

Literary chains frozen in tile? The roles of Salman Savaji and Ahmedi in the Persian epigraphic program of the Green Zaviye in Bursa (1419-1424)

Abstract

The layers of Arabic and Persian epigraphy in the Green Complex (1419-1424) in the Western Anatolian town of Bursa, built for Mehmed I (r.1413-1421), are indicative of the literary horizon at this time. Why is this important? Because given the scarce sources on the period very little is known about the practice of multilingualism in the early Ottoman realm. In addition to the Arabic verses, the Green Complex is the first extant Ottoman structure that features Persian epigraphy, allowing us a glimpse into the developments at Mehmed's court. While the existence of some of the Persian verses has been noted several times, a holistic discussion of the epigraphic program has been omitted. I argue that the extensive epigraphic program is a contemporary source frozen in "tile" and time, connecting the buildings to the concurrent developments in Anatolian literature. For the first time, I discuss the appearance of Persian poetry by the Jalayrid court poet Salman Savaji (d.1376) on early Ottoman architecture, which ties into the contemporary works of Taceddin Ahmedi (1334-1413), poet laureate of Mehmed I. The preserved texts in the Green Complex allow us to get a new perspective on the trans-regional connections between the post-Mongol Turkmen world and the Ottoman sphere of influence, adding a crucial literary component to the extant research in the field of art history and opening artworks to historians of literature.

Bio

I am currently a Universitätsassistentin of Art History at the University of Vienna. After finishing my PhD in History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University I taught Political Humanities in Middle Eastern History at Sciences Po Paris.

At the moment, I am pursuing my book project on the Green Complex of Mehmed I. I show how Mehmed I established his rule with the claim to universal legitimacy, connecting themes resonating throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. In this context, I am particularly interested in the actors and social groups, who preserved and spread technical and scientific know-how in times of concurrent warfare.