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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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SUMMER PRESENTATION EXPLORES

TURKISH TASTE AT THE COURT OF MARIE-ANTOINETTE

June 7 through September 11, 2011

Side table (console), 1776–1780, France, gilded and painted with marble tabletop, The Frick Collection; photo: © Michael Bodycomb

By the late eighteenth century, France had long been fascinated by the Ottoman empire. Trade with Turkish territories had gone on for centuries, bringing precious velvets, brocades, carpets, arabesque-decorated leathers, and metalwork to the Continent. In the fall of 1776, a performance of *Mustapha and Zeangir*, a tragedy in five acts by Sebastien-Roch Chamford that played in Paris, seems to have launched a taste for interiors *à la turque*, or "in the Turkish style." Soon after, *boudoirs turcs* were created in several royal residences, especially by those in the circle of Marie-Antoinette and the comte d'Artois, Louis XVI's younger brother. This taste was confined largely to the royal court and the French aristocracy, and few objects from such rooms survive today. In the summer of 2011, the Frick will present a dossier exhibition on the subject, bringing together several examples that have rarely—or, in some cases, never—been on view in New York City. This exhibition was inspired by a pair of French console tables at the Frick, whose exceptional quality suggests a royal origin. They are joined by four objects of confirmed royal provenance, characteristic of the Turkish taste popular at the court of Marie-Antoinette: two painted panels from The Metropolitan Museum of Art and two gilded bronze firedogs from the Musée du Louvre, Paris. Rather than being literal copies of Turkish models, such items were created by interior decorators, architects, designers, and craftsmen inspired by an imaginary Ottoman empire. Although the objects often featured turbaned figures, camels, palm trees, cornucopias, arabesques, crossed crescents, pearls and jewel-like ornaments, elaborate draperies, and heavy garlands of fruits and flowers, their form

Attributed to Jean-Démosthène Dugourc (1747–1820) and Jules-Hugues Rousseau (1743–1806), wall panel, 1781, France, painted oak, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY

and function remained essentially French. Having been made for the royal family or wealthy aristocrats, they were usually of the highest quality, and can be attributed to the best artists and craftsmen of the time. ***Turkish Taste at the Court of Marie-Antoinette*** is organized by Charlotte Vignon, the Frick's Associate Curator of Decorative Arts. **The exhibition is made possible by Koç Holding.**

EXHIBITION INSPIRED BY TWO REMARKABLE TABLES

Conservator Joseph Godla regilds one of the French consoles, focusing on areas such as the border; photo: © Michael Bodycomb

In 1914, following the advice of one of his decorators, the legendary Elsie de Wolfe, Henry Clay Frick purchased a pair of console tables in the Turkish style from the estate of the British collector Sir Richard Wallace (see left, below, and front page). Made in France around 1780, the tables display magnificent carving. Each has a bow-front frieze decorated by a repeated motif of crossed crescents, a traditional symbol of the Ottoman Empire. The frieze is supported by carved figures representing African boys, perhaps Nubian slaves, wearing turbans decorated with pearls, silver earrings, and sashes over skirts made of acanthus leaves. Their lower bodies morph into fishtails that curl around the upper part of the central support. The tables' frames were constructed of beechwood, also suggestive of a French origin. Two gilding techniques were used to obtain different finishes. Water gilding—in which gold leaf is applied to a thin foundation of red clay and later burnished to a high sheen—was applied in various carats to areas such as the border of the frieze and the scales of the boys' fishtails. Oil gilding—in which gold leaf is applied to an oil-based adhesive—cannot be burnished and thus produces a matte finish. This technique was used for the tables' deeply recessed areas of more intricate carving, such as the garlands of flowers. The beautiful contrast of shimmering and matte gold is further emphasized by the black paint covering the boys' faces and torsos, their silvered turbans, and the medallions, which were patinated to simulate bronze.

Although the original owner of the tables is not known, their iconography, ornamentation, and diminutive size suggest that they were commissioned to furnish a *boudoir turc*, a small private room decorated entirely in the Turkish manner. Such rooms were fashionable at the court of Marie-Antoinette during the late eighteenth century, a period when the Turkish style reached new heights of popularity among France's nobility. Indeed, for two centuries the taste for *turquerie* was evident in French fashion, literature, theater and opera, painting, architecture, and interior decoration. *Turquerie*, a term coined in the early nineteenth century, referred to essentially anything produced in the West that evoked or imitated Turkish culture, but it could include genuine Turkish goods as well, used in a Western context.

Ingénue Holding Lute with Two Nubians (detail of one of a pair), c. 1780, France, gilded and painted wood with marble tabletop, The Frick Collection; photo: © Michael Bodycomb

CENTURIES OF TRADE AND DIPLOMACY BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE INSPIRES A FASHION THAT BEGINS IN THE THEATER

Unlike many western European countries, France enjoyed cordial relations and favored trading privileges with the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years. The two powers first sought to strengthen their political ties at the end of the seventeenth century, prompted by the signing of the Treaty of Carlowitz in 1699, which concluded the Great Turkish War and ended two hundred fifty years of expansion by the Ottoman Empire. The treaty significantly shifted the balance of power in central and eastern Europe, diminishing Turkish influence and positioning the Hapsburgs of Austria as the dominant force. The Turks were then facing a more formidable West, with its military superiority, increased material wealth, and scientific progress. To fight against their newly powerful enemies, the Ottomans attempted to form an alliance with France, who shared the same adversaries, the Austrians. To that end, the Sublime Porte dispatched embassies to the French court: in 1721 Mehmed Efendi visited Louis XV, as did Efendi's son, Mehmed Said Pasha, in 1742. Each diplomatic visit, which lasted for several months, roused great curiosity in France and strengthened the already fashionable taste for *turquerie*.

Before these visits, only one envoy, Suleyman Aga, was sent to the French court, in 1669. An immediate response to this visit was Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (The Would-Be Noble).* The five-act comedy-ballet with music composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully was first presented to Louis XIV at the Château de Chambord on October 14, 1670. The idea of staging a play with a Turkish scene came directly from the Sun King. He also insisted that Laurent d'Arvieux, the French envoy to Constantinople and a well-known traveler to the Middle East, collaborate with Molière and Lully on the design for the costumes. Molière's few Turkish sentences added a touch of authenticity to this otherwise outrageous buffoonery. The success of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was enormous, and it became the model for many Turkish themes in ballets, operas, and plays in France and throughout Europe.

One of the most famous Turkish operas of the period was George Frideric Handel's *Tamerlano,* which was first performed in 1724 at the King's Theatre in London. Handel's Sultan Bajazet—a character inspired by the dramatic military defeat and capture of Beyazid I, the "Moslem emperor" depicted on the medallion of the Frick's console table—is represented as a noble ruler and loving father, a departure from the prevailing view of the Turks as a violent and cruel people who terrorized Europe until the end of the seventeenth century. A similarly enlightened figure appears in Jean-Philippe Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Indes Galantes,* first presented in 1735 at the Royal Academy of Music and Dance in Paris. Certainly, an emotional French public was profoundly touched by Pasha Osman, who sets free his captive and love, Émilie, to be reunited with her former lover, Valère. Perhaps the masterpiece of all Turkish operas is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Seraglio).* First performed in Vienna in 1782, it includes most of the eighteenth-century clichés about the Turks. At once brutal and fierce, amorous and sensitive, Mozart's Pasha Selim ultimately frees his captives, sending the following message of peace to his enemies: "It gave me by far the greatest pleasure to reward an injustice with justice rather than to keep on repaying evil with evil."

TURKISH REPRESENTATIONS IN FRENCH PAINTING

A slightly different image of Turkish culture appeared in French paintings. Following the diplomatic visits of 1721 and 1742, Turkish costumes were commonly donned by sitters to bestow sensuality and exoticism to their portraits. Around this time, representations—usually quite inaccurate—of Turkish harems, bathhouses, and feasts were used by artists as an allegory of the French court's enormous wealth and privilege. The Ottoman Empire's association with luxury and sexual liberty was capitalized on at aristocratic and popular masked balls, where Turkish costumes continued to be fashionable for the remainder of the century. An important figure in the development of Europe's fascination with the Ottoman Empire was the painter Jean-Étienne Liotard. Born in Switzerland in 1702 to a French Huguenot family, Liotard was an itinerant artist who spent extensive periods in Paris, Rome, Vienna, and Constantinople, where he lived from 1738 to 1742. Returning to Europe, Liotard brought with him a unique vision of the Orient that he captured in numerous drawings and sketches. He also brought back many Turkish costumes, which he used in his compositions, establishing the vogue for both monarchs and aristocrats to be painted *à la turque*, among them Maria Theresa of Austria, who not only championed the fashion for *turquerie* in Vienna but also had a deep interest in the Middle East and enthusiastically collected Turkish rugs and miniatures. The Hapsburg Empire's close proximity to the border of the Ottoman Empire and the Austrian court's centuries-long association with the Turks certainly explain Maria Theresa's interest, an interest that she passed on to her youngest daughter, Marie-Antoinette, who became the queen of France in 1774.

In 1776 and 1777, several operas and plays with Turkish themes were performed at the French court, increasing the nobility's interest in the Turkish style. These included *The Three Sultanas*, *Mustapha and Zéangir*, and *Zémire and Azor*, which derived some of their themes from *A Thousand and One Nights* (first translated into French in 1704). The premiere of *Mustapha and Zéangir*, a tragedy in five acts by Sebastien-Roch Chamford, played at the royal theater of Fontainebleau on November 1, 1776. Marie-Antoinette was so pleased with the production that she congratulated the author with a handsome reward of 1,200 livres.

BOUDOIRS TURCS IN FRENCH ROYAL RESIDENCES

Around this time, several *cabinets* or *boudoirs turcs* were created in the royal residences. Since these retreats were intended for private entertaining, interior designers were allowed more freedom than was permitted for the official, public apartments at court. As a result, the furniture and decorations were particularly fanciful. In 1776 the comte d'Artois, the younger brother of Louis XVI and the future Charles X of France, commissioned a *cabinet turc* for his Parisian residence, The Temple. Marie-Antoinette soon followed his lead, creating a *boudoir turc* at the Château de Fontainebleau in 1777. The comte d'Artois commissioned several other *cabinets turcs:* one at Versailles in 1781–82 and a second in The Temple in 1783. Meanwhile, the queen installed a *boudoir turc* in her apartments at Versailles. A few additional Turkish rooms are known to have existed: the landscape designer Racine de Monville had a *boudoir turc* in his residence in Paris, and the duc de Penthièvre ordered a *pavillion turc* built in the park of his Château d'Armanvilliers. The fashion—favored by members of the royal court and the French aristocracy—lasted until the end of the *ancien régime*, disappearing with the onset of the French Revolution.

Sadly, only one *cabinet turc* has survived, the one made in 1777 for Marie-Antoinette at Fontainebleau. It is decorated with *boiseries,* wood panels sculpted and painted with ornaments associated with the Ottoman Empire: turbans, pearls, stars, crescents, and blackamoors (stylized black Africans). An alcove covered with mirrors once contained a bed *à la turque,* now lost. Of the furnishings made for Marie-Antoinette's *boudoir turc* at Fontainebleau, all that have been identified are a pair of firedogs, one of which is illustrated at right, made by Pierre Gouthière, the greatest bronze maker, chaser, and gilder of his time. These two maganificent objects, which have never been on view in New York, will come to the Frick for this exhibition. Used to support logs in the fireplace, Marie-Antoinette's firedogs gave an extra touch of Orientalism to her boudoir. Each features a seated dromedary on a base decorated with delicate foliage, all beautifully chased and gilded by Gouthière. They originally rested on four small pinecones, one of Marie-Antoinette's favorite ornaments, now lost along with the shovel and tongs decorated with heads of blackamoors that were once part of the original set. In eighteenth-century France, camels were associated with Africa and so were represented in numerous allegories of the continent; after 1777, they became a favorite motif of Turkish cabinets.

Pierre Gouthière (1732–1813), one of a pair of firedogs, with a seated dromedary, 1777, France, from the Turkish boudoir of Marie-Antoinette at Fontainebleau, gilded bronze, 13 ½ x 9 7/8 inches, Musée du Louvre, Paris; photo: Martine Beck-Coppola; photo credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY

As with the objects *à la turque* once belonging to Marie-Antoinette, only a few pieces from the comte d'Artois's *cabinets turcs* have survived. These include eight door panels from the prince's second Turkish room at Versailles that were created by the decorative painters to the court, Jean-Siméon Rousseau de la Rottière and his brother Jules-Hugues Rousseau. The prince's *cabinet,* which served as his private library, was faced with mirrors (as was Marie-Antoinette's boudoir at Fontainebleau) and included four doors (two of them nonfunctional). Each door was adorned with top and bottom panels painted with arabesques, turbaned figures, naiads, floral garlands, and strings of pearls, and the top panel featured a central medallion illustrating episodes from the life of an imaginary sultan. Two of these panels now belong to The Metropolitan Museum of Art and are featured in the Frick's exhibition. (See page 1 for an example; the other six are in the collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, and the Château de Versailles.)

Separated from their exotic settings, these objects are today admired as works of art in their own right, highly original in design and beautifully crafted. They are also a reminder of the importance of opera, ballet, and theater at the French court, and their influence on eighteenth-century decorative arts.

RELATED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Special Exhibition Lectures

Lectures are free, and no reservations are necessary.

Date: Wednesday, June 22, 6:00 p.m.; doors open at 5:45 p.m.
Speaker: Walter B. Denny, Professor of Art History, University of Massachusetts at Amherst
Title: *Rococo Fears, Facts, and Fantasies: Eighteenth-Century* Turquerie

The Frick's exhibition *Turkish Taste at the Court of Marie-Antoinette* poses some interesting questions about Orientalism in eighteenth-century Europe, calling into question the interpretation that Orientalism in art is the product of a European colonial

worldview. Professor Denny will look at the rococo French-Ottoman artistic connection between East and West and will explore the fears and fascinations that lie behind *turquerie* and *alafranga*.

Date: Wednesday, July 27, 6:00 p.m.; doors open at 5:45 p.m.
Speaker: Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts, The Frick Collection
Title: *East Meets West at the Court of Marie-Antoinette*

For hundreds of years, trade with the Turkish territories brought precious velvets, brocades, carpets, arabesque-decorated leathers, and metalwork to the Continent. The French were particularly intrigued by the exoticism of the Ottoman Empire, and by the late 1770s and throughout the 1780s, Turkish culture had become a source of inspiration for interior decorators, architects, designers, and craftsmen working at the French court. Together, these artists created Turkish *boudoirs*—small theatrical rooms—for Marie-Antoinette and her brother-in-law, the comte d'Artois. This lecture will present the historical, social, and artistic context in which French artists mixed fantasy and aesthetics, style and function.

Seminar

This small-capacity session is designed to foster an appreciation for and knowledge of the works in this special exhibition. The Frick Collection's 2010–11 seminar program is made possible through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Walter A. Eberstadt. Seminars are limited to twenty participants. Register online or by calling 212.547.0704.

Date: Monday, June 27, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Speakers: Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts, The Frick Collection, and Adrienne L. Childs, independent scholar
Title: *Marie-Antoinette and Her Taste for Turkish Interiors*

This seminar will offer participants a detailed look at several objects from the special exhibition. Charlotte Vignon will discuss the Frick's two French console tables, which feature Nubian slaves with pearl-bedecked turbans, floral garlands, and a frieze of crossed crescents, a symbol of the Ottoman Empire. She will also examine a pair of firedogs from Marie-Antoinette's Turkish boudoir at Fontainebleau, on loan from the Musée du Louvre, and a pair of wall panels created for the Turkish cabinet of her brother-in-law, the comte d'Artois, from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. *$100 ($90 for Members)*

Summer Night at the Frick

Friday, July 22, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a free after-hours viewing of the Frick's two summer exhibitions, *In a New Light: Bellini's* St. Francis in the Desert and *Turkish Taste in the Court of Marie-Antoinette*. This free public evening will provide a special opportunity to meet the curators, hear gallery lectures and talks, sketch in the Garden Court, and listen to live music. *Visitors over ten are welcome; no reservations are necessary. For more information, please e-mail education@frick.org.*

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700
Web site: www.frick.org
E-mail: info@frick.org
Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.
Hours: open six days a week: 10am to 6pm on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11am to 5pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11am to 5pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.
Admission: $18; senior citizens $15; students $10; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11am to 1pm

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street
Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.
Museum Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.
Group Visits: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.
Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing, or Alexis Light, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing; Media Relations Phone: 212.547.6844 and E-mail address: mediarelations@frick.org