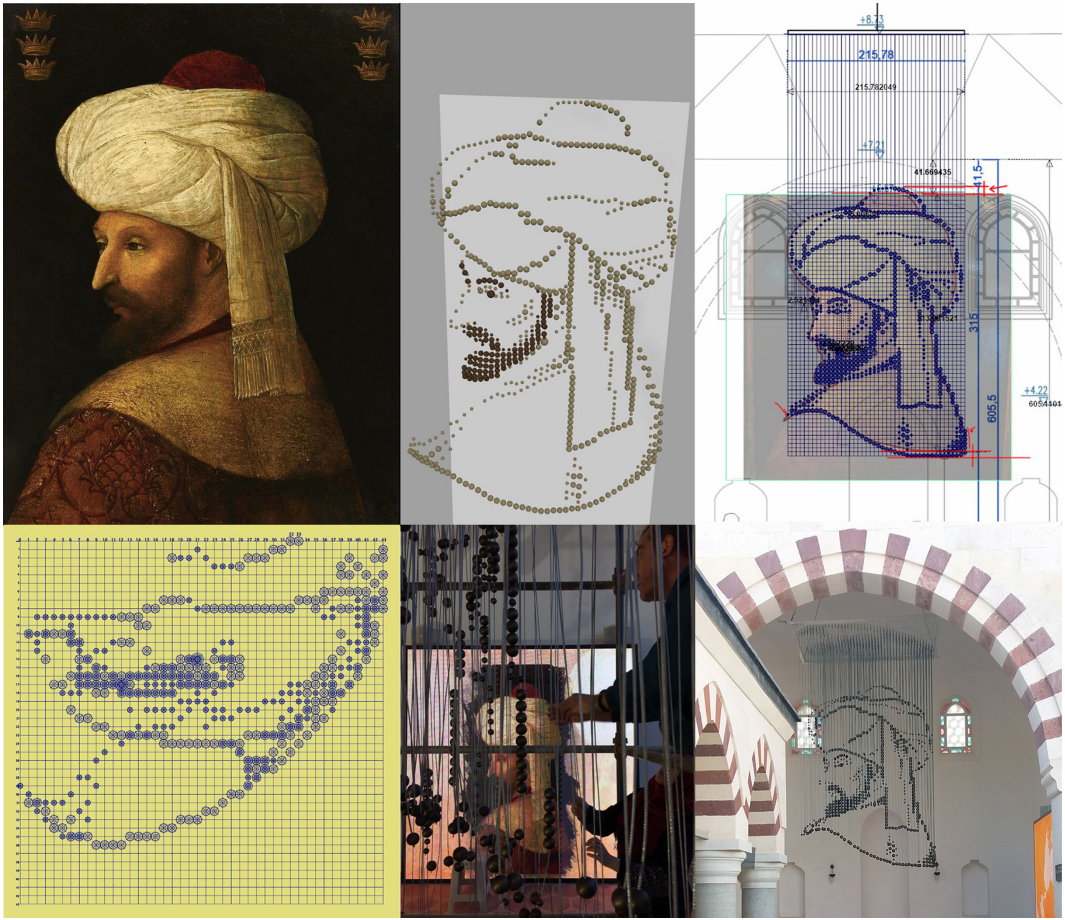


FIGURE 10 Design and installation process of the Sultan's bust composed of spheres in Cell D1.

construction of a model on a maximum of 1/200 scale. If the scale was smaller, the perception of the holistic formation of the army of conquest would be difficult, and the existing landscaping would not allow circulation around a greater model. The army model was produced with a meticulous study based on historical information. It consists of brass figures positioned on the pedestals in the gaps opened within the 2mm thick brass floor. Units formed by the same figures were divided into groups over the common divisors, thus making their placement easier (Figure 12).

## Other contributions

In order to appeal to as many senses as possible, music was not forgotten within the content of the museum. Ottoman army marches were arranged by the piano to be played in the selected cells of the museum as background sound for multivisions. Geometrical analyses of the 15th-century Ottoman architectural ornamentations were printed on the selected interior walls. A detachable scale model of Saatli Madrasah and puzzles of various Ottoman miniature paintings also await little visitors in the children's playroom.



FIGURE 11 Sultan, his scholars, and grand vizier in Cell D1 of the madrasah (Print of the miniature is seen on the left that inspired this mise-en-scène.)

## CONCLUSIONS

Detaching a commodity from its original context for reuse is a common initiative related to the conjuncture. Museumization, as a globally followed trend can be evaluated as an effort to create a new benefit from an out of use building, as if planting a flower an old shoe, ironically. Accordingly museumization seems to be a manifestation of imperative political initiatives in the name of preservation issue and this sort of *fait accompli* is legitimized all around the world. As the political authorities demand the fictionalization of the past constantly to survive, their presentations of the selected and desired histories also attempt to find a place within these populist conversions. By readily being reincarnated, history is intended to be glorified within the museumized cultural assets in this context. And, as long as the history sells, it seems to be a profitable way of for preservation and, a promoting initiative that promises continuous tangible and moral incomes by intermittent reproductions. While the exhibition environments offered by the venue will not change, the museum contents can be updated and changed over time. This potential of the cultural asset will enable to be brought also new museumization updates for the present-day agendas alongside with the restoration requirements it used to be before. So, museumization looks to be perceived as “a pot of gold” by the relevant official and private administrations for years to come, as before.

The imagination of administrators who are eager to cut red ribbons in order to check one more box in their performance lists, can be more dominant and determinative than the creativity of designers. And, coming to the designer's turn, the past is reutilized in the service of today for the next by neglecting the previous. Here, the designer is liable to satisfy the great expectations of the administration in need of political or economic income, to appeal to the

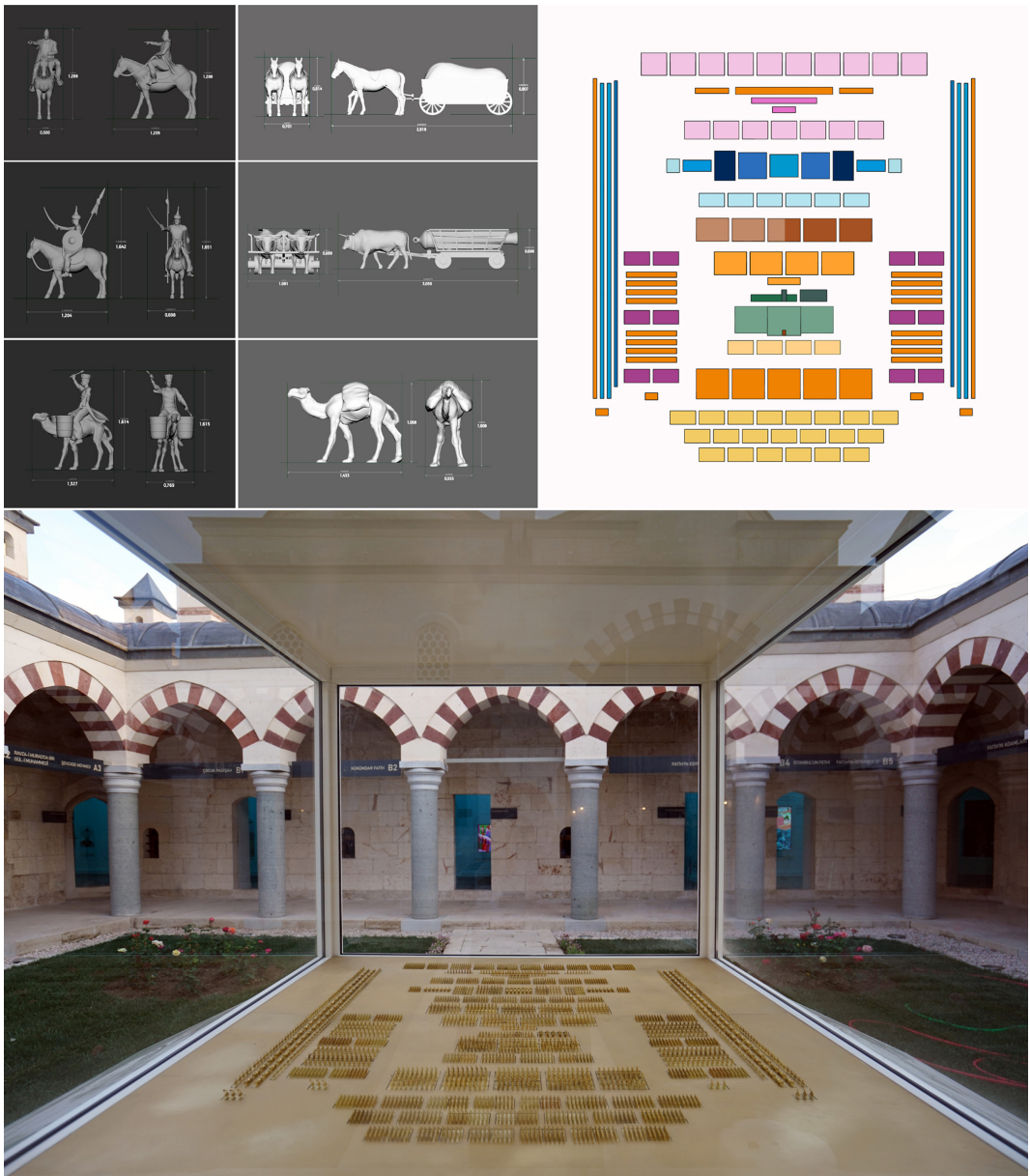


FIGURE 12 Selected 3D models of the army members, organization plan of the army, and the army of conquest in a row.

changeable mood of the visitors and, to avoid spoiling the aura of the museumized cultural asset. And, this triple spiral of expectations is cut off in the form of the red ribbon in every opening ceremony as the navel cord of reproduced history.

At the beginning, the title of this project was satisfactory for the ordering authority who desired to glorify a voluntary mythicized memory, as the image of Sultan Mehmed II was so large that any museumization attempt already lacked the capacity to compete with the perceived moral heritage of this victor. The selected structure was probably found the most convenient cultural asset in terms of its similar age with Sultan Mehmed among the other

choices in Edirne objectively, and the urban legend that this building was his primary school subjectively. The structure also lacked the “unwanted elements,” such as unplastered original masonry walls preventing print or authentic furniture that decontextualized the theme of the museum. The newly plastered and white washed empty cells of this historical structure already allowed it to be alienated to the present anyway. On the other hand, the most important motivation in establishing this museum in Edirne involved it being the city where Mehmed II was born as well as being the former capital of the Ottoman Empire before Istanbul. As a result, this newly restored out-of-use medieval education structure might have been found more convenient by the former governor of Edirne, to echo the most famous Ottoman historical figure rather than any other possible inconvenient civil society organization use.

As this museumization was a university project, the official administration that ordered it did not intervene much in the design process with respect to the academic team. Yet the approach difference between the sensational expectations of the administration focusing on the quantity of a voluntary mythicized memory, and the wary academic view prioritizing the qualification and compatibility of display objects with the space was, felt between the sides during the process. The conversion of a medieval structure to a museum dedicated to a historical figure who is thought to bring an end to the medieval era was a paradoxical process. The limits of the present architectural opportunities required the use of efficient media and information tools as the structure could allow. Although diversifying the mediums of expression for the exhibition, it was especially avoided to overshoot in such a modest and clear historical space and create a reluctant museum. Knowing its previous function is not good enough to predict the next usage of a cultural asset in an unknown future as seen with this sample. Hence, the museumization trend of cultural assets can also evolve an unpredictable manner at an unknown point in the future.

After the dedication of Saatli Madrasah to function as the museum of Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, the structure was treated as a guest rather than as a host, because, the past of this cultural asset and its current conversion would have fatefully brought a mutual foreignness. So this awareness required the new renter to exhibit a respectful behavior. For this reason, at the risk of being criticized for modesty, consistent, restrained, and updateable interventions were made. The contents and compatibility of the installations designed for the space required more importance than trying to alienate the authenticity of the structure in the present day. The display and media works realized with the collaboration with various artists and historians for the museum were very onerous. The management of these different perception, visualization and expression manners was not an easily repeatable process. The most significant features of this project were to keep a respectful distance from the cultural asset due to awareness of mutual foreignness and converting its gaps to the eyes looking and showing Sultan Mehmed II.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This museum project was designed by the author of this article and carried out with Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlhami Daniş and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Göleç who scripted the museum scenario and texts. The project team was assigned by Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University and realized by the collaboration of Edirne governorship. Edirne provincial director of culture and tourism, Kemal Soytürk, had enormous contributions to this project. Rûveyda Korkut was the assistant of the project. The dioramas were prepared by İnanç Ömer Benlioğlu, Alper Bıçakçioğlu, and Sezer Alemdar. Three-dimensional (3D) printings of the figures were made by Kemiç 3D Printing. The sculptures were prepared by Hakan Temur, and their costumes were designed and dressed by Tanju Babacan. The graphics were designed by Future-ist. The texts and graphics were printed on the walls by wall design art. I would like to especially thank Toygar Işıklı for playing Ottoman army marches on the piano for the museum, Serap Ekizler Sönmez for sharing us her geometrical ornamentation analyses printed on the walls, and Ayşegül Yılmaz with Mustafa Birer for preparing the detachable model of Saatli Madrasah. My deepest gratitude is to Dr. Sevgi Ağca Diker,

who was the former curator of the Topkapı Palace Museum, for contributing to designing the costumes prepared for figures, and the exhibition of the museum.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi at <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/candarli-halil-pasa>, reference number 2.

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## ENDNOTE

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**How to cite this article:** Diker, Hasan Fırat. 2024. "The Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror Museum: The Museumization of a Cultural Asset For an Ottoman Conqueror." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 00 (0): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12628>.