



Illuminating Ottoman Ceremonial

توتورال مرسوم العثمانيه عناقاة مرسومك

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241 (below) A modern-day fireworks celebration.

242 (opposite) *A View of Fireworks and Illuminations at Whitehall and the River Thames, Monday, May 15, 1749*, hand-colored etching, Victoria & Albert Museum (Beard Coll. HRBf.30-18).

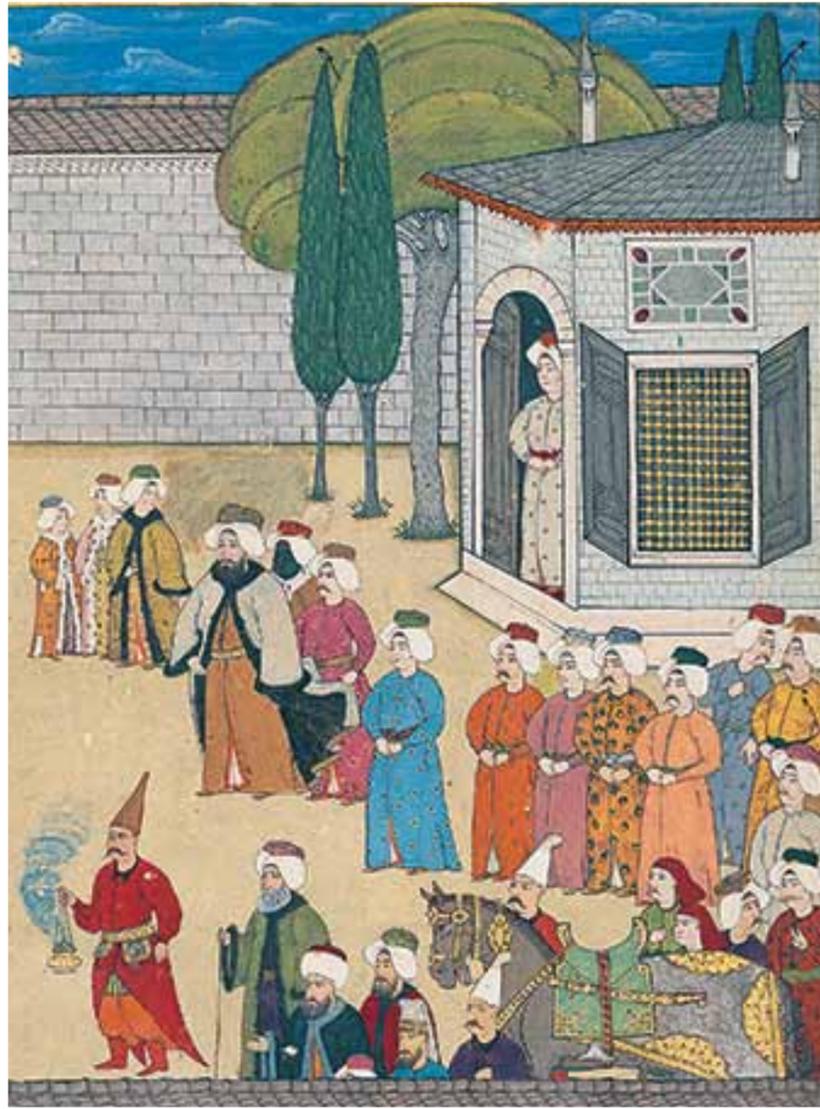
In modern societies we are accustomed to the sight of fireworks on days of national celebration (pl. 241).¹ Notwithstanding the complexity and sophistication of many fireworks displays today, they are now a relatively familiar spectacle. Both the images used in fireworks displays and the technology they employ are now largely known quantities to audiences in developed countries.

Seventeenth-century onlookers, however, may have felt quite differently when they witnessed a grandiose fireworks display during an imperial festival (pl. 242). This essay will examine the way in which early modern Istanbulians may have perceived fireworks, and why the Ottoman court chose to incorporate so many lavish displays into the protocol of their imperial festivals. To this end, I will describe various notable fireworks performances mentioned in historical records and elucidate the progression of pyrotechnic technology, closely aligned with other forms of technological advancement, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

The development of this technology was contemporaneous with the expansion of public life into the night in the early modern period, an overlooked but critical marker of modernity from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Istanbul was one of the important stages upon which this transition to modernity occurred. The conclusion of this essay will discuss the implications of this expansion of festivities into the night hours and what this might have meant at a larger societal level.

I will use data from two imperial festivals organized to celebrate the circumcisions of members of the Ottoman dynasty. I will focus primarily on a fifteen-day festival that took place in the autumn of 1720 to celebrate the circumcisions of four princes of Sultan Ahmed III (r. 1703–30) (pl. 243). I will compare these festivities to accounts of a festival that had been organized some 138 years earlier, in 1582. This latter festival commemorated the circumcision of prince Mehmed, son of Sultan Murad III (r.





243 Levni, “Festival to celebrate the circumcision of four Ottoman princes” showing Mustafa, Mehmed (c. 4 years old), and Süleyman (10 years old), but not the two-year-old Bayezid, from a copy of Vehbi’s *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fol. 6b).

1574–95). These festivals have attracted a fair amount of attention in scholarship, not least due to the existence of two extraordinary illustrated manuscripts that provide us with snapshots of the occasions.

We are aware of at least ten such large-scale festivities held between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries for which book-length accounts were composed. A separate genre seems to have emerged in the sixteenth century, in which the authors described the schedule of the festivities, including detailed accounts of the daily banquets and displays that took place during these momentous fetes. An account of this type was called a *surnâme*, or “festivity book.” These books were commissioned by members of the court, who hired skilled writers and granted them special access to the festivity grounds during the setup and over the course of celebrations. The court occasionally contracted more than one author to describe a particular festivity. There are actually two different narratives of the 1582 festival by İntizami and Mustafa Âli (both edited by Arslan 2008; and the former also by Procházka-Eisl 1995) and two different accounts of the 1720 celebrations by Vehbi (2008) and Hafız Mehmet (2008).



244 “Scene with torches and fireworks at the 1582 festival,” from a copy of İntizami’s *Surnâme-i hümayun*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Hazine 1344, fol. 28b).

Some of these works attained special notice and were produced in fine and illustrated copies in the palace ateliers. The two most notable examples are the above-mentioned manuscripts, which are still kept in the Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul. Lokman’s description of the 1582 festival is depicted in a large volume containing 427 full-page illustrations of the festival (ms. Hazine 1344; partial edition, Atasoy 1997). The painter of the miniatures in this volume (pl. 244) was the court artist Osman. The other lavishly illustrated manuscript (ms. Ahmed III 3593; Ertuğ 2000; for an analysis of the artistic qualities of the miniatures, see Atl 1993) was produced a few years after the



245 Levni, "Sultan Ahmed III and Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha view the firework displays on the Golden Horn," from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fols. 125b–126a).

1720 festival. A copy of the *surnâme* written by the celebrated poet Seyyit Vehbi, it was illustrated by Abdülcelil Levni (pl. 245), who held the position of chief painter at the imperial studio through the earlier part of the eighteenth century.

Symbolism

Many previous studies have offered explications of the symbolism of these grand festivals and described the kinds of messages that the ruling dynasty wished to convey to the general public in the pre-modern world. While infrequent, these ceremonies provided the common people with a series of entertainments that both emphasized the ruler's prominence and allowed groups of people from diverse backgrounds to gather in celebration of a common cause. These events may have helped alleviate an array of social tensions and reify political authority. Furthermore, festivals likely communicated

a message of dynastic continuity and fertility to the viewers and participants, and encouraged favorable public opinion toward the court (see, for example, Terzioğlu 1995 and Yerasimos 2000).

We must then imagine the opportunities offered by the advent of new pyrotechnic technology in the sixteenth century. Fireworks presented an opportunity to use an unprecedented new medium and time slot to achieve the ongoing goals of imperial grandstanding and fostering unity among subject peoples. The use of night as the temporal stage for these spectacular new technologies rendered these festivities even more captivating than they would have been during daylight hours. The presentation of fireworks in an otherwise utterly dark environment compelled onlookers to focus on the displays. Pyrotechnics mesmerized the crowds through the obvious spectacle of explosions and patterns made from fire and further awed by the sheer technology employed, which for the first time created beautiful order from the chaos of flames. These spectacles contained hitherto unknown potential for dazzling an audience, both with the spectacle itself and with the implications of state power, represented by access to and control of new technologies.

What, if anything, impresses audiences today is not the technology employed by a fireworks display, but the artistry of the choreography and the quality of the images—a subtle but important difference when we consider the pre-modern audience. Even if today's viewers are not experts in the science of modern pyrotechnics, they likewise do not perceive a fireworks display as a demonstration of the cutting edge of technology. A fireworks performance in the sixteenth century, however, connoted the appropriation of technological progress on the part of the producer. Along with its pure entertainment value based on visually striking performances, a fireworks display conveyed messages about the military might of the state in the pre-modern world. These displays clearly communicated to the audience the fact that the Ottomans were in possession of the latest in military technologies (pl. 246).

While small explosive firecracker devices were known in the Chinese world in the late medieval period, complex forms of fireworks became a significant element of European life only after the proliferation of gunpowder in the fourteenth century (Werrett 2010, 16). In addition to powerful new weapons, gunpowder was used to produce fiery displays, wondrous explosions, and playful imagery for both courtly circles and common people in early modern Europe. One tends to take these displays for granted now, but as noted in a recent study of the history of European fireworks (Werrett 2010, 4), the manufacture of these artificial fire displays required diverse and unusual technical skills ranging from chemistry to artillery, from architecture to poetic composition.

Weak Lights and Cannon Fire²

Night performances ordinarily began after sunset with a choreographed display of weak lights, such as candles, oil lamps, and torches. Thousands of oil lamps in ornamented



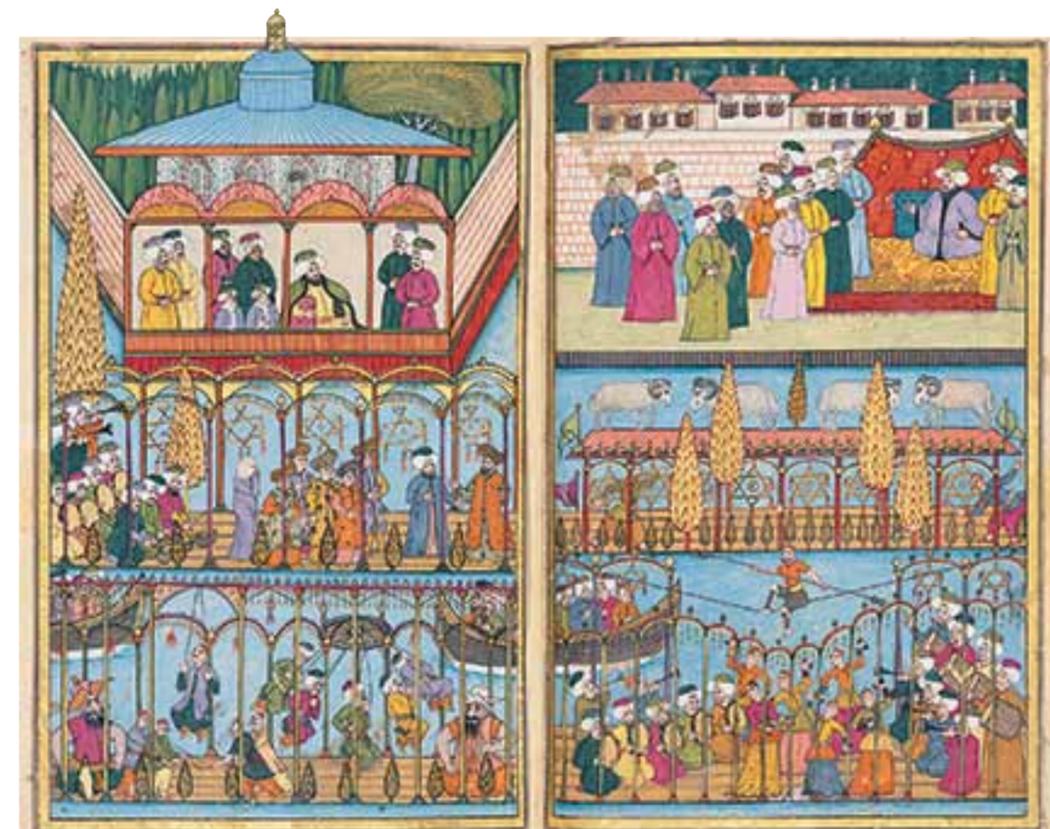
246 Levni, “The set-up of the festival grounds at Okdanı plain, c. 2 km north of the Golden Horn”, from a copy of Vehbi’s *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fols. 10b–11a).

glass covers of various hues were dispersed among tents on the festivity grounds, or placed on moving objects like carts or even tortoises. A group of singers known as the *akkam* carried torches on their shoulders and chanted songs in praise of the sultan. If the celebration took place near the sea, hundreds of illuminated boats would spread out over the water. The authors of the *surnâmes* particularly praise calligraphic writings or images formed with oil lamps hung on nets strung between high poles (*işare*). Written descriptions and visual depictions in miniatures report that these colored lamps formed images including cypresses, palm trees, suns, eight-pointed stars, and religious imagery such as mosque prayer niches and pulpits (pls. 247–48).

Oil lamps and torches were undoubtedly in use in festivals over a long period of time. Low-budget celebrations in non-imperial contexts would also ordinarily feature oil-lamp illuminations. Regardless of the level of sophistication of the design and choreography created with these weak lights, these were static illuminations, not a lively performance per se. They could not have kept the spectators focussed and entertained for a sustained period of time at night.

After the spread of gunpowder, but before firework technology was particularly advanced, festivities were enlivened by the firing of a few rounds of rifles and cannons. Rendered as *top u tüfeng şenliği*, or “cannon and rifle celebrations,” this method was still common practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in small-scale celebrations in fortresses and at provincial sites, and at caravan stations along the pilgrimage road. Depending on its scope, a cannonade performance could be on the expensive side, but it required almost no preparation and provided an awe-inspiring aural complement to lackluster illuminations.

There is reason to believe, however, that the court viewed the bare use of cannon and rifle fire as relatively coarse, and that these methods were used only sparsely in imperial festivals. If the court wanted to make use of explosions, combustion, and flames



247–48 (opposite, top and bottom) Levni, “Fireworks displays on the Golden Horn,” showing the rafts with oil lamps and other light-emitting substances made in various forms such as cypresses and stars of David, from a copy of Vehbi’s *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fols. 62b–63a and 89b–90a).



249 Scene in İntizami's *Surnâme-i hümayun* showing a three-dimensional mountain, the inside of which was filled with gunpowder and firecrackers, and when ignited exploded and vanished into flames in a matter of minutes. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Hazine 1344, fol. 59a).

as part of a performance, it went for more sophisticated arrangements. Theatrical representations of a recent capture of a fortress or a mock battle between the Ottoman and enemy forces usually involved gunfire and small-scale cannon shots. John Covel, a clergyman who spent time in the Ottoman lands in 1675 and witnessed an imperial festival in Edirne, describes such a performance in the following way (Covel 1893, 224):

There was (May 28th) a very large castle brought forth, intended to represent the castle at Candia. After an infinite of fireworkes discharg'd from it, and God knowes how many guns fired from within (by men on purpose, who withdrew afterwards at a port hole), it took fire at last (designedly) in so admirable a manner as no naturall fire could seem more reall. The combustibile matter was made with so exquisite a composition, and the ribs so well contrived, as though the flame burst out in many places about the bottom of the roof; yet the top took fire in due time and burnt with the body, and dropt down first peice by peice. Then the sides began to let the fire break out through them, and by little and little the top parts of them fell down first, and then the wals wasted in order, till all was dropt down in one heap of fire. All this was done with that leisure, as it lasted at least an hour, and made the goodlyest bonfire that ever I saw.

An untypical performance featured the destruction of a mountain on the eleventh night of the 1582 festival (pl. 249). The mountain was actually an elaborate three-dimensional stage serving as the backdrop for a small-scale pastoral scene with hills, caves, trees, animals, and even people. The inside of this mountain was filled with gunpowder and firecrackers; when ignited, these exploded and the mountain vanished in flames in a matter of minutes (Lokman, ms. Hazine 1344, fols. 58a–60a; *İntizami Surnamesi* 2009, 168–69; Mustafa Ali 1996, 205–08).

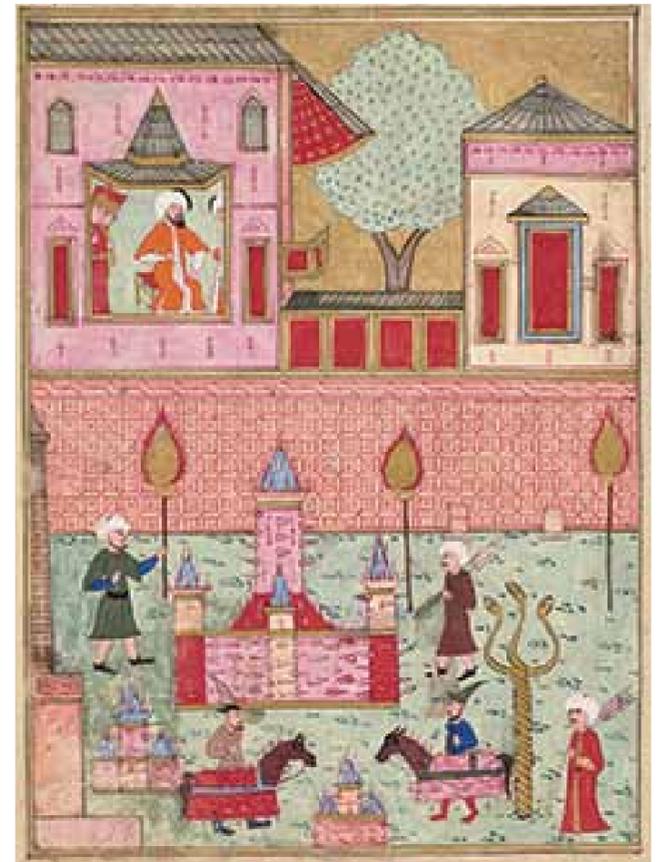
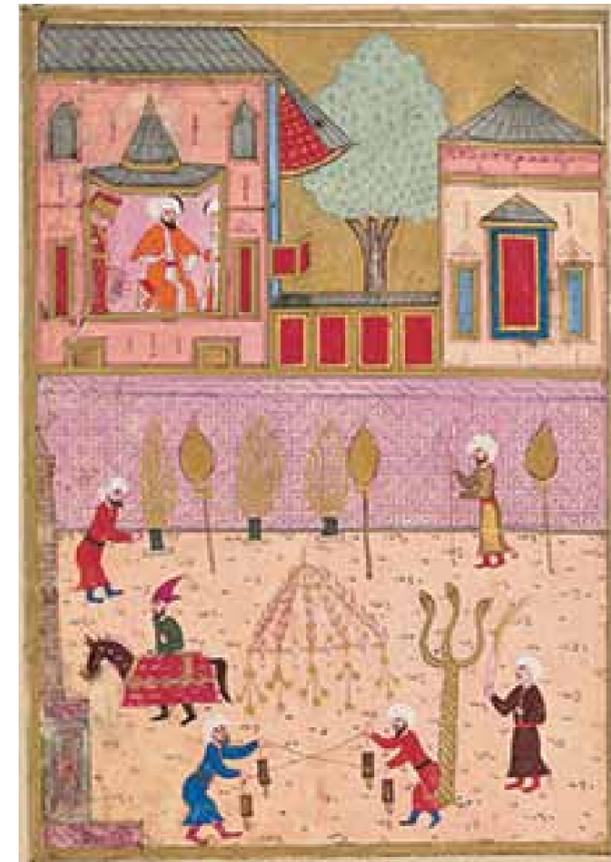
A Breakthrough in Nighttime Celebrations: Fireworks

A breakthrough in nighttime celebrations came with the advancement of firework technology, so much so that by the eighteenth century almost half of all events in an imperial festival took place after sunset. This technology also brought the capacity to hold audiences rapt for a longer period of time; the sources indicate an average of four hours of fireworks after sunset during the 1720 festival. Given that the imperial festival took place between 18 September and 2 October, that figure brings us close to midnight on a September night using the modern clock (sunset fell in Istanbul at 7:08 p.m. on 18 September).

For comparison, the 1582 festival lasted 52 days but featured hardly any large nighttime celebrations. The sources cite a few fireworks spectacles during the first few nights of this earlier festival, but the rather brief descriptions in the *surnâmes* indicate that these fireworks performances were not a highlight of the festivities. Some aerial fireworks were shot off, but according to the sources no big show came close to dominating the proceedings.³ The grand show ran during the day (pls. 250–52).

Fireworks may have been an underdeveloped and prohibitively expensive novelty in the sixteenth century; by the mid-seventeenth century, however, the technique and its use in celebrations had become so commonplace that the masters of the craft had to constantly innovate to dazzle audiences at grand festivals. The seventeenth-century traveler Evliya Çelebi (*Seyahatname*, vol. 1, Topkapı Palace Museum Library; ms. Bağdat 304, fol. 182b) mentions some 50 technicians of the armorers division of the imperial army, with some eighteen workshops in Istanbul (*fişekciyan-ı havayî*). Some of these workshops were located inside the military quarters. A steady search for novel creative fireworks becomes apparent in the sources at this time. Even the curious traveler Evliya himself describes a somewhat intricate rocket that he put together in his youth.

Most fireworks craftsmen were members of the armorers division (*cebehane*), and they seem to have prepared the standard fireworks devices in bulk. However, these individuals did not necessarily carry out the artistic deployment and sophisticated choreography of fireworks used in imperial festivals. As fireworks became increasingly elaborate and ever more meaningful symbols of imperial pomp and circumstance, a group of highly skilled specialist artisans emerged who worked specifically on complex public displays. In Europe, fireworks had become enough of a field of specialization that masters from various regions preferred different techniques and compositions; many



250–52 (above and opposite) These five pictures show scenes from İntizami's *Surnâme-i hümayun* about the 1582 festival. Some performers hold aerial shells in their hands. There are a few devices that jet sparks, torches, and in the middle of (pl. 251b, opposite top left?) a conic device similar to the "tent fire" later depicted by Levni (pl. 259). Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Hazine 1344, fols. 39a, 375b–376a, 413b–414a).

of them traveled to princely courts to offer their skills for use. I have not been able to locate any Ottoman sources that mention European technicians working for the court; however, John Covel mentions two renegades, one of Dutch and the other of Venetian origin, designing the firework displays, and another "Jew" who made some of the fireworks (Covel 1893, 222, 225). It is highly likely that the different techniques and performances in Ottoman festivals were designed as a result of close contact with people at the forefront of European pyrotechnic development.

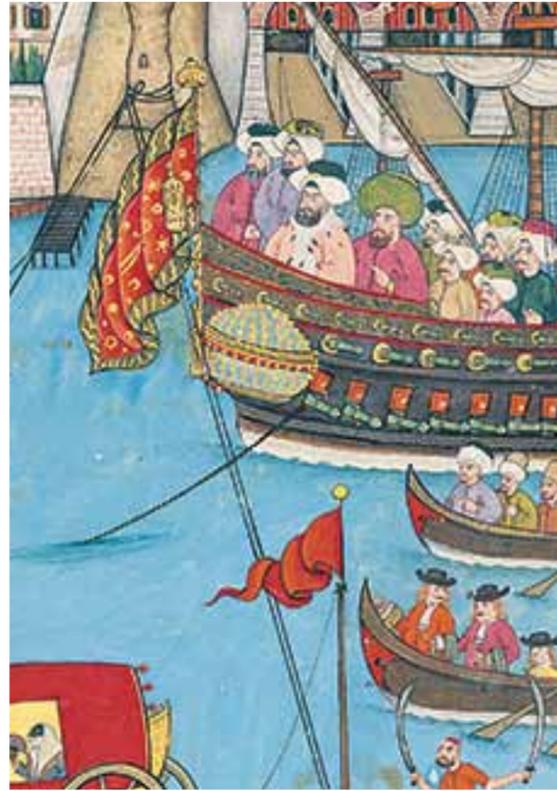
Festival proceedings were recorded by foreign envoys with prominent seats at the imperial festivals (pls. 253–54), and carried back to their respective courts and governments. The semi-enlightened absolutist courts of the eighteenth century much revered new technological developments, and the transfer of knowledge and techniques in the pyrotechnical realm is a good metric for the transmission of knowledge and cultural currency generally in the broader Eurasian region. Peter the Great, for example, was fascinated by pyrotechnics; it has been suggested that his interest was not simply the result of a pleasure in spectacle, but was part of a larger effort to teach civility to Russians (Werrett 2010, 107).

Based on Evliya Çelebi's remarks, we can surmise with some certainty that fireworks were perceived as a European art and craft in the Ottoman lands until the later seventeenth century. While praising the Cairene masters of fireworks in the 1670s, Evliya refers to fireworks as a typically European technique and form of entertainment.⁴ In this case, a comparison with European innovation was a positive qualifier; when Evliya says that "the art of playing with fire" (*ateşbazlık sanatı*), pyrotechnics, was typical of





253 (left) Detail of Levni's "Procession of the guilds," showing foreign envoys viewing the festival proceedings from prominent seats, from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fol. 140a).



254 (right) Detail of Levni's "Spectacular show on the Golden Horn," showing the grand vizier viewing the daytime performances from his own galleon, while the foreign envoys again have a prominent spot to observe the shows, from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fol. 92b).

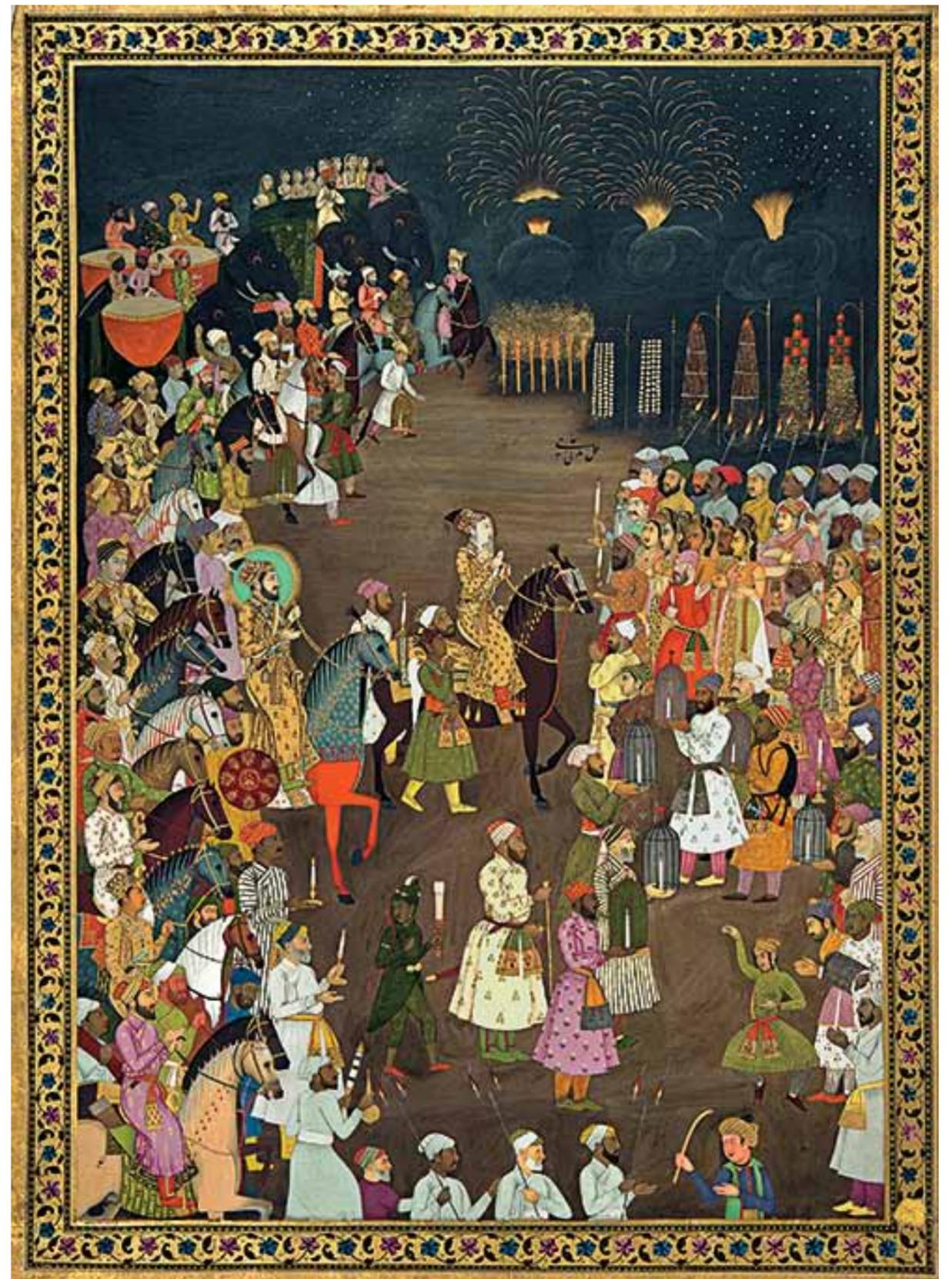
255 (opposite) "Wedding celebrations for Dara Shikoh in 1633," 1740s, paper, 43 × 32 cm. National Museum, Delhi (58.58/38).

the Europeans, the context leaves no doubt that he is expressing admiration for the skills of the Damascene and Egyptian fireworks masters who had honed their own skills in this arena. Fireworks fascinated courtly circles and the people not only on the Bosphorus or the Nile, but also along the banks of the Yamuna. The wedding celebrations of Dara Shikoh, son and heir apparent of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628–58), in 1633 were immortalized in lavish paintings in which fireworks displays are also visible in the background (pl. 255).

For the 1720 festival in Istanbul, the sources report that some *aghas* (officers) and whole military divisions worked to prepare pyrotechnical devices for this grand celebration. A certain Ankad Agha seems to have developed some particularly creative innovations. It appears that primarily the gunners/artillery (*topçu*) and the armorers (*cebeci*) organized and staged fireworks performances during this festival—with additional displays put up by the members of the customs (*gümrükçü*) and arsenal divisions (*tersaneli*) and the fire brigade (*tulumbacı*). While the displays that these divisions performed are described in sources as separate events taking place one after another, the harmonious flow of the displays must have required a good deal of coordination.

The performances were carried out either in Okmeydanı, on the plain that served as the festival grounds, or on the waters of the Golden Horn. The sultan would view the displays from his elevated seat, called the "tower of justice," or from a platform on the seashore (pl. 256). Many of the displays on the Golden Horn took place on rafts large enough to carry heavy devices and featured a number of performing artists, technicians, and musicians (pl. 257).

As with the modern varieties of fireworks, most of the devices were given onomatopoeic names describing their effects or the sounds from nature that they mimicked, or

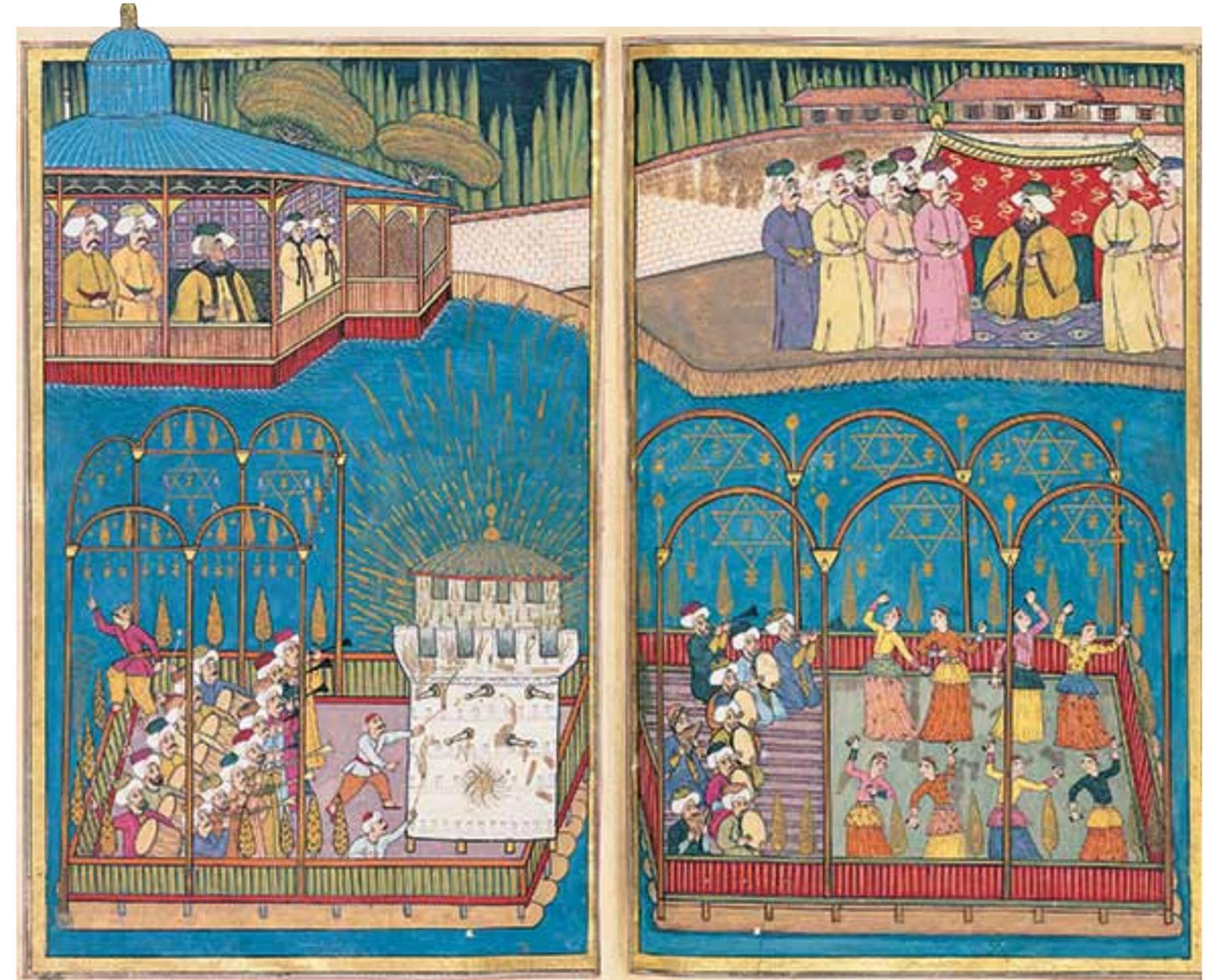




256 Right page of Levni's "Firework displays at the Ok Meydanı," showing the sultan viewing the shows from his elevated seat called the "tower of justice," from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fol. 51b).

names that described the motions they made. The variety of names given in the *surnâmes*, which are often accompanied by only brief descriptions, makes it difficult to picture what some of these devices actually looked like. We can visualize some of these contraptions from their descriptive names, others we are able to match with their illustrations in the manuscripts. Further research is required to determine how the remainder of these fireworks in fact worked. But the fact that eighteenth-century festival books or archival documents list close to 80 different types of fireworks, whereas the descriptions of the 1582 festival name only a handful, gives us an idea as to how much the admiration for fireworks caused their proliferation.⁵

The fireworks displays usually began with hundreds of firecrackers. A common one, known as the "chestnut firecracker" (*kestane fişegî*), which must have been similar to modern "ground spinners," made cracking and crackling sounds, shot out colored sparks, and sprung haphazardly on the ground. Among the other fireworks mentioned in the sources is the so-called "Catherine wheel" (*çarh-ı felek*), which threw fireballs into the air while it spun for half an hour (pl. 258). There were several different versions of fire imitating water in pyrotechnic cascades. The "spring-fountain" (*fiskiye fişegî*)



257 Levni, "Firework displays on the Golden Horn," showing the rafts large enough to carry heavy devices and featuring a number of performing artists, technicians, and musicians, from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fols. 112b–113a).

jetted large sparks vertically into the air. Multi-colored fireworks displaying figures including the aforementioned cypresses, palms, and other trees; ducks; roosters; horses; snowballs; jars; eight-pointed stars—in addition to hundreds of plain rockets—dominated the greater part of the show (pl. 259).

A new device called a "tent fire" (*çadır fişegî*), which was to be displayed before the sultan, was accidentally set alight on the first night, when the sultan had decided not to attend the ceremonies due to severe winds. The miniatures show a conical tent-shaped device. Apparently this contraption was raised from the ground with fire-discharging mechanisms attached to its wires. The descriptions mention that colored images decorated this fire tent once it was alight. The show must have been repeated on other nights in the presence of the sultan.

The sources also describe a device called a "sea fire" (*bahrî*) or "fish-like" (*semekî*). A detail of a Levni miniature features this device. The *surnâmes* do not elaborate on



258 Levni, “Firework displays at the Ok Meydanı,” showing the so-called “Catherine wheel” (*çarh-ı felek*) that threw fireballs into the air while it spun for half an hour, from a copy of Vehbi’s *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fols. 33b–34a).

this device, but Evliya Çelebi describes it as being submerged in water and subsequently resurfacing as many as seven or eight times consecutively. Apparently, it continued to spray fire underwater.

Novelties: Giant Puppets and “Macchines”

In the European pyrotechnics tradition, Italian masters were renowned for their elaborate *macchines*—fantastical, fanciful structures with moving parts that spurted sparks and flames. These edifices became typical performances across the Italian states during the eighteenth century and in a way were even more sought-after than plain pyrotechnic performances. Many fireworks practitioners traveled from city to city and performed remarkable fireworks displays and mechanical displays (Werrett 2010, 133–36). Less elaborate versions of these devices became popular in Istanbul as well. In fact, we have evidence that some of the edifices mentioned below were used in the earlier festivals.



259 Detail of Levni’s “Firework displays at the Ok Meydanı,” showing the “spring-fountain” (*fiskiye fiş eği*) that jetted large sparks vertically into the air, from a copy of Vehbi’s *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fol. 101a).

The English master-gunner Edward Webbe, who fell prisoner of war in the 1570s and later had to serve for the Ottoman army, relates how he constructed “a cunning peece of fire work framed in form like to ye Arke of Noy.” Twenty-four yards high and 8 yards wide with 40 men inside it, the device seemed “as though it were onely drawn by two Fiery Dragons” (Webbe 1868, 28–29; see also Stout 1966, 233–34).⁶ Again, Evliya reports that puppets of priests, Franks, Jews, and Kızılbaş made of (covered with?) fireworks battled with each other at festivals. John Covel’s descriptions for the 1675 festival may give us a better idea about how these devices worked. He writes (Covel 1893, 222):



260 Left page of Levni's "Firework displays at the Ok Meydanı," showing the stork that sat on top of a structure and dispersed flames while streams of flames and sparkles and several rockets poured out of the seven-headed dragon's eyes, mouths, and noses, from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fol. 52a).

About mid-night, as is said, all the dances and other sports being over, began the fireworks, which, indeed, very much delighted me . . . First there were several figures of monstrous giants, many-headed and deformed. They were hollow'd and framed with little hoopcs, and paper'd over. These were hang'd all over with crackers, serpents, saussissons, etc., and after these were fired (which always was done with excellent time), out of their heads, and Eyes, nose, eares, flew severall rockets, and, last, out of their mouths gushed streams of fire. Some had charges in their hands, which fired in the last place, and the armes being continued loose, swung them about very dexterously. Severall of these machines were contrived to turn upon the pole or spindle on which they hung, and were caryed round by a blind rocket attacht to the hem of their garments, for you saw no legs—nothing but a long coat cover'd their lower part. What was burnt of the frame was infallibly repair'd by next night.

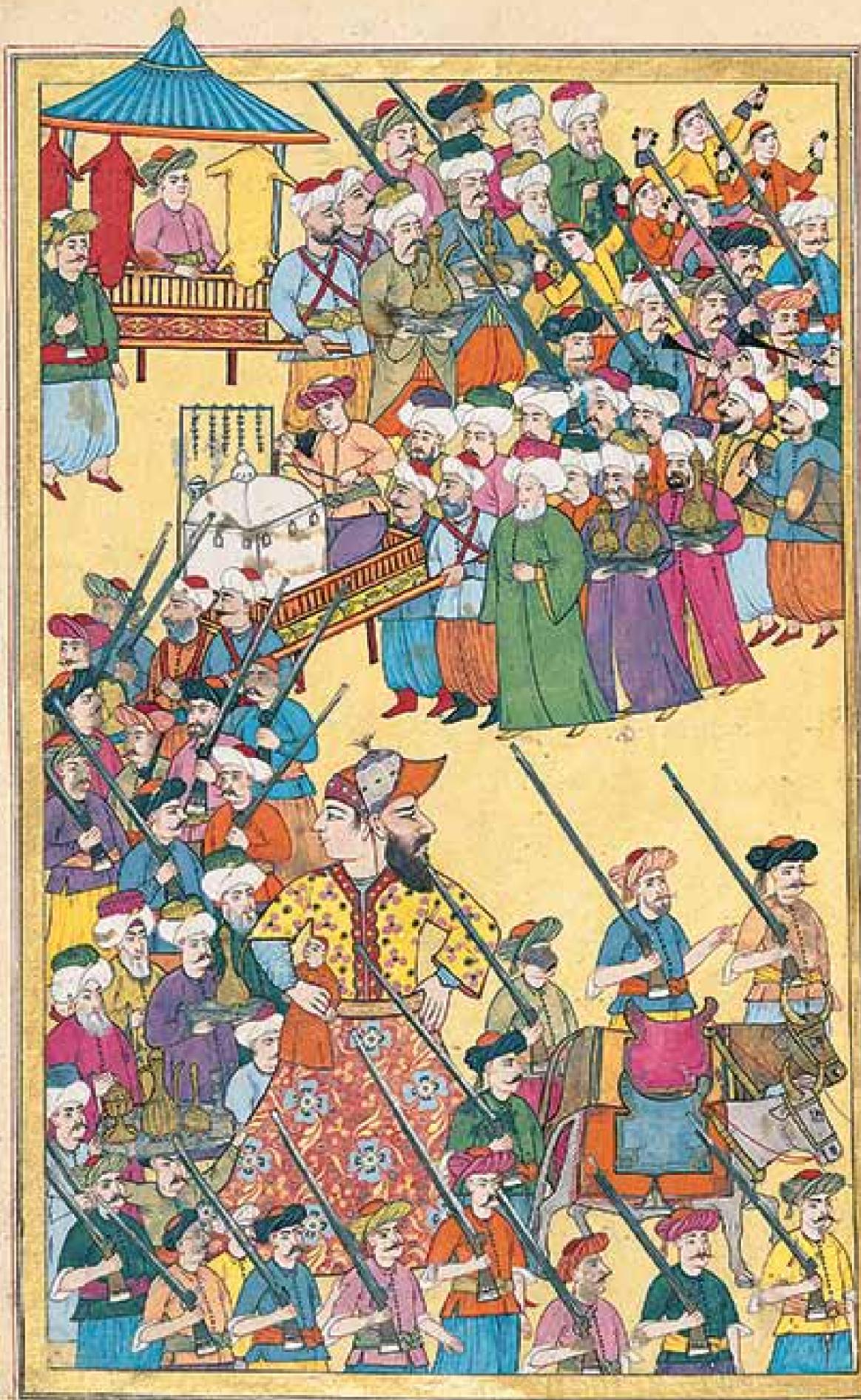


261 Detail of Levni's "Firework displays at the Ok Meydanı," showing a device shaped like an elephant trumpeted and sprayed flames from its trunk, from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fol. 100b).

Probably not all these puppets are devices as complex as the eighteenth-century Italian *machines*, but still their sophistication leaves no doubt that their fabrication and deployment required highly specialized training. How this technique improved will need to be further researched. The devices used during the 1720 festival included:

The Dragon: A seven-headed dragon was brought onto the stage on the second night of the festival (pl. 260). Its heads swung from side to side with the wind, and it opened and closed its mouths. Streams of flames and sparkles and several rockets poured out of its eyes, mouths, and noses. The dragon show continued for an entire hour (Vehbi 2008, 135).⁷

The Stork: The same night featured a stork that sat on top of a structure and dispersed flames (pl. 260). When the stork's bill was ignited, it started to spray flames and produced loud clacking sounds. It immolated completely at the end of the show (Vehbi 2008, 134).



262–63 (opposite and above) Levni's "Firework displays on Golden Horn," showing several giant human figures that made an appearance during day and night time festivities, from a copy of Vehbi's *Surnâme*. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul (ms. Ahmed III 3593, fols. 74a, 55b–56a).

The Elephant: A device shaped like an elephant came on stage on the eighth night of the festival (pl. 261). A carriage positioned on its top carried three people in Hindu garb. The "elephant" trumpeted and sprayed flames from its trunk.

The Giants: Several giant human figures made an appearance during day and night-time festivities (pls. 262–63). All of these figures had moving limbs and made loud sounds. Those used at night also had fireworks devices attached to them. According to the sources, one giant, terrifying "Persian" with about 700 attached sparklers moved like a live person (Vehbi 2008, 145).

Finally, live animals and people were used in displays involving fire and fireworks to bewilder and frighten the spectators. Some performances contained a slapstick element: in one show, twelve yoghurt bowls were brought to the stage; when performers attempted to eat the yoghurt, fireworks burst out from inside the bowls. Others were more macabre: necklaces of firecrackers were hung on hounds and ignited, and the panicked animals were let loose among the people (*İntizami Surnâmesi* 2009, 144). In

yet another show, mutes were put in a rotating tower, which was then set on fire with fireworks (Vehbi 2008, 269).

Conclusion

The pre-modern world was fascinated with marvels and wonders (*acayib ve garayib*)—both those rumored and imagined in faraway lands and those that took place right before the eyes of the audience. Processions of the various social classes, such as military divisions, guilds, and Sufi orders, were a standard feature of the Ottoman festivals. But the festivals also included spectacular displays by acrobats and magicians, and the display of curious animals—all of which were viewed and described within the framework of *acayib*. There is reason to believe that the fireworks in their earlier incarnations were also perceived as curious and strange marvels, and were linked conceptually with other elements of the Ottoman imperial festivals. Ottoman authors' reference to fireworks as "magic, marvel, or an act of devilry" may have been more than just a figure of speech. In Europe also, fireworks were considered a skill that hovered somewhere between magic and craft in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; they even appeared in some magic books (Werrett 2010, 49). The fact that only the court had the resources to perform this marvelous spectacle must have added an extra layer of prestige to the practice in the eyes of spectators.

During the course of the seventeenth century, however, fireworks became rather commonplace. As pyrotechnic technology proliferated and improved, some of these new fireworks may even have become accessible to members of the public. Evliya mentions that youngsters would obtain firecrackers and fireworks on special holidays and cause a ruckus at popular picnicking spots. One could reasonably assume that the crowds gathering for nightly entertainments were no longer awestruck by any mere technique of the artifice or by a modest show of firecrackers. Not only those in Istanbul, but also those who lived in and around major fortresses or stopping places on the caravan roads could witness ordinary fireworks during low-level celebrations. By this time, there was nothing devilish or incomprehensible about the practice. Always trying to build upon previous spectacle in its imperial pageants, the court now developed fire displays not only using more technologically sophisticated fireworks, but also applying narrative techniques, staging dramatic performances involving light-emitting substances (Werrett 2010, 139). We can safely say that these developments in pyrotechnics occurred simultaneously in many courtly centers in Europe.

The expansion of public life on the streets into the nighttime hours from the sixteenth century onward was part of a larger social change and indeed formed an important chapter of the story of modernity. Craig Koslofsky (2011) recently coined the term "nocturnalization" for the "ongoing expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night" in early modern Europe. Cemal Kafadar (unpublished lecture) labeled the opening up of new secular spaces in the Ottoman lands, primarily through the coffeehouses, as the "conquest of the night." People (or more accurately,

men) of the early modern era gradually grew accustomed to socializing in the evening and nighttime hours in a variety of prescribed secular public spaces.

From the perspective of the state, these developments were cause for concern in so far as they facilitated the uncontrolled exchange, formation, and manipulation of public opinion. This was particularly true for coffeehouses, which became potential fertile grounds for clandestine activity or anti-imperial rhetoric. While an imperial festivity happened largely in a controlled and micro-managed environment, it was nonetheless a party atmosphere offering some limited opportunity for transgression of the boundaries of established norms of sociability. The festival arena was an open space, quite different from the spatially limited room of a coffeehouse. Unlike the coffeehouses, which were strictly male spaces, the imperial festival occasioned the mingling of genders. Such a stretch in the boundaries of social norms was tolerated, because the event was understood as a temporary, not a continuous breach of norms. Whatever transpired during these festivities took place under imperial authorization and protection and was hence considered legitimate in the eyes of the state. The festival offered a relief for many from the rigidity of everyday life.

Imperial festivals were a fixture of human ceremonial life for centuries. What was different in the early eighteenth century was that the celebrations now expanded into the nighttime. The new manipulation of technology and light in the development of fireworks technology was not only a new method of demonstrating state power; it was also a critical component of human expansion into a new temporal realm.

Notes

- 1 I wish to express my thanks to Suraiya Faroqhi, who made her unpublished article "Fireworks in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul" available to me.
- 2 Özdemir Nutku's studies on the Ottoman nighttime entertainments (Nutku 1995) inspired my classification of fireworks types. My aim is to put them in a larger historical context. See also Metin 1959.
- 3 İntizami does not detail fireworks performances for most of the nights of the festival, but gives a relatively wordy description for the fifth(?) night (*İntizami Surnâmesi* 2009, 144–45 and 162).
- 4 *Seyahatname*, vol. 10, Topkapı Palace Museum Library Y154b: *bin yüz pare alat-ı ateşbazlık sanatı Frengi mahsus iken; ateşbazlık ilmi Freng-i pür-rengi mahsus iken*.
- 5 In addition to Hafız Mehmet 2008, see the following eighteenth-century documents from the Ottoman archives: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Cevdet Saray 7833 (1176/1762); Cevdet Saray 8867 (1190/1776).
- 6 Suraiya Faroqhi's article alerted me to Webbe's work.
- 7 İntizami (*İntizami Surnâmesi*, 420–21 and Atasoy 1997, 155–56) describes already for the 1582 festival a dragon pouring sparks and flames from its mouth and nostrils. The depiction of this dragon in the illustrated copy by Lokman was scratched out and erased; see Topkapı Palace Museum Library, ms. Hazine 1344, fol. 351a.

p. 308: Detail of Antoin Sevruguin, "Nasir al-Din Shah on the Peacock Throne," c. 1880. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution (FSA_A.15_01).