Seljuk Past and Timurid Present: Tile Decoration of the Yeşil Külliye in Bursa

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Abstract

This article focuses on the Yeşil Külliye in Bursa, Turkey, built in 1419–24. Even though it is one of the major Ottoman monuments of the early fifteenth century, the complex—a mosque-zâviye, madrasa, mausoleum, bath, and kitchen—has not been viewed in the broader context of its time, when the political situation forced the Ottoman sultan to reposition his struggling empire between Anatolia, Timurid Central Asia, and the Balkans. Whereas early Ottoman architecture, from the emergence of the principality until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, has been reevaluated in recent years, the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries are only gradually receiving increased scholarly attention. The Ottoman sultan Bayezid I, defeated by the Mongol conqueror Timur, was led into captivity after the battle of Ankara in 1402, and his son Mehmed Çelebi eventually emerged victorious from a civil war with his brothers. In 1413 he came to the throne as Mehmed I, ruling as sultan of the Ottoman Empire until his death in 1421. The Yeşil Külliye was a focus of Mehmed I’s patronage. I argue that the elaborate tile decoration of the Yeşil mosque and mausoleum created a deliberate dialogue with both the Anatolian heritage of Seljuk architecture and the broader Persianate culture of post-Mongol Iran and Central Asia. With their varied techniques, color schemes, and visual references, the tiles signal the extent to which Ottoman visual culture in the early fifteenth century mirrored the constant renegotiation of power, rule, and representation that involved the sultan, historians, and builders.

Timurid Invasion and Ottoman Recovery

After his 1402 defeat at the battle of Ankara by the Central Asian conqueror Timur (r. 1370–1405), the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402) was led into captivity together with two of his sons, Musa and Mustafa. For the next eleven

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years, the sultan’s remaining sons fought one another in a bloody civil war to regain fragments of the Ottoman principality and challenge Timurid domination. Over the course of the conflict they came into contact with post-Mongol Anatolia, Iran, and Central Asia, and the resulting change in Ottoman outlook is evident in the arts of the period.

In 1413 Mehmed I emerged victorious from the civil war and rebuilt the Ottoman principality from his base in Bursa. The city became the site of the sultan’s mosque complex and, a few years later, of his tomb. Mehmed I’s son and successor, Murad II (r. 1421–44 and 1446–51), commissioned the mausoleum. The conflict with the Timurids, rebuilding the Ottoman principality (used here in approximation of the Turkish term beylik) on an Anatolian base, and the surrounding region in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, when the Anatolian Seljuks were at the peak of their power. The patronage of Sultan ᶜAlāʾ al-Dīn Kayqubāḍ (r. 1220–37), in particular, led to the emergence of an architectural style associated with the ruler. ⁴ While some features, such as monumental muqarnas (honeycomb) portals with decorative frames, took hold elsewhere in Anatolia, a unified form of architecture did not emerge. The Mongol conquest of Ana-

The Yeşil Külliye presents clear stylistic connections to Timurid Central Asia and pre-Ottoman Anatolia. While the term “pre-Ottoman” can be problematic, in that it may imply a potentially teleological perspective focused on the rise of the Ottomans, I use it here as a way of moving beyond the specificity of such dynastic terms as “Seljuk” or “Ilkhanid,” which have their own distinct historiographies in the context of medieval Anatolia. ³ “Seljuk”—used here to designate architectural forms—refers to the architecture established in Konya and the surrounding region in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, when the Anatolian Seljuks were at the peak of their power. The patronage of Sultan ᶜAlāʾ al-Dīn Kayqubāḍ (r. 1220–37), in particular, led to the emergence of an architectural style associated with the ruler. ⁴ While some features, such as monumental muqarnas (honeycomb) portals with decorative frames, took hold elsewhere in Anatolia, a unified form of architecture did not emerge. The Mongol conquest of Ana-


tolia in 1243 led to the disappearance of royal Seljuk patronage, and all standardizing efforts in architecture were abandoned. In the following decades and into the fourteenth century, regional styles—often centered on such major cities as Sivas, Erzurum, Kayseri, and Konya—were consolidated as local patrons came forward in the absence of centralized rule and patronage. The breakdown of Mongol power in Anatolia in the 1330s only added to this politically and culturally fragmented picture, and similar dynamics remained in place well into the fifteenth century.

Bursa was the center of the realm under Mehmed I, but not the capital; Edirne retained this role from about 1368 until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. While Bursa was at the cultural heart of Ottoman architectural innovation, it was located on the edge of the post-Mongol eastern Islamic lands. Throughout the fourteenth century, central and eastern Anatolia were peripheral areas for Ottoman architecture; stylistic evidence suggests that Islamic monuments in these regions did not serve as references for Ottoman builders and patrons before the early fifteenth century. During the reign of Mehmed I, however, that changed: the architecture of Konya, which harked back to a strong past under the Seljuks before Mongol rule, became a source of inspiration, while Bursa was reshaped as a center of Ottoman dynastic memory. My study thus includes multiple peripheries and in this way parallels the discourse of geography, history, and artistic production that Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg present in their analysis of Italian art. The dynamics that I analyze also benefit from recent discussions of artistic geographies across regions and cultural spaces. In this article, I focus on the Ottomans and their cultural production that reached from Anatolia into Central Asia, moving beyond the vast literature on the relationship between center and provinces in the expanding Ottoman Empire.

While Bursa emerged as the Ottoman cultural center, Mehmed I looked east as he began to rebuild the realm. Tabriz, in western Iran, was an important economic and artistic center, a role it had held since the late thirteenth century, when the Mongol Ilkhanids made it their capital. After their fall in the 1350s, the city changed hands among various successors. In the following decades, Tabriz remained in the shadow of the Timurids, who invaded it several times in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. With the Timurid invasion of the Ottoman lands and the defeat of Bayezid I, the Ottoman territories became connected to the larger Timurid realm. The exceedingly complex dynamics of center and periphery persisted after Mehmed I’s reign, when the influence of Timurid cultural production in the eastern Islamic world was at its peak.

The movements of workshops and individual craftsmen figure prominently in the scholarly literature; given the scarcity of written sources on artisans in the Islamic world before the late fifteenth century, stylistic and technical features are often the only means with which art historians can reconstruct networks of traveling craftsmen. Such movement was also crucial for disseminating styles and techniques across the Islamic world, supplemented by the use of technical drawings that were seldom preserved. From this perspective, the Ottoman realm was one of the peripheries of the Timurid cultural orbit. This should not be viewed negatively: a periphery can be the source of fruitful artistic production in its own right.

In early fifteenth-century Bursa, architectural evidence reveals a multilayered cultural environment invested in local traditions and new trends imported from Iran and Central Asia. First, we will discuss the setting of the Yeşil Külliye, then analyze Bursa as a center of Ottoman patronage before turning to the tile decoration of the Yeşil Külliye to assess its place between the Timurid present and the Seljuk past.

**The Yeşil Külliye**

The building complex that Mehmed I commissioned in Bursa comprised a madrasa, mausoleum, mosque-zāviye, bathhouse, and imaret, a kitchen for preparing food for charitable distribution (Fig. 2). Known as the Yeşil, or Green, Külliye for the color of some of its interior and exterior tile decoration, it was partially complete in 1421, when the mausoleum was added. The mosque-zāviye remained unfinished under Murad II, even though construction continued for a few years. Its porch was never built, but holes on the facade, just below the cornice, indicate where it would have been connected to the walls (Fig. 3a–b).

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In plan (Fig. 2, no. 2), the mosque-zâviye belongs to a group of monuments that has been variously designated eyvan mosque, Bursa type, reverse-T, multifunction mosque, mosque with side spaces (yan mekânlı cami), convent mosque, and cross-axial mosque (çapraz-mihverli cami). The complicated historiography of these terms is related to the implications of their mixed use, and recent work has focused on the relationship between form and function in these buildings. According to Aptullah Kuran's detailed classification of early Ottoman mosques, the Yeşil Cami is a “cross-axial eyvan mosque,” a variant of the T-shaped plan, in which the basic form is expanded with additional side rooms. The central, domed courtyard and use of iwans (eyvan in Turkish)—rectangular vaulted spaces framed by large arches opening to the central courtyard—is thought to be based on the plans of thirteenth-century Seljuk madrasas. Indeed, the madrasas commissioned by Seljuk and other Muslim patrons in Anatolia beginning in the late twelfth century are variations of two- or four-iwan plans in which vaulted spaces face each other across open or covered courtyards. Examples include the Karatay Madrasa in Konya (1251–52), with its domed courtyard, and the Gök Medrese in Sivas (1271–72), which is open at the center. Given the large number of medieval two- and four-iwan madrasas in Anatolia, it is reasonable to assume that the Ottoman reverse-T plan refers, in part, to earlier Islamic monuments in the region. Changes in function and spatial additions during the Ottoman transformation of earlier architectural forms turned the two- or four-iwan plans into an entirely new building type. The reverse-T plan allows for the presence of a mosque and rooms for Sufis in the same building. The integration of different functions into one structure, without revealing these multiple purposes on the building’s exterior, is a new feature in Ottoman architecture in the late fourteenth century. Earlier multifunctional monuments in Anatolia, such as the Mahperi Hatun Complex in Kayseri (1237–38) and the Sahib Ata Complex in Konya (1258–84), read as composites on the outside even when direct connections exist between parts of the structure on the interior: in both of these examples, access to the mausoleum is possible from a madrasa or khângâh, a structure for Sufis akin to a zâviye, while the mosque retains a separate entrance.17

bul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 240n49.


The plan of the Yeşil Cami, by contrast, continues a line of development that began in Bursa at the end of the previous century. The interior space departs from the expectations that viewers familiar with thirteenth-century monuments in central and eastern Anatolia would have had based on the facade, with its muqarnas portal. The portal of the Yeşil Cami leads to a vestibule that is connected to the mosque’s central space by a hallway. The central courtyard is covered by a dome and has a fountain in the middle. At the end of the central axis is the largest iwan, its floor level raised four steps above the courtyard. This section constitutes the mosque, or prayer room, underscored by the large tiled mihrab on its southeastern wall. Two smaller iwans to the east and west are also raised above the courtyard level; these served as rooms for Sufi teaching. Two square rooms, accessible by doors on the left and right before the steps leading to the mosque iwan, and two rectangular rooms, which can be entered from the vestibule, complete the ensemble. The three iwans and two subsidiary spaces near the mosque iwan are domed. Above the vestibule, a second floor contains the sultan’s loge (hünkâr mahfili), which includes several small rooms and a balcony overlooking the monument’s central space. The domes are visible from the exterior (Fig. 4). The walls, built of stone, are clad in marble, and intricate carving decorates the portal, two rows of windows on the portal facade, and the windows on lateral walls. Small inserts of turquoise tile emphasize the qibla iwan, forming thin bands around the window frames of its western wall and the single window on the south (Fig. 5).

The octagonal domed Yeşil Türbe (mausoleum) is situated to the south of the mosque-zaviye in an elevated loca-

Figure 4. Mausoleum (left) and mosque (right), Yeşil Külliye, 1419–24, Bursa (photo: Sébah & Joaillier, ca. 1890–1910, reproduced courtesy of Special Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University).

The portal is decorated with multicolored tile. A foundation inscription above the entrance refers to Mehmed I’s burial: “This is the mausoleum of the late, the blessed, the martyr, sultan, son of the sultan Mehmed son of Bayezid Khan. He passed away dur-

Figure 5. Window frame in west wall of qibla iwan with tile decoration, mosque, Yeşil Külliye, 1419–24, Bursa (photo: author). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.

18. Ekrem Hakkı Ayverdi, Osmanlı’nın mârîsinde Çelebi ve II. Sultan Murad devri, 806–855 (1403–1451) (İstanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1972), fig. 169; and Gabriel, Une capitale turque, 1:94 and fig. 29.
That of Murad I (1365–85) consists of a mosque-zaviye with a madrasa on the upper floor, a bathhouse, and the sultan’s mausoleum. The complex of Bayezid I (begun 1390, completed before 1395) originally comprised a mosque-zaviye, madrasa, mausoleum, bathhouse, imaret, hospital, and palace, but only the first four buildings are extant. Murad II’s (1424–26) compound contains a mosque, hospital, and several mausolea, some added at later dates.20

The structures of the Yeşil Külliye are distributed unevenly over a hilly site that offers views (partially obscured today by trees and construction) of the city center, the complex of Bayezid I, and the fertile alluvial plain to the north, the Yeşilova.21 The site affords maximum visibility, and the Yeşil Türbe, with its elevated location and turquoise tile cladding, stands at the center of attention. Because of the site’s spatial arrangement, devoid of symmetry and enclosing walls, the Yeşil Külliye does not appear as a single structural unit. Unlike the later mosque ensembles of the Ottoman sultans in Istanbul, beginning with that of Meḥmed II (1463–70), the Yeşil Külliye was not built with an emphasis on spatial unity.22 Instead, the buildings are linked by visual connections and by inscriptions that mention their patron.23 The tile decoration is a key element in the creation of those visual ties. Before exploring them, it will be useful to consider the issue of dynastic memory in early Ottoman architecture and Bursa as a former capital and necropolis of the Ottoman sultans, which lies behind Meḥmed I’s motives in founding the Yeşil Külliye.

**Dynastic Memory in Bursa**

Recent studies have focused on early Ottoman architecture, from the emergence of Ottoman rule in the western

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Anatolian region of Bithynia in the late thirteenth century to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Oya Pancaroğlu, Robert Ousterhout, and Suna Çağaptay have pointed to the continuation of Byzantine building practices and their role in identity formation in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, when the Ottoman territories were consolidated. This view of early Ottoman architecture departs from the traditional one, which ties these monuments to preconceived ethnic and religious categories. The scholarly reevaluation, however, has focused on the late thirteenth and especially, because of the larger number of extant monuments, fourteenth century, when the Ottoman realm was first expanding and Ottoman identity was being formed. I focus on the transmission of style and techniques in the creation of Ottoman architecture somewhat later, when the dynamics of architecture and patronage had shifted. Scholars are slowly reconsidering the late fourteenth and especially the early fifteenth century, a particularly complicated time in Ottoman history for both political and cultural reasons. Efforts at identity construction increased in the fifteenth century, as Linda Darling has shown. The patronage of Mehmed I in general and the Yeşil Külliye in particular are part of this development, yet only recently has work on the historical context and primary sources made possible a new assessment of material culture in the fifteenth-century Ottoman Empire.

Dimitris Kastritis has studied the civil war waged by the sons of Bayezid I after the sultan’s defeat at the hands of Timur. After being held in captivity for eight months, Bayezid died in unclear circumstances. His sons fought a bloody war for supremacy in Anatolia and the Balkans in the following decade, and the Ottoman realm was nearly lost in the ensuing violence. Mehmed Çelebi, Isa, and Emir Süleyman were initially the main actors. After his victory in 1402, Timur appointed Emir Süleyman ruler of Rumeli, the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman lands, and installed a nephew of Bayezid I in Bursa; the latter was soon ousted by Isa, who received a decree of appointment from Timur confirming him as ruler of Bithynia. In 1403 Musa was released from Timurid captiv-


ity into Mehmed Çelebi’s custody, but he later rebelled and was defeated in battle in 1413.  
27 Mehmed Çelebi ultimately emerged victorious and came to the throne in 1413 as Mehmed I, ruling as sultan of the Ottoman realm until his death in 1421. His reign was not uncontested; the sultan’s last remaining brother, Mustafa, led a revolt in 1415–16, after he was released from Timurid captivity.  
28 The Ottoman realm was once more consolidated during this time, forming the basis of later conquests, including that of Constantinople in 1453 under Mehmed II (known as Mehmed the Conqueror, r. 1444–46 and 1451–81). As with many Ottoman sultans, Mehmed I’s ascension entailed a renegotiation of the past and of the relationship between the Ottoman dynasty and the post-Mongol world of central and eastern Anatolia.  
The Mongol conquest of Anatolia in the 1240s brought about the gradual end of Seljuk rule in the region. Although members of the dynasty can be identified as late as 1307, the Seljuks lost political power when they became vassals of the Mongol khan and were embroiled in decades-long internal succession struggles.  
29 The dynasty slipped further into obscurity after the Mamluk invasion of Anatolia in 1277, when the sultan of Egypt and Syria, Baybars I (r. 1260–77), held the region for six months before retreating to Syria at the start of winter. As a consequence of this invasion, the Mongol Ilkhanids of Iran, the main rivals of the Mamluks and overlords of much of central and eastern Anatolia, tightened control over the region, levying taxes and appointing governors.  
30 Beginning in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, the Mongols’ hold over the region slowly dissolved. This was part of a process that began after the death of the Ilkhanid sultan Abū Sa’īd (r. 1316–35) and eventually led to the collapse, in the 1350s, of the Ilkhanid realm, which had its center in Iran. Former Mongol vassals and governors formed independent realms in central and eastern Anatolia as Ilkhanid power waned.  
31 Thus, from the mid-thirteenth century on Anatolia was closely connected to the Mongol Empire and rooted in a post-Mongol world, even after the fall of the Ilkhanid dynasty in Iran. The Ottoman principality in its initial stages was part of that world as it encountered the frontier zone between Islam and Christianity and the fluid power dynamics of Anatolia in the late thirteenth century.  
During the reign of Osman I (r. ca. 1299–1326), the Mongols remained the dominant force in much of central and eastern Anatolia and were effectively overlords of several beyliks in western Anatolia.  
Baki Tezcan has argued that the Ottomans’ attitude toward Anatolia’s Mongol past shifted over time, a change that is reflected in early Ottoman chronicles.  
33 In texts written in the late fifteenth century, late thirteenth-century Anatolia was transformed into something distinctly more Seljuk than the historical reality described above, and the Mongol presence was nearly erased. The past became an elaborate fiction in which the Ottomans were connected to local Seljuk rather than invading Mongol overlords, and legitimacy was based on Islamic power relations. A Seljuk sultan named ʿAlā al-Dīn—a legendary figure without a clear historical basis—was said to have conferred ruling authority on Osman I.  
34 Despite this shift, ʿAşıkpaşazâde (d. 1485), one of the main chroniclers of the Ottoman dynasty, also used earlier sources that referred to the Mongols instead of the Seljuks, showing that such texts did exist and were known at the time. His writings reveal the extent to which Ottoman perception of the Mongol past had changed since 1300. Tezcan shows that earlier accounts on which ʿAşıkpaşazâde draws hark back to the late thirteenth and fourteenth century, when the Ottomans saw a close connection between their rule and that of the Mongols. After 1402, however, the traumatic defeat of
Bayezid I by Timur turned the post-Mongol world into enemy territory for the Ottomans, bringing about the changes just described.  

This rewriting of the past found a parallel in twentieth-century Turkey. In the aftermath of World War I, with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the Ottoman past became marginalized in the historical literature. The trauma of the empire’s demise was still fresh in the public consciousness. A prevailing narrative of decline depicted the present in a positive light and proposed strong ties to a pre-Ottoman past. To create an identity for the new Turkish nation-state, the Ottomans and their multiethnic empire.

The fifteen-century shift in the writing of history raises many questions, including to what extent the Ottomans’ changing attitude toward the Anatolian past was reflected in architecture after Mehmed I’s victory over his brothers in the succession war of 1402–13. Whereas in early Ottoman Bithynia architectural regionalism was pronounced, in Bursa and, to a lesser extent, in Edirne in the early fifteenth century we can detect an emerging interest in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century architecture of central and eastern Anatolia. There are few detailed studies of late fourteenth- to early fifteenth-century monuments in central and eastern Anatolia, but a survey reveals marked regional differences. This phenomenon is consistent with the strongly regional architecture that developed after the Mongol conquest of Anatolia in the 1240s, when centralized Seljuk patronage broke down and the range of patrons and architectural styles became more diverse. These regionally ingrained architectural styles persisted well beyond the end of Seljuk and even Mongol control over Anatolia. Thus, a monument built in the principality of Karaman in the region of Konya in the late fourteenth century, such as the Hatunie Medrese (1381–82), still displays a prominent muqarnas portal and stonework connected to earlier monuments in the region.

Like several of his ancestors, Mehmed I made his mark on Bursa, a city that changed hands repeatedly over the course of the civil war among Bayezid I’s sons. Possessing the former capital was an important sign of power and prestige for Ottoman sultans and pretenders to the throne. The interventions of Mehmed I and Murad II brought about the revitalization of Bursa in the early fifteen century. Mehmed I connected his patronage to the established site of ruling memory that Ottoman Bursa represented, at the intersection of the dynastic past and the projected future. The mausolea of the first Ottoman sultans, Osman I and Orhan, were located in Bursa. The first funerary complex that the Ottomans built in Bursa, that of Murad I (known as Hüdavendiş), consists of a mosque with madrasa (the madrasa forming the upper level of the mosque), mausoleum, and bathhouse. Like those of his ancestors Osman I and Orhan, the mausoleum of Murad I was destroyed in an earthquake in 1855 that damaged many monuments in Bursa.

The mausoleum of Bayezid I was built near his mosque and its surrounding structures in 1406, probably on the orders of Emir Süleymán, whose name appears on the foundation inscription. It cites 1 Muharram 809 (18 June 1406) as the start of construction. Sources describe how Mehmed Çelebi, after conquering Bursa in 1404, obtained his father’s body from the Germiyan ruler Yakub, whom Timur had or-
ordered to bury the sultan.\textsuperscript{44} Mehmed Çelebi recovered his father’s body, but Emir Süleyman conquered Bursa only a few months later and oversaw the completion of the monument.\textsuperscript{45}

The efforts made to recover Bayezid I’s body, transport it to Bursa, and inter it there show Mehmed Çelebi’s desire to honor his father’s memory and enhance the status of Bursa as a site of dynastic memory. A source from the time of the brothers’ civil war, \textit{Ahvâl-i Sultân Mehmemmed bin Bâyêzîd Hân (Tales of Sultan Mehmed, Son of Bayezid Han)}, describes the recovery and reburial of the body from the perspective of the court:

Then the Sultan ordered that a letter be written to Germiyan-ogh Yakub Bey, in which he asked him to send his father’s body along with his brother Musa Çelebi, and delivered it by messenger. The letter reached Yakub Bey, who acted in accordance with its noble content. Adding his own men to those who had been dispatched by the Sultan, he sent back Yûldiz Khan’s body with all appropriate honors along with Musa Çelebi. They took the body, brought it, and buried it in a hallowed place in Bursa. For seven days, Qur’anic excerpts were recited over it, stews were cooked, and the Sultan did good deeds for the soul of the deceased, making the sîyâds [descendants of the Prophet Muhammad] and poor people rich. And he assigned to certain villages the legal status of waqf to contribute to the upkeep of the tomb’s pious foundation.\textsuperscript{46}

The deceased sultan’s burial site furthered the line established with the mausolea of Osman, Orhan, and Murad I. Bursa was the site of dynastic commemoration, a lieu de mémoire.\textsuperscript{47} Mehmed Çelebi’s efforts and Emir Süleyman’s patronage show that both brothers used the notion of dynastic memory tied to specific sites as part of their competition. Once Mehmed Çelebi emerged victorious, his patronage of the Yeşil Külliye can be seen as maintaining this effort.

Scholars have argued that the construction of multifunctional building complexes at the behest of several Ottoman sultans between the mid-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth century created a specific topography suited to notions of imperial domination and established urban cores in different sections of Bursa.\textsuperscript{48} Pancaroğlu underlines the need to study Bursa as a cityscape rather than a series of individual monuments and to avoid viewing the city as a mere prelude to Edirne and Istanbul.\textsuperscript{49} In the fourteenth century, according to Çağaptay, Ottoman interventions in Bursa made use of the city to adapt Byzantine urban space to a new reality, and preexisting architectural elements were translated into a new style specifically tied to the formation of an Ottoman identity.\textsuperscript{50} At the same time, Bursa’s landscape was appropriated for Ottoman use, establishing a pattern of organization centered on the monumental complexes of the sultans. Construction projects in new suburbs and the established city center around the citadel and market area marked the patronage of the early Ottoman sultans; the mosque ensembles of Bayezid I and Murad I, in particular, formed landmarks in new sections of the city.\textsuperscript{51} Located on several hills, the funerary complexes of four Ottoman sultans, built between 1390 and 1426, dominate the most prominent sites of the city. The idea of creating groups of buildings that fulfilled multiple functions centered on a monument dedicated to worship (a mosque and/or zâviye), a funerary structure, and additional buildings providing charitable services was established in Bursa and developed in Istanbul after 1453.\textsuperscript{52} The Yeşil Külliye, built at an important juncture in the history of the Ottoman realm, exemplifies the volatile dynamics of memory and identity formation that were at stake. In exam-

\textsuperscript{44} The beylik of Germiyan, with its capital at Kütahya, existed from the late thirteenth century until its absorption by the Ottomans in 1427. Kastritsis, \textit{Sons of Bayezid}, 84, 97–100; and idem, ed., \textit{The Tales of Sultan Mehmed, Son of Bayezid Khan [Ahvâl-i Sultân Mehmemmed bin Bâyêzîd Hân], Annotated English Translation, Turkish Edition, and Facsimiles of the Relevant Folia of Bodleian Marsh 313 and Neşîrî Codex Menzel} (Cambridge, MA: Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, Harvard University, 2007), 15–16.

\textsuperscript{45} The current structure is the result of this intervention and a major restoration that followed the earthquake of 1855. Kuran, \textit{Mosque in Early Ottoman Architecture}, 112.

\textsuperscript{46} Kastritsis, \textit{Tales of Sultan Mehmed}, 18.


\textsuperscript{49} Pancaroğlu, “Architecture, Landscape, and Patronage in Bursa,” 40–41.


\textsuperscript{52} On the transformation of Istanbul into the Ottoman capital, see Kafescioglu, \textit{Constantinopolis/Istanbul}, esp. 53–142.
ining its tile decoration, the remainder of this article engages questions of center and periphery in the Timurid-Ottoman-Anatolian context.

The Tile Decoration of the Yeşil Külliye

The Yeşil Külliye, the mosque-şâviye, mausoleum, and madrasa are decorated with various types of tile work. This is combined with stone and brick architecture, and together these techniques indicate multiple historical and cultural references. The Timurid present and the Seljuk past are the most prevalent, implied in the variegated and, at times, ambiguous tile decoration. Both an Anatolian past (in the mosque’s stone facade and the shape of the mausoleum) and a Bithynian one (in the brick architecture of parts of the mosque and the entire madrasa) are evoked. While the present discussion focuses on the tile decoration as a rich visual device that is used to direct perceptions of past and present, it is important to note that the Yeşil Külliye as a whole is an exercise in manipulating the past for the benefit of a new Ottoman future. Far from creating a dichotomy between past and future, the ornament may have been used to signal possible paths and to consolidate the role of Bursa as a site of Ottoman memory.

The madrasa (Fig. 7) is the least elaborately decorated of the extant monuments. Only small pieces of tile are used on the exterior, in lunettes over the windows, inserted into brick to form checkerboard and similar patterns (Fig. 8). Inside, the tile mosaic forms geometric patterns in the vaults of the lateral iwans (Fig. 9). This decoration is much more extensive in the mosque and on the mausoleum’s interior and exterior. The latter (Fig. 6) is entirely clad in turquoise-glazed tiles, in an unprecedented (and unique) use of tile decoration in Anatolia. These tiles are interrupted by calligraphic lunettes over the windows and so-called black-line tiles on the portal (Figs. 10–11), where carved, glazed terracotta around the inscription panels frames the black-line tiles. This technique, according to Bernard O’Kane, has roots in Iran.54

In the Yeşil Türbe’s interior, turquoise tiles covering the lower half of the walls are interrupted by medallions in black-line technique (Fig. 12). The mausoleum’s mihrab is composed entirely of black-line tile (Fig. 13).55 The tiles made with this method for the Yeşil Külliye are often called cuerda seca (dry cord) tiles, but due to technical differences, black-line is the more appropriate term in the eastern Islamic context.56 In Timurid black-line ceramics from Central Asia, Iran, and Anatolia, the tile is first covered with a slip to create a uniform background, then fired. Black (and sometimes red) outlines are then drawn on the tile and filled with different pigments. During a second firing, those outlines remain visible and the colored sections assume their brilliant glaze.57 Black-line tiles compose a large part of the decoration in the Yeşil Külliye, but other tile techniques, including monochrome underglaze, mosaic, and painted terracotta relief were used as well.

In the center of the Yeşil Türbe, a low platform is covered in monochrome turquoise tiles (Fig. 12). This platform is the

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53. The tiles were first restored in 1863, following the earthquake of 1855. Léon Parvillé, Architecture et décoration turques au XVe siècle (Paris: Morel, 1874), 4, 14–15. The ceramic facing was removed (and later reinstalled) during a restoration project in 1941–43. Ayverdi, Osmanlı mi’marisinde Çelebi ve II. Sultan Murad devri, figs. 170, 171, 173; and Macit R. Kural, “Çelebi Mehmed’in Yeşil Türbesi ve 1941–1943 restorasyonu,” Gızel sanatlar 5 (1944): 50–102.


56. In cuerda seca tiles produced in Spain, waxed cords are used to separate the different colors. The cords burn during firing, resulting in an unglazed line between fields of different color. Hence, O’Kane (“Tiles of Many Hues,” 182) notes that the term cuerda seca is better translated as “colorless line.” Bernus-Taylor, “Le décor du ’Complexe Vert’ à Bursa,” mentions the technical differences but continues to use the term cuerda seca for the sake of convenience. Michael Meinecke, Fayencedekorationen seldschukischer Sakralbauten in Kleinasiien, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1976), 1:103, refers to these tiles as “Glasurfarbenfliesen mit ‘toten Rändern’” (underglaze tile with dead, i.e., unpainted edges).

In the Yeşil Cami, tile decoration on the interior extends over large parts of the structure: the lower parts of walls in the entrance hallway and iwans around the courtyard are covered in dark blue- and turquoise-glazed tiles. In the hall, large roundels in black-line tile interrupt fields of monochrome tile (Fig. 16). On the hexagonal dark-green tiles in the two side iwans, gold decoration has been preserved (Fig. 17). The mosque’s mihrab is richly decorated with black-line tiles in blue, purple, and yellow (Fig. 18). Even in this central part of the monument the patterns on neighboring tiles do not quite match, suggesting a degree of experimentation in the workshop’s production. The lower parts of the walls in the mosque are covered in dark blue tiles, without gold overlay, and inscription bands in black-line tile run above them. Black-line tiles also appear in the sultan’s loge on the building’s upper level, above the vestibule and entrance corridor. In this richly decorated section of the mosque, tiles are combined with stucco and wood carving. Black-line tiles with geometric motifs cover the lateral walls and ceiling of the central room. Viewed from the mosque’s courtyard, the opening of the loge, which allowed the sultan to look out over the central space, is framed with inscription bands in black-line tiles.

Diverse tile techniques were used in the mosque and mausoleum, displaying the full array of skills in which craftsmen were proficient at the time of construction: black line, mosaic, inlays in stone, monochrome with gold overlay, and carved terracotta. Tiles were also combined with decorative elements in stucco, carved wood, painting, and carved stone. This diverse set of techniques and styles, and the creative combination of these elements to create a wholly distinct architecture, in many ways prefigures what was done in Istanbul in the late fifteenth century. As Gülru Necipoğlu and Çağdem Kesicioğlu have discussed in detail, works patronized by Sultan Mehmed II and his grand viziers in Istanbul drew on a wide range of materials, styles, and techniques—Byzantine, Timurid, early Ottoman, even Italian—to present aspirations to universal rule. Even though such ambitions were not yet central in Mehmed I’s Bursa, a desire to display knowledge of a wide range of past and present styles, along with the related prestige of being able to hire craftsmen capable of working in them, could have been at stake. When Murad II commissioned the addition of the mausoleum, the Persianate aesthetic promulgated by the Timurid courts would have been more desirable than it had been previously, and the Ottoman sultan may have been keen to embrace a prevalent Islamic elite culture. This may explain, at least in part, why the Yeşil Türbe looks more Per-
sian and Timurid, especially on the inside, while the mosque-
zāviye works with a different aesthetic dominated by stone and supplemented with tile.

The extended palette used in the decoration of the Yeşil Külliye is striking. Yellow and light purple were added to the more restrained color scheme used in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century tile decoration in central Anatolia, blue and turquoise, with additions of white and purple so dark that it appears black. This new type of decoration would become common, if intermittent, in Ottoman architecture, where it was used in the Muradiye Mosque in Edirne (1435) and in that of Mehmed the Conqueror in Istanbul (1463–70). Elsewhere in Anatolia, however, such tiles were rare. The mihrab of the İbrahim Bey İmaret in Karaman (1432) offers one example of black-line technique in central Anatolia (it is now preserved in the collections of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum and on view in the Çinili Köşk). Meinecke observes that Karaman was an important point of connection between the Ottomans and central Anatolia, because of rivalry but also through marriage alliances; the patron of the Hatuniye Medrese in Karaman (1381–82) was a daughter of the Ottoman sultan Murad I. Meinecke suggests a close connection between the black-line tiles in Karaman and those in Bursa, based on the use of both red and black lines to separate fields of colored glaze, a rather unusual combination of the two types of dividing lines. Rare examples in southeastern Anatolia, in the region between Mardin, Hasankeyf, and Diyarbakır at the juncture between Anatolia and the larger area of Turkmen rule, are closely related to the cultural sphere of Tabriz and located in the same geographic zone.

The tiles of the Yeşil Külliye were probably produced locally, although kilns have not been found in Bursa. The mak-


65. Turkish-speaking nomadic populations are referred to as Turkmen; several such dynasties emerged in post-Mongol Iran and Anatolia. For examples of tile decoration in southeastern Anatolia under Turkmen rule, see Khalida Mahi, “Tile Revetments from the 15th Century in Eastern Anatolia: A Problem of Attribution,” in Beyazit, *At the Crossroads of Empires*, 181–205.

ers of the tiles left a collective signature in the monument: on the mosque’s mihrab, “amal-i ustādhān-i Tabrīz” (work of the masters of Tabriz) is written in Persian.\(^{67}\) Other signatures include “Muhammad the Mad” on an arch in the sultan’s loge and “Ali ibn Hājjī Ahmad of Tabriz” on the mausoleum’s wooden doors.\(^{68}\) One signature in particular has been at the center of a debate about the attribution of the tile decoration, even though it is not found on the tiles: carved into a piece of stone above the sultan’s loge is the name \(^{69}\) Alī ibn Ilyās \(^{70}\) Alī, also known as naqqāsh \(^{71}\) Alī, was taken captive as a young man during the Timurid conquest of Bursa and deported to Samarkand, where he was trained as a craftsman.\(^{69}\) Twenty years later, he miraculously reappeared in his hometown and became a leading figure in the construction of the Yeşil Cami. As Marthe Bernus-Taylor notes, this account is often repeated without evidence.\(^{70}\) The narrative is based on Franz Taeschner’s study of the Yeşil Cami published in 1932. The German historian referred to an account by the Ottoman historian and biographer Ahmad b. Mustafa Taşköprülüzade (d. 1561) who,\(^{71}\) in his Shaqā’iq al-nu’māniya, cites \(^{70}\) Alī al-

67. Ayverdi, Osmanlı mîmârisinde Çelebi ve II. Sultan Murad devri, 68 and fig. 100d. The signature is paired with a verse from Sa’di’s Gulistān: ibid., 68 and fig. 100e.
68. Bernus-Taylor, “Le décor du ‘Complexe Vert’ à Bursa,” 257; and Ayverdi, Osmanlı mîmârisinde Çelebi ve II. Sultan Murad devri, 79 and fig. 120.
69. Bernus-Taylor, “Le décor du ‘Complexe Vert’ à Bursa,” 257; and Gabriel, Une capitale turque, 191. Ayverdi (Osmanlı mîmârisinde Çelebi ve II. Sultan Murad devri, 94, 327) mentions Naqqâsh \(^{70}\) Alī’s signature and identifies him as the grandfather of Lâmmî Çelebi.

Figure 11. Detail of portal, mausoleum, Yeşil Külliye, 1419–24, Bursa (photo: author).
Naqqāsh as the grandfather of the poet Lāmī Çelebi (d. 1532), whom he includes in this biographical dictionary of learned men active in the Ottoman Empire. In his youth, ‘Alī al-Naqqāsh, according to Taṣkoprülüzāde, was taken from Bursa to Transoxiana as Timur’s captive, trained as a naqqāsh (which can be translated as carver of stone or wood, or more generally as decorator or designer), and, on returning to Bursa, became one of the foremost representatives of his craft in Anatolia. Taṣkoprülüzāde’s account does not, however, offer a date for ‘Alī al-Naqqāsh’s return to Bursa, nor does it connect him to the Yeşil Cami. Moreover, it remains unclear whether the ‘Alī al-Naqqāsh of Taṣkoprülüzāde’s account and the ‘Alī ibn İlyās ‘Alī whose name appears in the Yeşil Cami are the same person. The fact that Lāmī Çelebi, the purported grandson of the celebrated naqqāsh, wrote a poetical elegy for his hometown may have contributed to the link established in Taeschner’s and later publications.

In relation to the question of attribution, Michele Bernardini suggests that the Tabriz of the artists’ signatures is really Samarkand. He follows Lisa Golombek, who argued that the largest body of Timurid black-line tile is found in the Shāh-i Zinda Complex in Samarkand beginning in the 1380s and that Tabriz did not emerge as a major center of tile production until the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Golombek concluded that a direct connection between the tiles produced in Bursa and workshops in Timurid Samarkand should be considered. In addition to the story of ‘Alī al-Naqqāsh, the Timurid prince Ulugh Beg released master

73. Ibid.
craftsmen from their forced residence in Samarkand in 1411. Perhaps the “masters of Tabriz” spent time in Khurasan before making their way to Bursa. While he agrees with Golombek about the dates of the earliest Timurid black-line tiles, O’Kane convincingly suggests that the quality of tiles made in Tabriz in the second half of the fifteenth century would not have been possible without previous production. The geographic proximity between Bursa and Tabriz, compared with the long distance to Samarkand, renders this tie more probable (Fig. 1).

Hacı İvaz Pasha, whose name is carved in rectangular stone cartouches on both sides of the portal recess of the Yeşil Cami, was the governor of Bursa and later became a vizier. He oversaw the construction site, but his impact on the design is unclear. Thus, it is impossible to determine who was responsible for the balance struck between the Seljuk and Timurid features in the Yeşil Külliye. The lack of sources that explain the roles performed on construction sites and individuals’ participation in the building process makes it difficult to gauge how designations such as naqqāsh or the general term “work of” (ʿamal, followed by a name) translate into such modern concepts as architect, engineer, or overseer.

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Any analysis of center and periphery requires an understanding of the movement of craftsmen as a dynamic exchange that involves patrons, sites, objects, and techniques.  

The Timurid Present: Bursa, Tabriz, and International Timurid Style

Stylistically speaking, the tiles of the Yeşil Külliye have been placed in the context of Timurid visual culture. Bernus-Taylor has argued that, despite differences in decorative details, they evoke Timurid tile work in Central Asia, such as the mausolea of Qutluq Āqā (1361), Shād-e Mulk Āqā (1371–83), Amir Husayn ibn Tughluq Tekin (1376), and Shirin Bika Āqā (1385–86) in the cemetery of the shrine complex of Shāh-i Zinda in Samarkand. The portal of the mausoleum of Qutluq Āqā features several techniques. In the muqarnas niche over the entrance, black-line tiles alternate with cut terracotta (Fig. 19). On the frames around it a rich play emerges between tiles in relief, with varying depths, and bands of simple tile mosaic.

Figure 15. Tile mosaic in window niche, mausoleum, Yeşil Külliye, 1419–24, Bursa (photo: author). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.

Figure 16. Monochrome tile with black-tile medallion, hallway between vestibule and prayer hall, mosque, Yeşil Külliye, 1419–24, Bursa (photo: author). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.

At the Bibi Khanum Mosque in Samarkand (1398–1405), black-line tiles were used on a large scale on the drum of the dome (Fig. 20) and in the qibla iwan.81 On Timur’s mausoleum, the Gur-i Mir (1405) in Samarkand, only a few black-line tiles appear: on the outer portal, where they are used in combination with tile mosaic that includes yellow, and in a few star-shaped tiles on a side entrance.

In these Timurid monuments, as in Bursa, combined tile techniques abound. The effect of the Ottoman architecture in Bursa, however, departs from the monumental scale of buildings such as the Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Gur-i Mir, where large sections of bannā‘ī (glazed tiles alternating with brick) dominate the exterior. The intimate funerary structures in the Shâh-i Zinda cemetery resemble the interior decoration of the Yeşil Cami and Türbe in their jeweled and fragmented aesthetic of varied tile motifs and techniques. Still, the overall effect is different. In the Yeşil Türbe, for example, the central section of the portal, with its black-line tiles, looks entirely Timurid (Fig. 11), but the rest of the exterior, with its stark monochrome tiles interrupted only by inscription panels and marble moldings, establishes a different aesthetic—one that is arguably Ottoman by virtue of its stylistic position at the intersection of the Timurid present and Seljuk past. The interior, with its tiled cenotaphs and monochrome dado, evokes Seljuk models (Figs. 12 and 14).

In the Yeşil Cami, the tension between interior and exterior is articulated further: the facade presents a “Seljuk” muqarnas portal (Fig. 3a), yet the two-story facade recalls the immediate Ottoman past, in particular the mosques of Bayezid I and Murad I in Bursa. Inside, the black-line tiles appear prominently on the mihrab, in the sultan’s loge, and around windows, doorways, and decorative panels (Figs. 16–18). At the same time, the decoration does not simply imitate a remote Timurid model; rather, Anatolia’s Seljuk past is integrated into the program so that the overall visual effect is distinct from contemporary Timurid examples.

Discussing the spread of Timurid art across Eurasia and into the Ottoman realm, Necipoğlu suggests that the tiles in

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81. O’Kane, “Tiles of Many Hues,” 188.


Figure 17. Monochrome tile with gold overlay in west iwan, mosque, Yeşil Külliye, 1419–24, Bursa (photo: author).
Küşk built on the premises of the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul in 1472 (Fig. 21). Craftsmen from Kharasan were invited to the Ottoman capital to decorate the pavilion as part of Mehmed II’s project to advertise his goal of universal rule in the architecture of his palace and capital. A second intervention by craftsmen from Tabriz occurred in 1523; it can be attributed to a group of tile makers who were taken to Istanbul when Sultan Selim I (r. 1512–20) defeated the Safavids at the battle of Çaldırın in 1514. This group “perpetuated a post-Timurid repertoire established earlier in the fifteenth century.” With the emergence in the 1540s of so-called saz-leaf decoration (named after the dominant element of the design, an elongated leaf with serrated edges, but combined with such other vegetal motifs as pomegranates, tulips, and carnations), the change in taste became obvious. On tiles, these new motifs—initially developed on paper—were more easily executed in underglaze technique, which permitted more freedom in drawing. The black-line technique eventually disappeared from the Ottoman repertoire.

Scholars’ assertions of the emergence of an inherently Ottoman style in the first half of the sixteenth century are compelling, but they assume the presence of a unified Timurid style in the fifteenth century. The concept of an International Timurid Style is connected to the idea that the visual idiom of Timurid art became prevalent in large parts of the eastern Islamic world, including the Ottoman realm, in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. A pervasive Timurid visual culture that spread from the courts of Samarkand and Herat and extended into the Ottoman realm is central to this notion. Timur and the Princely Vision, the catalogue of an exhibition that focused on arts of the book and portable objects from Central Asia, Iran, and, to a lesser extent, the Ottoman world from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries, captures this view. Marked by post-Mongol ideals of kingship translated into a refined visual mode, the transregional scope of a Timurid style is visible in miniature paintings and can also be traced in woodwork, metalwork, and to some extent in architecture. “The Timurids used a restricted set of pictorial designs that were continually repeated to construct their images,” explain the catalogue editors. “Through a process of repetition and refinement these standardized forms became identi-
fied with specific aesthetic and ideological aspects of the dynasty.\textsuperscript{86} The dissemination of this visual idiom throughout the eastern Islamic world was the result of the association between style and rule at the core of Timurid art that persisted beyond the fall of the dynasty in the early sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{87}

The work of an art historian who problematizes international styles in art history, focusing on the ancient Near East, is helpful here.\textsuperscript{88} Marian Feldman observes that the notion of international styles emerged in two exhibition catalogues published in 1962.\textsuperscript{89} Although the phenomenon of an “International Gothic Style” included various media, the publications highlighted sculpture produced around 1400, when an elegant style, commonly referred to as the “beautiful style,” spread from Bohemia to Germany, France, and northern Italy.\textsuperscript{90} An underlying premise of an international style is that artistic exchange and transfer, not political domination, form the core of an overarching stylistic mode that is nevertheless not entirely unified.\textsuperscript{91} “The term international style has been adopted subsequently for many other times and places,” writes Feldman, “but in each case it designates a perceived cross-cultural mingling of artistic forms.”\textsuperscript{92} She clarifies that the term also involves the larger art historical problem of style as a methodological tool.

86. Lentz and Lowry, Timur and the Princely Vision, 14.
87. Ibid., 303–4.
The issue of style and its relationship to center and periphery, with the implied extension toward transregional (or international) connections, is pertinent to early fifteenth-century monuments built under Ottoman rule. Although close ties to the ruling sultan are evident in this period, a clearly identifiable Ottoman style had not yet emerged. As Necipoğlu notes, the turn from a largely Timurid to a fully developed Ottoman aesthetic would occur in the sixteenth century, the result of a slow process of transformation rather than an abrupt shift. Late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century cross-cultural interaction between Ottoman and Timurid courts was partly responsible for the pervasive Ottoman engagement with the culture of Timurid and post-Timurid Central Asia.

Questions about attribution, tile production, and the larger Timurid cultural context are still germane because of the reference to Tabriz in two of the four artists’ signatures in the Yeşil Külliye. This western Iranian city had emerged as an important commercial center under Ilkhanid rule, connecting Iran to major trade routes into Anatolia; later it was a site of Turkmen patronage, as the Qaraquyunlu and Aqquyunlu dynasties consolidated their rule and competed against each other and the Timurids. While the cultural and political im-


94. See notes 67–69 above.

portance of Tabriz are uncontested, the state of monument preservation raises a central problem. Earthquakes in 1641 and 1780 destroyed many buildings, and the Ottoman-Safavid wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries damaged the city. The vestiges of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Tabriz are few. Monuments likely suffered in the aftermath of the fall of the Ilkhanids in the 1350s, when Tabriz repeatedly changed hands among local successor dynasties for more than a century. From the fifteenth century, only the Masjid-i Muzaffariya, also known as the Blue Mosque or the Masjid-i Kabūd, has survived. Khāṭūn Jān Begum founded the building in 1465 as a funerary complex for her husband, the Qara-qyounlu ruler Abū Muẓaffar Jahānshāh (r. 1436–67). The tile decoration of the Masjid-i Muzaffariya presents a wide range of techniques: mostly tile mosaic, but also two types of blue-and-white tiles, bānānī, hexagonal dark blue tiles with fragments of gold decoration, and a few luster tiles.

Tabriz, a major cultural center in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, may have been the ideal point of reference for high-quality production in a specific style by artists or patrons subscribing to a particular aesthetic. Works from Tabriz spoke to a periphery that included the Ottoman realm and Bursa specifically. Examples of such ideal artistic centers abound in art history; Prague was the source of stylistic points of reference for International Gothic. Regional differences remained in place, and local artists could interpret forms with or without the impetus of a traveling workshop. This observation is crucial with regard to Bursa, where the presence of a workshop from Tabriz is likely but is not sufficiently well documented to be taken for granted.

Scholars who study the Yeşiş Külliye mention the absence of material evidence from early fifteenth-century Tabriz. In the Türbe, it is significant that references to Tabriz are not limited to tiles: the signature “ʻAli bin Ḥājjī Ahmad al-Tabrīzī” appears on the wooden doors. Comparative evidence in Tabriz has not been preserved, but several examples of signatures containing the nīsba (part of the personal name indicating origin) “al-Tabrīzī” are found in Lahijan and Qazvin in Iran. The example in Bursa thus belongs to a rare group of wood carvings that may be connected to Tabriz. In their adaptation of the style, aesthetic, and name belonging to Tabriz, Ottoman patrons and builders in Bursa asserted their city’s status as a dynastic node of Ottoman rule by associating it with a major cultural center. The choice did not fall on Samarkand, Timur’s former capital, which was eclipsed by Herat during the rule of his successor Shah Rukh (r. 1405–47). Instead, Tabriz—geographically closer to Bursa and less closely associated with Timurid rule—became the point of stylistic reference. I speculate, but cannot prove, that this choice was an effort to eschew direct imitation of the art related to a dynasty that defeated an Ottoman sultan. Thanks to Mehmed I’s patronage, Bursa was relieved of its peripheral status in the cultural world of the post-Mongol eastern Islamic lands and gained leverage as an artistic center in its own right. The Timurid present was therefore one of the two major elements in the tile decoration of the Yeşiş Külliye. The other, to which I now turn, was Anatolia’s pre-Mongol, Seljuk past.

The Seljuk Past: Repositioning Pre-Ottoman Anatolia

In the earliest extant Ottoman monuments in Bursa, before the Yeşiş Külliye, Anatolia’s Islamic past is conspicuously absent. Rooted in the Byzantine architectural tradition of Bithynia, these monuments were part of a local architecture adapted to the needs of Ottoman identity formation and Islamic practice. In the Yeşiş Külliye, the frame of reference for architecture was transformed, spurred by a dynamic and

100. For a detailed study of the different tile techniques and their placement in the mosque, see Aube, “La mosquée bleue de Tabriz,” 250–68.


Tile Decoration of the Yeşiş Külliye 247
political outlook that changed during Mehmed I’s rule. Dialogue about Anatolia’s Islamic past emerged, in which references to monuments built in central and eastern Anatolia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries played a role. A recent study addresses the question of Seljuk tradition in early Ottoman architecture. Based on a thorough catalogue of monuments in Turkey, Sema Gündüz Küskü’s analysis focuses on plans, elevations (especially portal and window schemes), and building materials, in which she observes a consistent link to the Seljuks beginning with the earliest Ottoman structures.105

As noted above, Tezcan argues that Ottoman sources from the mid- to late fifteenth century efface the Mongol past and establish continuity between the Seljuks and the earliest Ottomans.106 In the Yeşil Külliye, it is possible to trace a similar phenomenon in architecture through references to early and mid-thirteenth-century monuments in central and eastern Anatolia. For instance, the tiles that most closely reflect Seljuk models in the Yeşil Külliye are those covering the lower zones of walls in the vestibule, the hallway linking the vestibule to the prayer hall (Fig. 16), the side iwans, and the prayer hall of the mosque. In the lateral iwans of the latter (Fig. 17), the addition of gold-leaf decoration on the monochrome turquoise tiles is closely related to techniques prevalent in Islamic monuments of the mid- to late thirteenth century in central and eastern Anatolia. One of the most striking parallels is at the Karatay Madrasa in Konya, founded in 1251–52 by Jalâl al-Dîn Qârâtîy, a vizier to the Seljuk sultans, whose power extended beyond the Mongol conquest.107 The lower zone of the walls around the central space is decorated with hexagonal turquoise tiles, adorned with gold ornament (mostly inscriptions), that balance the dome’s rich tile mosaic (Fig. 22). This monument was built after the Mongol conquest of Anatolia and therefore is not, in strict terms, Seljuk. Yet such categories are problematic, for we do not know what distinction, if any, a fifteenth-century Ottoman viewer would have made between monuments built in Konya in the first third of the thirteenth century and those built after the Mongol conquest in 1243. This historiographic observation does not, however, undermine my argument that Anatolia’s Seljuk past was evoked in the Yeşil Külliye. Rather, the architecture of Konya, as the Seljuk center, could represent the idealized image of Islamic monuments built in Anatolia before Ottoman expansion. Their association with a major dynasty based in Anatolia could have made monuments built under Seljuk patronage into models for a new architecture that would represent Ottoman power while the polity recovered from civil war.

Outside the realm of tiles, the most striking reference to Seljuk architecture lies in the framed muqarnas portal of the Yeşil Cami (Fig. 3a). Carved in marble, it is one of the first portals of this type to appear in an Ottoman monument. Earlier Ottoman examples include the Timurtaş Zâviye in Bursa (1389–1402), the Eski Cami in Edirne (1413), and the Ulu Cami in Bursa (1399–1402).108 These portals are placed in deep recesses on facades and lack the monumental series of frames that make thirteenth-century portals prominent. The portal of the Yeşil Cami is flush with the facade rather than set in the central axis of a salient block, as in most thirteenth- and fourteenth-century examples, but it has ornamental frames to highlight the central muqarnas niche and doorway. The history of this type of portal is fraught with overly simplified correlations to Seljuk central power and patronage.109 Such portals first emerged in Anatolia on caravanserais sponsored by the Seljuk sultans in the second quarter of the thirteenth century; later they appeared in mosques, madrasas, and mau solea, built by Seljuk and other patrons across central and eastern Anatolia, while other types of portals also remained in use. In the Yeşil Cami, a strong link to central Anatolia’s Islamic past was established with the muqarnas portal, moving...
away from the Byzantine architecture of Bithynia and toward a more inclusive Ottoman style in its initial stages of consolidation. These connections are strongest on the exterior of the mosque-zāviye (Fig. 3a–b), while on the interior, the Timurid mode of decoration dominates, with the prevailing use of black-line tiles (Figs. 16 and 18). Anatolia’s architectural past is nevertheless present in the interior monochrome tiles (Figs. 16–17), creating a balance between aspiring imperial power and the local base.

The use of tile on the Yeşil Türbe exterior is unique in medieval Anatolia. The climate does not lend itself to the type of tile decoration prevalent in Timurid Iran and Central Asia, where large sections of monuments are clad in tile mosaic or bannā’i (Figs. 19–20). The wet winters of Anatolia, with abundant snow and rainfall and strong frosts, are particularly hard on tile decoration, which often suffers water damage and cracks when subjected to humidity and cold temperatures. Outdoor tile use in Anatolia is otherwise limited to the open courtyards of madrasas, including the Şirçalı Medrese in Konya (1243) and the Gök Medrese in Tokat (ca. 1280–90); in both, the walls around the courtyard are covered with damaged tile mosaic. Their exterior facades are built of stone and devoid of tile decoration. Overall, in medieval Anatolia tile was used indoors. The Yeşil Türbe is the exception to this rule and may represent a moment of experimentation at the hands of tile makers from Tabrız, or an effort to replicate Timurid style more closely than in the earlier mosque.

Conclusion: Entangled References between Iran and Anatolia

The Yeşil Külliye contains a multilayered set of references to the architecture of Bithynia, central Anatolia, Iran, and Central Asia. Depending on the building, one allusion or another is prevalent, but the overall message points to the revived aspirations of the Ottoman realm under Mehmed I, when rebuilding of the realm went hand in hand with patronage. The construction of the Yeşil Külliye marked Mehmed F’s power in Bursa, a city that changed hands multiple times during the war that followed Bayezid I’s death. With the commission of a mosque complex in Bursa, rather than in his capital, Edirne, Mehmed I continued the tradition of sultanic patronage and funerary complexes in the city, enhancing its status as an Ottoman dynastic lieu de mémoire. The details of the architecture and decoration had important implications as the sultan renegotiated the Ottomans’ position between the Timurid present, Seljuk past, and Ottoman future.

My focus on tile decoration has revealed connections to Timurid monuments in Iran and Central Asia of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, as well as links to thirteenth-century structures in Anatolia. There is no straightforward way to attribute each element to a point of origin; instead, it seems that various visual models were used with the goal of presenting both current artistic production (and displaying the wealth necessary for it) and ties to local and regional pasts. The Yeşil Madrasa is closely connected to early Ottoman architecture in Bursa, with the exception of the tile mosaic in its iwans, which points to central Anatolia. The interior of the Yeşil Türbe refers to both Seljuk Anatolia and Timurid Central Asia, whereas the portal points to Iran and Central Asia in its shape and decoration, and the overall shape of the structure has local roots. The interplay between past and present through visual cues thus continues in the mausoleum yet strikes a somewhat different balance from that in the mosque-zāviye, where interior and exterior are distinct in their opposing motifs.

Combining tile techniques to accentuate specific parts of a monument was not exclusive to Bursa; the practice can also be observed in Iran. In the Masjid-i Jāmī in Yazd, a tiled dado was added to the prayer hall, most likely between 1406 and 1417. It closely resembles the interior wall decoration of the Yeşil Türbe (Figs. 12–13), although in Yazd the medallions were completed in tile mosaic rather than black-line tile.110 In their discussion of the Masjid-i Shāh in Mashhad (1452) and the Masjid-i Muzaffariya in Tabriz (1465), Golombok and Donald Wilber cite the Yeşil Cami in Bursa as a related example of a tiled dado and T-shaped plan (Figs. 17–18).111 While their observation is limited to stylistic connections, it suggests that the Yeşil Cami may have become a model for monuments built in western Iran, perhaps through the movement of craftmen who signed its tile decoration and wooden doors, returned to Tabrız, and transmitted their knowledge to later generations. The plan of the Masjid-i Muzaffariya, in particular, has been viewed as a variant of the Ottoman T-shape, and Bursa may have been the node between Ottoman architecture and craftsmen from Tabrız, who could have carried back to Iran knowledge of Ottoman building practices.112 The dynamic of center and periphery is less a dichotomy between Tabrız as center and Bursa as periphery than one in which Bursa, as a center of Ottoman memory, became a new point of reference and slowly moved out of its peripheral role. Pe-


111. Golombok and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, 1:36, 409; and O’Kane, Timurid Architecture in Khorasan, 67 and pl. 26.3.

ripheries took on new prominence when former centers lost their importance.

The tension inherent in attributing various styles to specific times and places appears elsewhere in an Ottoman context. Discussing a poem by Cafer Çelebi, composed in 1493–94 in praise of the mosque of Mehmed II in Istanbul, Necipoğlu notes that the text refers to the interplay of “rūmī” (i.e., foliate arabesque of Rūm, known as islāmī or islāmī in the Timurid world) and “ḥitāyi” (chinoiserie motifs of Cathay) patterns. Thus, the scroll patterns associated with medieval Anatolia become part and parcel of an international Timurid mode, with its local variations stretching from Samarkand to Edirne.

In the Yeşil Külliye, however, built seven decades before Cafer Çelebi wrote his evocative poem, the dynamics of style, memory, and power were different. There, stone carving takes the place of the arabesque, but allusions to Anatolia, Iran, and Central Asia, and to Konya, Tabriz, and Samarkand appear in the tile decoration. In fifteenth-century Bursa, Anatolia’s Seljuk past, particularly in its pre-Mongol form, became a node of visual reference that helped disassociate the Ottomans from the successors of Timur, the Central Asian conqueror who inflicted a nearly fatal blow to the Ottoman polity and inserted it forcibly into the Timurid present, politically and culturally, as a new Ottoman future was being built.