Paper prepared for the Third Euroacademia International Conference

Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities

Lucca, Italy

19 – 20 June 2015

This paper is a draft

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Identity and Self-fashioning of an Ottoman Ruler as shown in Gentile Bellini's *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II* (1480)[1]

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Abstract paper

This paper addresses the concepts of identity and self-fashioning in Gentile Bellini's *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*(1480). After examining the material culture and the history of the painting (attribution, provenance, condition and conservation history), a visualcomparison between the portrait and three portrait medals of the sultan has been made in order to analysethe iconographical devices of power employedin the portrait. Furthermore, this paper has compared Bellini's portrait and the three medals with earlier and later images of the sultan. This overview helped to establish whetherthe sultan's self-fashioned image as a powerful leader was successful. Mehmed II identified himself with Alexander the Great, and as such ordered a portrait *all' antica*, just like Alexander had ordered one from Apelles.Thus, the sultan wanted to be seen not only as the Conqueror, but more importantly as a second Alexander the Great.

Keywords: *Gentile Bellini – Sultan Mehmed II – Portrait – Medal – Iconography*

Introduction

> *Cultural identity in early modern Europe was formed out of direct encounters between artefacts exchanged amongst international communities at distinct geographical locations.* – Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton.[2]

With the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 at the hands of Sultan Mehmed II, The Conqueror (r. 1444-46/r.1451-1481), Europe became acutely aware of the presence and power of the Ottoman Empire.[3] The Ottoman threat became tangible and Europeans grew worried that Rome would be the sultan's next target.[4] Curiously enough, at the same time, Europeans showed a keen interest in the image of the Conqueror, especially as Byzantine authors compared him to Alexander the Great.[5] During the 1460s and 1470s various images of the sultan spread throughout Western Europe, with some even reaching Constantinople in the East. Towards the end of his life, Mehmed II commissioned two Italian artists to render his portrait in the *all' antica* tradition. Costanzo di Moysis (fl. 1474-1524), better known as Costanzo de Ferrara, made a portrait medal, while Gentile Bellini (1430/34-1507) painted a portrait.

Although accepting Bellini's *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II* (1480)[6] as an important cross-cultural artistic testimony, due to the complexity of the painting's condition and conservation history, few scholars have further explored its significance as a political and cultural expression of self-representation by an Ottoman ruler. This painting is a particularly interesting case study, not only because it is the first known portrait of an Ottoman ruler made by a European artist, but also because Islam is known for its rigorous ban of any depiction of humans or animals.[7]

Thus, this paper seeks to address the concepts of identity and self-fashioning in *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, by examining its attribution, provenance and iconography. Moreover, a comparison between this painting and the surviving medals of Mehmed II, including that of Costanzo, will allow for a detailed study of the iconographical devices of power used within the portrait. By taking Bellini's portrait as a case study, this paper aims to examine how portraiture was used to create a cross-cultural identity and how Renaissance's courtly culture had an impact on the staging of this multi-layered identity of Sultan Mehmed II. However, it should be noted that this paper does not attempt to define the precise meaning of Renaissance concepts like verisimilitude and likeness as various studies have previously addressed these questions extensively.[8]

In this paper an interdisciplinary research method has been used, which combines a microhistorical approach with primary source-based research that not only includes archival and written sources, but also examines contemporary material and visual culture. In doing so, this paper follows the scholarly examples of Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, Anne Contadini and Claire Norton, Deborah Howard, Lisa Monnas and GülruNecipoğlu.[9] In contrast to many previous studies, this paper addresses in more detail the painting's complex condition and conservation history, before providing an iconographical analysis of the portrait and the medals.By using an interdisciplinary methodology that brings together historical, art historical and conservational issues, this paper addresses the question of self-fashioning by an Ottoman ruler. The first part of the paper will focus on the material culture and the history of the painting. In a second part early European images of the sultan will be discussed, before examining the iconography of the painting in comparison to that of the portrait medals. Before reaching a conclusion, the third part of the paper will focus on a visual comparison of the so-called afterlife of the various portraits, which will help to establish the degree of success of the sultan's self-fashioned image.

Gentile Bellini in Constantinople (1478-1481)

By the fifteenth century, Venice had established trade relationships in the Mediterranean, North Africa and Flanders, with many Venetian merchants being settled abroad, including the *bailo*, the Venetian consul, in Constantinople.[10] After the Fall of Constantinople, Venice was keen to keep its strong trading position in the Mediterranean and therefore lost no time in renegotiating its trading privileges with the Ottoman Empire.[11] It sent ambassadors to Constantinople with the clear instruction to agree to anything that would maintain their commercial privileges. Consequently, after almost sixteen years of war a humiliating peace treaty was signed in January 1479, which relinquished all claims to the lost colonies and reduced the *bailo*'s privileges tremendously.[12]

On 1 August 1479 the Venetian Senate received a request for a painter from Sultan Mehmed II.[13] As Venice did not want to jeopardize its newly established relationship with the Ottoman Empire, the city immediately sent its most prominent painter, Gentile Bellini, who at the time was working on his monumental paintings for the Great Council Hall of the Doge's Palace.[14] Because of the diplomatic importance of this assignment, it can be understood that Bellini was not only sent to Constantinople for his artistic qualities, but also as a cultural ambassador for Venice.

On 3 September 1479 Bellini left Venice together with two of his assistants. He stayed at the court in Constantinople at least until 15 January 1481, from which date there is a letter from Mehmed II praising him. On 25 April 1481 Mehmed left for battle, so presumably Bellini left Constantinople before that date.[15] Unfortunately, only few works

from Bellini's stay at the Ottoman court have survived, including some drawings, a medal of Mehmed II, and the painting *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*.[16]

The Italian Giovanni Maria Angiolello, who served Mehmed between 1474 and 1481, describes the kinds of works Bellini made for the sultan. However, he does not mention a portrait specifically.[17] A first published account of the portrait, possibly provided by Bellini himself, is Jacopo Filippo Foresti da Bergamo's *Supplementumchronicarum* (1490). This account describes how Bellini was tested by the sultan, who made him paint several paintings and a self-portrait. Consequently, being impressed by the artist's skills, the sultan asked Bellini to portray him.[18] According to Woods-Marsden's study on Italian self-portraiture in the Renaissance, there are no recorded witnesses of patrons asking for an artist's self-portrait, which makes the sultan's request rather unique.[19]

Material Analysis of *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*:

Attribution and Date

The two inscriptions on *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II* seem to indicate that Bellini painted this picture during his stay in Constantinople. However, they are severely damaged and can therefore not be accepted as a definite confirmation of the painting's attribution and date.[20] Although the attribution to Bellini has never been doubted, some questions have been raised whether Bellini made the portrait in Constantinople or in Venice. The poor condition of the painting as well as the lack of other paintings from Bellini's stay in Constantinople, make it difficult to reach a clear conclusion.

On the one hand, the fact that only one painting has survived, while Angiolello speaks of 'several beautiful pictures',[21] and the fact that this painting was recorded first in Italy rather than in the Ottoman Empire, has been used as an argument to state that Bellini probably painted the portrait in Venice. In addition, Humfrey suggests that Mehmed II may have commissioned this portrait as a diplomatic gift for the doge, since the first modern record of the painting's location was in Venice.[22]

On the other hand, I tend to agree with some compelling argumentsagainst the idea that the portrait was painted in Venice. Firstly, Angiolello reports that Sultan Bayezid (r. 1481-1512), Mehmed II's son and successor, sold most of his father's artworks on the Bazaar in Constantinople immediately after Mehmed's death in 1481. Angiolello reports that Italian merchants, living in Constantinople, bought many of the works sold by the austere and strictly religious Bayezid.[23] It is possible that Bellini's portrait might have found its way back to Venice through this sale. Secondly, Rogers mentions an Ottoman palace inventory list of 1505 – with a very miscellaneous and mostly European content – that consisted of objects meant to be endowed upon the new mosque of Bayezid II in Constantinople and objects meant to be sold in aid of this project.[24] If Bellini's portrait was still in the palace at that time, it might have been sold at this later date. Thirdly, Meyer zurCapellen argues that Angiolello does not specify the word 'pictures' and can therefore also be referring to drawings instead of paintings. Mehmed's court was greatly influenced by Persian art, more specifically from the environment of Aqqoyunlu in Tabriz, where drawings were more fashionable than paintings. As several drawings from Bellini's stay in Constantinople have survived, Meyer zurCapellen argues that, although they have been, and still are, considered as costume studies in the West, in the East they may have been interpreted as actual portraits in the tradition of book illustrations from Persia. He thus claims that these drawings can be considered as part of the 'several beautiful pictures' that Angiolello mentions, and as such, reinforces the claim that Bellini painted this portrait in Constantinople.[25] A final argument in favour of the Constantinople theory, is that scholars as Meyer zurCapellen and Chong, believe that Bellini may also have been painting canvases for wall

decorations within the Royal Topkapı Palace, probably for one of the Kiosks that were under construction in the gardens and are now lost.[26] Together with the portrait, these wall decorations could also be interpreted as 'several beautiful pictures'.

Provenance and Condition and Conservation History

Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II most likely stayed in Topkapı Palace until Sultan Bayezid sold most of his father's artworks. The painting reappeared in the autumn of 1865 when Sir Austen Henry Layard purchased it in Venice 'from an old man, the son of an Englishman, who had been a contractor in the service of the Republic (of Venice). This contractor had, according to his son's avowal, secured this portrait, with other property, from the Venturi family in discharge of a debt'.[27] Layard paid five pounds for the portrait, which was considerably cheap compared to other paintings that he acquired.[28] In 1916 the painting entered the National Gallery (London) through the Layard bequest.[29]

Due to the complexity of the painting's condition and conservation history, only a brief summary of its poor condition will be given.[30] The painting has been transferred from a panel to canvas, although, it is very difficult to determine when. While it was part of the Layard collection, the painting was relined by Morrill and restored by Molteni, before the latter's death in 1867. However, because of the type of varnish that has been used, it is not clear whether the painting was varnished before Layard purchased it or during a later restoration by Pinti.[31] Judging from the short amount of time Pinti needed for his assignments, he probably did more retouching than actual revarnishing.[32] When the painting entered the National Gallery it was noted that the varnish had suffered, which led to a varnish refreshment in October 1916.Since then no subsequent treatment has been recorded.[33] The canvas has suffered greatly and many new canvas inserts (both small and big) can be noticed in the painting's X-Ray scans. Furthermore, there are numerous losses of paint and the remaining original parts have been largely overpainted.Apart from a brief examination of the surface coatings,[34] no scientific research has been done on *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*. In combination with the severe condition of the painting, this makes it rather difficult to say anything about the materials used in the ground, the underdrawing, the priming or the paint layer. In addition, the several layers of overpaint and varnish make it not only impossible to determine which changes Bellini made to the portrait, but they also hinder any attempt to make a stylistic comparison of the artist's technique with his other paintings. Consequently, this paper will focus primarily on an iconographical analysis of the painting.

Iconographical Analysis of Various Images of Sultan Mehmed II

Early European Images of the Sultan

As mentioned in the introduction, during the 1460s and 1470s various images of the sultan circulated in Europe. The two most commonly known images, a medal and an engraving, can both be traced back stylistically and iconographically to two medals by Antonio Pisanello (1395-1455), who was praised as the new Apelles.[35]

The first early image of the sultan is a portrait medal by an anonymous artist that shows the sultan in profile wearing a cap with fabric wrapped around its base, possibly in imitation of a turban wrapped around a *taj*, a ribbed felt cap. The reverse of the medal depicts a nude male figure reclining while holding a victory torch. This emblem was first used by

Pisanello on the reverse of his 1441 medal of Leonellod'Este, Duke of Ferrara. Pisanello based his reclining nude on a statue of Bacchus, who at the time was associated with Alexander the Great, because of their common victory over India.[36] As it was common knowledge in Italy that Mehmed identified himself with Alexander, it seems fitting that a medal portraying the sultan followed Pisanello's emblem.

A second early image is an engraving that bears the inscription 'El Gran Turco' and shows the sultan in profile with full beard and aquiline nose, wearing a fanciful headgear with a dragon on top. Dragons were commonly used to symbolise the qualities of a warrior.[37]Although fanciful, the strange headgear can be traced back to a typical Byzantine headwear, which was worn by the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaiologos, when he attended the 1438 Council of Eastern and Western Churches in Florence. For that occasion, Pisanello designed a bronze medal showing the Emperor in profile wearing his Byzantine hat.[38]Another variant of this engraving with watercolour reached Constantinople presumably before 1500, where it was kept in the palace album H2153 at Topkapı Palace.[39]

None of these earlier images show any resemblance or verisimilitude to the later portraits by Bellini and Costanzo, which were accepted as true portraits made after life. They did, however, identify the sultan as a strong warrior associated with Alexander the Great.

Description of *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*

Sultan Mehmed II is depicted in a three-quarter view, placed behind a parapet and surrounded by an illusionistic arch, which is clearly inspired by antique architectural designs. The columns are decorated with antique candelabrum patterns and scrolling foliage, whereas the arch itself is decorated with a sequence of leaf patterns. Over the parapet hangs a fine fabric decorated with a floral tulip motive and precious gems. In the middle of the cloth a small crown made out of pearls can be distinguished. Two plaques with Latin inscriptions are painted on both sides of the cloth. The plaques appear to have been purple originally, maybe in an imitation of porphyry.[40] In the top corners of the painting, three identical crowns are placed above each other. Under a short sleeveless fur mantle, the sultan is wearing a traditional caftan that closes from his left to his right side. Mehmed's most recognizable features are his white turban – wrapped around a red *taj* –, his aquiline nose and his brown trimmed beard. As with other portraits of Bellini, the sitter does not show expressive emotions, but is depicted in a serene and dignified manner.[41]

Portraiture: The Venetian Context

During the Renaissance, the art of portraiture developed in response to a newly discovered interest in individual human personalities.[42] Wealthy people in Italy started to acquire bust portraits in profile, inspired by the tradition of classical portraits busts, medals and coins.[43] In Venice portraits occupied a central place in the artistic production of leading artists as the Bellini family: father Jacopo (1400-1471) and his sons Gentile and Giovanni (1436/38-1516). However, by the end of the fifteenth century, Venetian portraits would employ a three-quarter view instead of the common Italian profile pose.

Southern Netherlandish artists had favoured a three-quarter view from as early as the 1420s onwards, as shown in *Man in a Red Turban* (1433, National Gallery, London) by Jan van Eyck (1390/1400-1441).[44] Although northern artists had occasionally employed a profile view, these few examples are now considered to be isolated instances of Italian

influence.[45]An important artist for the transmission of the three-quarter view from the Southern Netherlands to Venice, was the Sicilian Antonello da Messina (1430-1479), who was familiar with Netherlandish techniques and styles.[46]Antonello travelled to Venice in 1475-76 and is known to have exerted a great influence on the works of Giovanni and Gentile, who were among the first Venetian artists to use a three-quarter view in their portraits.[47] For various reasons a three-quarter view was preferred: the face gained in volume and expression, the sitter's costume could be rendered to its best advantage and the artist could demonstrate his knowledge of perspective and fore-shortening. Gentile exploited these advantages to the fullest in his *Portrait of Mehmed II*, while maintaining the psychological remoteness characteristic of earlier Venetian portraits. Also consistent with other fifteenth-century Venetian portraits is the use of a plain background, which was to help focus the viewer's attention entirely on the sitter's features and expression.[48]

Many Italian and Netherlandish artists, merchants and diplomats, crossed the Alps to visit different cities and courts. This created a continuous intercultural exchange of ideas, techniques and motifs.[49] Another Netherlandish device followed by Venetian portraitists is the use of a foreground ledge or parapet that serves as the surface for an inscription.[50] However, Bellini used the illusionistic motif of a parapet in an unusual way by adding an arch *all' antica* around the sultan, who is now portrayed as a ruler looking out from his palace window or balcony.[51] The frame thus functions as a 'window' that creates continuity between the 'painted' world and the 'real' world. The archway resembles very closely aedicular or tabernacle frames that were usually decorated with antique candelabrum patterns and scrolling foliage.[52] However, this type of architectural setting was more common in religious paintings,where the frame's structure was repeated in the painted architecture.[53] A clear example of which can be seen in Bellini's *The Virgin and Child Enthroned* (1480, National Gallery, London).[54]For secular subject matters like portraiture, the more simpler cassetta or entablature frame was generally preferred.[55]

Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II is currently shown with a thin gilded moulding frame dating most likely from the 1960s. This type of frame emphasises the artist's composition rather than distract from it.[56] Nonetheless, I would like to argue that Bellini might have chosen an aedicular frame instead of a traditional cassetta frame in order to draw extra attention to the sultan. It was not uncommon to use luxuriously decorated frames to highlight the sitter's sense of his place in society.[57] Moreover, an aedicular frame made by Jacopo da Faenza was designed by Giovanni Bellini for his *Frari Triptych*(1488, S. Maria GloriosadeiFrari, Venice), which shows that the Bellini brothers were acquainted with the designs of these frames.[58] Using an aedicular frame would have reinforced the sultan's claim as an imperial ruler in the tradition of the antique.

Three Portrait Medals of Sultan Mehmed II

During the Renaissance portrait medals in an *all' antica* style became very popular as they showed the likenesses of famous rulers. Due to their size they became highly transportable objects that, in comparison to paintings, could be easily duplicated and spread across the world.[59] There are at least three bronze medals that show the sultan's portrait.

The first medal (British Museum, London) was cast by Bellini presumably when he was back in Venice as a response to the demand of commemorative portraits of Mehmed II after his sudden death.There exist various copies of this medal, but generally all those that are pierced at the first M in the inscription *Mohameti* are considered to be contemporary. These holes may indicate that the medals were originally hung for display.[60]The fact that Bellini's

medal does not differ in essence from his painted portrait, implies that, although the painting has suffered a great deal, it must have looked similar in design.

A second medal (British Museum, London) was made by Bertoldo di Giovanni (1430/40-1491), who never travelled to the East, but worked as a resident sculptor for Lorenzo de' Medici, 'The Magnificent', who probably commissioned the medal.[61]Bertoldo rendered Mehmed's face with extreme flatness and he depicted the turban without paying attention to its clear structure. Rather than making his medal from life, Bertoldo probably used Bellini's medal as a model.[62] Further stylistic comparison with Bellini's medal seems to confirm this suggestion.

A third, and by far the most compelling medallic portrait of Mehmed II, is the one by Costanzo (British Museum, London).[63]Under the patronage of King Ferrante I of Naples, he was sent to the Ottoman court in response to Mehmed's request for a painter. It is uncertain whether he went in 1467 or in 1478.[64] Two of his medals survive: an original, signed medal in Washington and one reissued in 1481, presumably to commemorate Mehmed's death.[65]

When stylistically comparing the three portrait medals with *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, it becomes clear that Mehmed is shown with the same facial features in all portraits: a profound aquiline nose and a trimmed beard. However, Bellini's medal shows him with a fuller beard, while Costanzo's medal shows a rounder face, rendering the impression of a strong leader. Meyer zurCapellen notices that the difference in the facial features can be a result of the sultan's poor health towards the end of his life as he suffered from gout, the dynastic malady of the Ottoman Sultans.[66]

In addition, a comparison between *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II* and the reverse sides of the three medals, provides an iconographical analysis of the devices of power used by the sultan. Referring to one's personal life through means of symbolism was not uncommon in portraits, and the reverse of medals used similar messages.[67]The three crowns in the top corners of the painting are a personal emblem of Mehmed II in which he refers to the three rival powers that he defeated: Greece, Trebizond and Asia. It has been suggested by Fabris that the three crowns on both sides of the arch, together with the crown shown on the cloth over the parapet, symbolize Mehmed's position as the seventh Sultan of the House of Osman.[68] However, no other representation of Mehmed with seven crowns is known. It seems unlikely that Bellini would use an unprecedented iconographical device to symbolize the sultan's power. Moreover, the fact that Bellini uses the three crowns for the reverse of his medal suggests that the symbolical meaning was clear to the sultan's contemporaries. On the reverse of Bertoldo's medal, three female nudes, labelled 'Greece, Trebizond, Asia', are wearing similar crowns while standing on a triumphal cart, on top of which stands a turbaned figure with a beard.[69]In his left hand this figure holds a small victory figure while with his right hand he tethers the three female nudes. The cart is pulled by two horses led by the figure of Mars, the Roman god of war, who can be identified by his helmet and the trophy he holds. In the exergue of the medal two personifications of sea and land witness the scene, who resemble the reclining nude figure in the earlier discussed medal by Pisanello.[70] It is not difficult to understand this allegory of victory where the sultan, while following the god of war, conquered his three rivals.The allegory of victory depicted on Bertoldo's reverse is clearly in the tradition of ancient Roman coins, of which Lorenzo de' Medici had a large collection.[71] Only the medal of Costanzo does not employ the device of the three crowns.

Afterlife of the Sultan's Self-Fashioned Image

Both *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II* and the three medals have inspired a number of copies and variants of the image of the sultan both in the West and the East.[72] By making a visual comparison between these various images, it will become clear whether the sultan's self-fashioned image was a success.

Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II inspired at least two other paintings and one watercolour. A first painting, a double portrait of a young unidentified Ottoman man and Sultan Mehmed II, has been attributed by Babinger to Bellini. To my knowledge, Babinger is the last scholar to have examined this painting, which at the time was in a private Swiss collection.[73] Without examining the original it is impossible to reach any kind of conclusion about the painting's attribution, date or provenance. The portrait shows both men in a three-quarter view turned towards each other, while sitting behind a long parapet without any inscriptions. In composition and style the sultan's portrait bears close resemblance to *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*.

A second painting dates from 1510-1520 and shows Mehmed turning towards the viewer. It was common for later Venetian artists to introduce motion into their sitter's pose.[74] The sultan is shown wearing a white turban around a red *taj* and a reddish-brown caftan with an ornamental design. The sultan's face, with his full beard and aquiline nose, shows great resemblance to that depicted by Bellini.[75]

A third image is a watercolour drawing on paper entitled *Mehmed II smelling a rose* (H2153, fol. 10r, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul). The portrait is dated around 1480 and was most likely done by an Ottoman artist. The sultan is sitting cross-legged, smelling a rose while holding a handkerchief in his other hand. Handkerchiefs were favourite gifts and it was fashionable to be depicted while holding one.[76] In contrast to Bellini's painting, the sultan is now wearing a gold-brown caftan, which is gathered at the waist with a white sash and lined at the wrists and collar with a small strip of red fabric.[77] Over his caftan, he wears a white fur-lined, sleeveless blue caftan that functions as an over garment. The white turban around the red *taj* resembles strongly the one depicted by Bellini. When comparing this watercolour with Bellini's portrait, it becomes clear that the Ottoman artist must have been familiar with it. The facial features, from the full beard to the aquiline nose over the narrow, slightly raised eyebrows, show remarkable resemblance to Bellini's portrait.

Costanzo's medal equally served as a basis for future representations of the sultan. Executed in watercolour and gold on paper, *Bust portrait of Mehmed II* (H2153, fol. 145v, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul) shows the sultan in profile wearing a dark green caftan lined with brown fur. Following Costanzo's example, the Ottoman artist rendered the sultan's face in a rounder fashion with turban's wrappings that are almost identical to those depicted by Costanzo.

The reverse of Costanzo's medal, however, inspired a European artist instead of an Ottoman artist, namely Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) and his drawing *Ottoman Rider* (1495). Dürer's rider is shown with an Ottoman sword, *scabbard*, on his side and a sceptre in his right hand. From the drawing's overall composition, it seems likely that Dürer came across Costanzo's medal. The drawing's date suggests that this possibly happened during Dürer's first journey to Venice (1494-1495). Eventually, Dürer's work would define and help spread the image of the Turk in Northern Europe.[78]

A final hypothesis worth exploring is whether *Bust Portrait of Mehmed II* and *Mehmed II smelling a Rose* were commissioned by the sultan. If so, could it be that the Ottoman artists, who made these portraits, deliberately followed the example of Costanzo and Bellini, knowing that this would please the sultan? Here, it should be noted that *Mehmed II smelling a Rose* is also known as the 'Sinan'-portrait. Sinan Beg was an Ottoman artist, who formed part of the sultan's palace retinue and had a European denomination. Should *Mehmed II smelling a Rose* be the work of Sinan Beg, then it seems very likely that this portrait was indeed commissioned by the sultan.

Conclusion: Sultan Mehmed II as a New Alexander the Great

Sultan Mehmed II was known for his ambition to revive the lost glory of the Roman Empire by uniting Constantinople with Rome.[79] He had a great interest in the heroes of classical antiquity and, more specifically, in the life of Alexander the Great.[80] He saw himself as a new Alexander and wanted to create a world empire that joined East and West in a single faith and under a single monarch.[81] As Mehmed conquered Constantinople at the age of 21, the comparison of him as a new Alexander made by Byzantine authors was understandable. The sultan found Alexander a good example for his own life as a ruler and for his imperial ambitions.[82] Following other contemporary rulers in the Renaissance tradition of portraiture, Mehmed ordered a portrait, just like Alexander ordered one from Apelles. It was known among Renaissance rulers that Alexander the Great was so much impressed by Apelles that he would frequent the artist's studio. By engaging with, and taking a personal interest in Bellini and his work, Mehmed identified himself with Alexander the Great. For similar reasons other European Renaissance rulers would also try to emulate the relationship between Alexander and Apelles by taking a stronger interest in their court artists.[83] Being fully aware of Renaissance portraiture tradition, Mehmed commissioned a portrait and a medal of himself *all' antica*.[84] He thus self-fashioned his identity as a new Alexander the Great. Moreover, in order to compete successfully with other Renaissance rulers it was crucial for Mehmed to have his portrait rendered in a Renaissance fashion. By asking '*un bon pytor*' (a good painter)[85] and knowing that Venice did not want to jeopardise its newly established trading position, Mehmed ensured that his representation would be rendered by a skilful and talented artist, worthy to portray him. By commissioning both Costanzo and Bellini he ensured that his self-fashioned image, in which he used the well-known symbol of the three crowns, was spread across Europe and eventually also in the East. In conclusion, Sultan Mehmed II consciously wanted to be seen not only as the Conqueror, *Fatih*, but more importantly as a second Alexander the Great, *Iskendar*, capable of uniting East and West.

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[1] I would like to thank MarijnEveraarts, SerenellaSessini and Katie Reid for their support and critical questions.

[2] L. Jardine and J. Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West*, New York 2000: 133.

[3] Sultan Mehmed II is also known under the name *Fatih*, Conqueror, and *Iskendar*, new Alexander.

[4] A. Çırakman, *From the "terror of the world" to the "sick man of Europe": European images of Ottoman empore and society from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth*, New York 2002.

[5] A. Akasoy, 'A Baghdad court in Constantinople/Istanbul', in *Das Mittelalter*, X no. 2, 2005: 146; F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time. Translated from the German by Ralph Manheim*, ed. W. C. Hickman, Princeton 1978: 494, 499; J. M. Rogers, 'Mehmed the Conqueror: Between East and West', in *Bellini and the East* [exhib. cat.], London and Boston 2005: 80.

[6] Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II*, 1480, oil on canvas, 70 x 52 cm, National Gallery London, NG 3099.

[7] A. Akasoy, 2005: 136.

[8] R. Preimesberger, '"The Face that is known draws the eyes of all spectators…" – Leon Battista Alberti on the impact of the face in a painting', in *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*, ed. K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann, New York 2011: 77-84; L. Syson, 'Circulating a Likeness? Coin Portraits in Late Fifteenth-Century Italy', in *The Image of the Individual Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. N. Mann and L. Syson, London 1998: 113-123; S. Weppelmann, 'Some Thoughts on Likeness in Italian Early Renaissance Portraits', in *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*, ed. K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann, New York 2011: 64-76.

[9] C. Campbell and A. Chong (eds), *Bellini and the East* [exhib. cat.], London and Boston 2005; A. Contadini and C. Norton, *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, Farnham 2013; D. Howard, *Venice & The East: the Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100-1500*, New Haven and London 2000; L. Monnas, *Renaissance Velvets*, London 2012; G. Necipoğlu, 'Süleyman the Magnificent and the Representation of Power in the Context of Ottoman-Hapsburg-Papal Rivalry', in *The Art Bulletin*, LXXI no. 3, 1989: 401-427.

[10] D. Howard, 'Venice, the Bazaar of Europe', in *Bellini and the East* [exhib. cat.], London and Boston 2005: 12-13; R. E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza Islamic Trade and Italian Art 1300-1600*, California and London 2002: 20, 22-23.

[11] Howard, 2005: 16.

[12] A. Contadini, 'Artistic Contacts: Current Scholarship and Future Tasks', in *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. C. Burnett and A. Contadini, London 1999: 4, 12; Mack, 2002: 22-23, 25.

[13] A. Chong, 'Gentile Bellini in Istanbul: Myths and Misunderstandings', in *Bellini and the East* [exhib. cat.], London and Boston 2005: 107; J. Meyer zurCapellen, *Gentile Bellini*, Stuttgart 1985: 17.

[14] Chong, 2005: 107; M. Davies, *The Earlier Italian Schools*, National Gallery Catalogues, London 1951, repr. 1961: 49; L. Thuasne, *Gentile Bellini et Sultan Mohammed II*, ed. E. Leroux, Paris 1888: 10.

[15] Babinger, 1978: 403-404; Chong, 2005: 107, 114; Meyer zurCapellen, 1985: 18, 21; J. Meyer zur Capellen, 'Gentile Bellini als Bildnismaler am Hofe Mehmets II', in *Sultan Mehmet II. Eroberer Konstantinopels – Patron der Künste*, ed. N. Asutayand U. R. Effenberger, Vienna 2009: 142; Rogers, 2005: 88.

[16] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 74-75, 78, 100.

[17] Meyer zurCapellen, 1985: 109-110.

[18] Chong, 2005: 108, 132.

[19] It seems that most artists presented their self-portrait to possible patrons as a gift in return for a favour. J. Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*, New Haven and London 1998: 8.

[20] Right-hand inscription: 'MCCCCLXXX./ DIE XXV.ME / NSIS NOVEM/ BRIS' (*25 November 1480*). The left-hand inscription is very damaged and a more recent one has been added, which reads: '…IL(?)ISQV…R/…OR ORBIS… CVNCTARE...'. It has been suggested that the inscription could have said 'Victor Orbis', in order to praise the sultan as 'Conqueror of the World'. The more recent inscription mentions the names of Bellini and Mehmed II. Davies points out that this insertion may be based on an older, now lost, inscription. Campbell and Chong, 2005: 78; Davies, 1961: 51.

[21] Chong, 2005: 110.

[22] P. Humfrey, 'The Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Venice', in *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*, ed. K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann, New York 2011: 55.

[23] Babinger, 1978: 379; Campbell and Chong, 2005: 78.; Howard, 2005: 31; Meyer zur Capellen, 2009: 141; Thuasne, 1888: 32.

[24] Rogers, 2005: 95-96.

[25] Meyer zur Capellen, 2009: 151-154; Rogers, 2005: 84-85.

[26] Chong, 2005: 110-111; Meyer zur Capellen, 2009: 151-154.

[27] National Gallery Archives [hereafter NGA], Dossier 3099, Unpublished Material; J. Anderson, 'Layard and Morelli', in *Austen Henry Layard tral'Oriente e Venezia*, ed. F. M. Fales and B. J. Hickey, Rome 1987: 117; Campbell and Chong, 2005: 78; Davies, 1961: 52.

[28] Anderson, 1987: 117; D. Bomford, *Conservation of paintings*, London, 1997: 48-49.

[29] NGA, Dossier 3099, Unpublished Material; Babinger, 1978: 379; Campbell and Chong, 2005: 78; Davies, 1961: 52.

[30] I would like to thank Caroline Campbell (Curator of Italian Painting before 1500) and conservator Rachel Billinge at the National Gallery in London for their professional advice.

[31] NGA, NG 3099 Conservation Record: Brief History of Condition and Treatment; Bomford, 1997: 48; R. White and J. Kirby, 'A Survey of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Varnish Compositions Found on a Selection of Paintings in the National Gallery Collection', in *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, XXII, 2001: 77.

[32] For detailed information about the organic composition of the varnish, please check White and Kirby, 2001: 83-84.

[33] NGA, NG 3099 Conservation Record: Brief History of Condition and Treatment.

[34] White and Kirby, 2001: 77.

[35] P. Rubin, 'Understanding Renaissance Portraiture', in *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*, ed. K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann, New York 2011: 6.

[36] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 70.

[37] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 66-67.

[38] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 66-67; Contadini, 1999: 7; Jardine and Brotton, 2000: 25-26, 173-174; J. Raby, *Venice, Dürer and the Oriental Mode*, London 1982: 18.

[39] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 66-67; J. M. Rogers, 'Ornament Prints, Patterns and Designs East and West', in *Islam and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. C. Burnett and A. Contadini, London 1999: 142-143; Rogers, 2005: 84-85.

[40] NGA, Dossier 3099, Unpublished Material: 'mix ultramarine and red lake, which would have looked purple originally'.

[41] Chong, 2005: 100.

[42] Humfrey, 2011: 48-49, 63; J. Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, Washington 1989: 3; Rubin, 2011: 18.

[43] Pope-Hennessy, 1989: 64.

[44] Campbell, 1990: 81; J. Cranston, *ThePoetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*, Cambridge 2000: 17.

[45] Campbell, 1990: 81.

[46] Campbell, 1990: 149; K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann (eds), *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini* [exhib. cat.], New York 2011: 339.

[47] Campbell, 1990: 86; J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, D. Gordon and N. Penny (eds), *Giotto to Dürer. Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery* [exhib. cat.], New Haven and London 1991: 92, 95; Humfrey, 2011: 48-51, 58; Pope-Hennessy, 1989: 3.

[48] Campbell, 1990: 81; Dunkerton, Foister, Gordon and Penny, 1991: 92, 95-96; Humfrey, 2011: 51, 56.

[49] Famous examples include Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) and Hugo van der Goes's *Portinari Altarpiece* (1475).L. Campbell, *Renaissance Portraits. Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries*, New Haven and London 1990: 115, 149.

[50] For example: Van Eyck's *Portrait of Tymotheos* (ca. 1432). Cranston, 2000: 17, 53.

[51] Dunkerton, Foister, Gordon and Penny, 1991: 96; Humfrey, 2011: 50-51, 55.

[52] Dunkerton, Foister, Gordon and Penny, 1991: 156; P. Mitchell and L. Roberts, *A History of European Picture Frames*, London 1996: 17-18; P. Mitchell and L. Roberts, *Frameworks. Form, Function & Ornament in European Portrait Frames*, London 1996: 22, 390.

[53] Mitchell and Roberts, *A History of*,1996: 17-18; Mitchell and Roberts, *Frameworks,* 1996: 390; N. Penny, *Frames*, London 1997: 33.

[54] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 60, 78.

[55] The cassetta frame is in essence a simplification of the tabernacle frame, as it essentially is an extended entablature wrapped around all four sides of the frame. T. J. Newbery, G. Bisacca and L. B. Kanter, *Italian Renaissance Frames*, New York 1990: 24.

[56] Correspondence with Peter Schade, Head of Framing, The National Gallery, London.

[57] Mitchell and Roberts, *Frameworks,* 1996: 21.

[58] Dunkerton, Foister, Gordon and Penny, 1991: 156; Mitchell and Roberts, *A History of*, 1996: 18.

[59] Dunkerton, Foister, Gordon and Penny, 1991: 90; Jardine and Brotton, 2000: 23; Woods-Marsden, 1998: 8.

[60] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 74.

[61] T. R. Blurton (ed.), *The Enduring Image. Treasures from the British Museum* [exhib. cat.], London 1997: 154.

[62] Babinger, 1978: 385; G. F. Hill, *A corpus of the Italian medals of the Renaissance before Cellini*, 2 vols, London 1930, vol. I, 238.

[63] Babinger, 1978: 505-506.

[64] G. F. Hill, *Medals of the Renaissance. Revised and enlarged by Graham Pollard*, London 1978 (or.: 1920):47.

[65] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 72; Rogers, 2005: 88.

[66] Babinger, 1978: 403-404, 425; Rogers, 2005: 88.

[67] Dunkerton, Foister, Gordon and Penny, 1991: 99-100.

[68] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 78; Meyer zur Capellen, 2009: 158; G. Renda, 'Mehmed the Conqueror and the Arts', in *Ressam, sultan veportresi; The Artist, the Sultan and his Portrait* [exhib. cat.], ed. M. Eminoğlu, Istanbul 1999:15.

[69] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 74, 76.

[70] Babinger, 1978: 387; Campbell and Chong, 2005: 76.

[71] Campbell and Chong, 2005: 76.

[72] Dunkerton, Foister, Gordon and Penny, 1991: 90-91; Humfrey, 2011: 55.

[73] NGA, Dossier 3099, Unpublished Material; F. Babinger, 'Un ritrattoignorato di Maometto II, opera di Gentile Bellini', in *Arte Veneta*, vol. XV, 1961: 28-29.

[74] For example: Giorgione, *Man in Armour* (1505/1510). Cranston, 2000: 17; Humfrey, 2011: 63.

[75] The painting's current location is unknown. Campbell and Chong, 2005: 78.

[76] J. M. Rogers and R. M. Ward, *Süleyman the Magnificent*, London 1988: 178.

[77] A sash is a long strip of fabric that functions as a belt. Rogers and Ward, 1988: 181-182.

[78] Raby, 1982: 81.

[79] Necipoğlu, 1989: 425.

[80] Babinger, 1978: 499.

[81] Necipoğlu, 1989: 425.

[82] Akasoy, 2005: 146; Babinger, 1978: 494, 499; Rogers, 2005: 80.

[83] Woods-Marsden, 1998: 23.

[84] Rogers, 2005: 87.

[85] Chong, 2005: 107.

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She gained professional experience as a freelance tour guide and worked as an intern for various cultural organisations. She also gained teaching experience as an English language teacher in Turkey, before resuming her studies in 2013 with an MA in Art History, Curatorship and Renaissance Culture from the Warburg Institute in London, jointly offered by the National Gallery. Her academic interests centre around the cross-cultural interactions between East and West during the Renaissance period with a main focus on the impact of Islamic fabrics, rugs and costumes on paintings and prints in the Low Countries.