

Topkapı Palace ①

Topkapı Sarayı



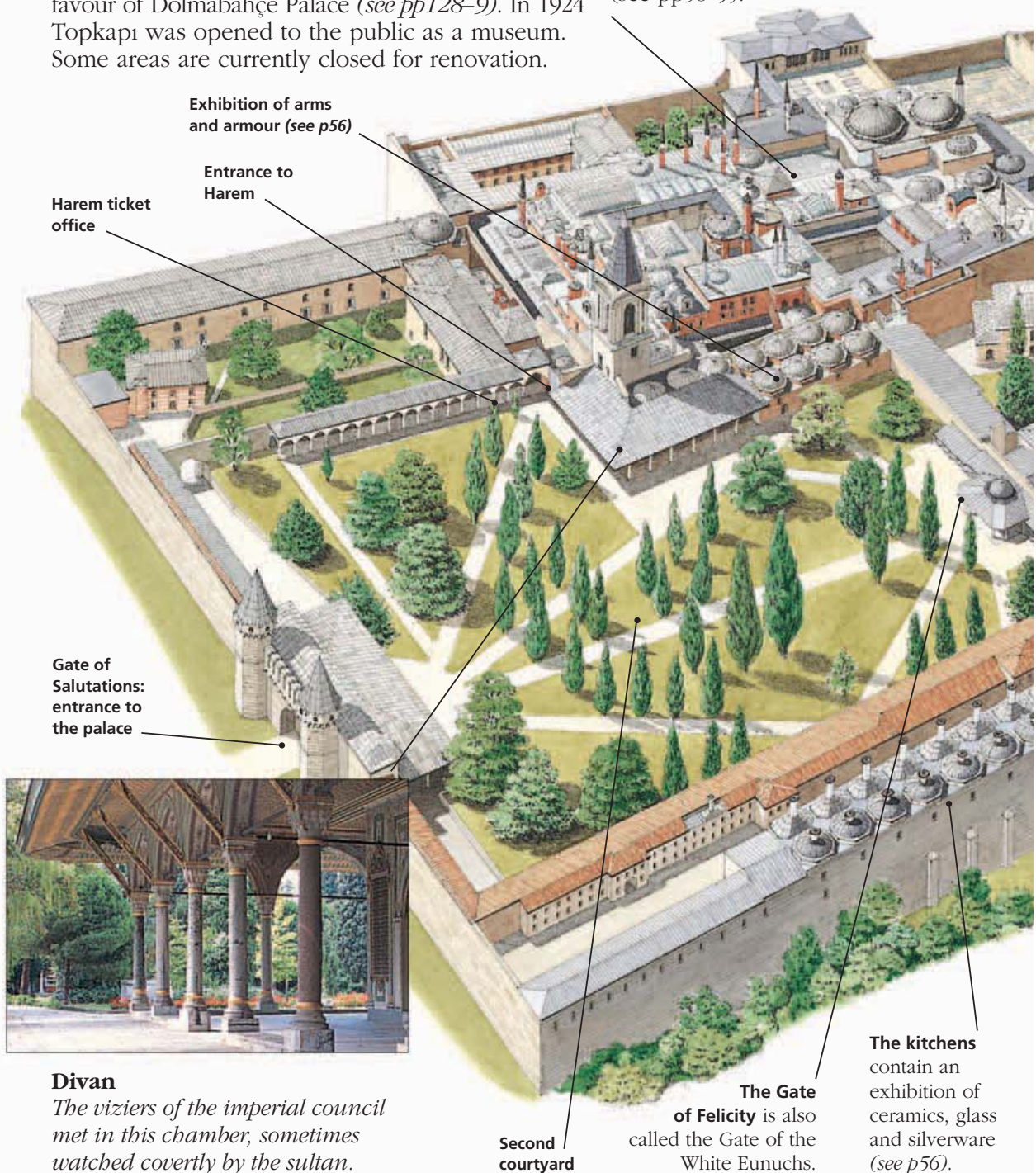
Süleyman I's
tuğra over
the main gate

Between 1459 and 1465, shortly after his conquest of Constantinople (see p26), Mehmet II built Topkapı Palace as his main residence. Rather than a single building, it was conceived as a series of pavilions contained by four enormous courtyards, a stone version of the tented encampments from which the nomadic Ottomans had emerged. Initially, the palace served as the seat of government and housed a school in which civil servants and soldiers were trained. In the 18th century, however, the government was moved to the Sublime Porte (see p61). Sultan Abdül Mecit I abandoned Topkapı in 1853 in favour of Dolmabahçe Palace (see pp128–9). In 1924 Topkapı was opened to the public as a museum. Some areas are currently closed for renovation.



★ Harem

The labyrinth of exquisite rooms where the sultan's wives and concubines lived is open to visitors (see pp58–9).



Exhibition of arms
and armour (see p56)

Entrance to
Harem

Harem ticket
office

Gate of
Salutations:
entrance to
the palace



Divan

The viziers of the imperial council met in this chamber, sometimes watched covertly by the sultan.

Second
courtyard

The Gate
of Felicity is also
called the Gate of the
White Eunuchs.

The kitchens
contain an
exhibition of
ceramics, glass
and silverware
(see p56).



İftariye Pavilion

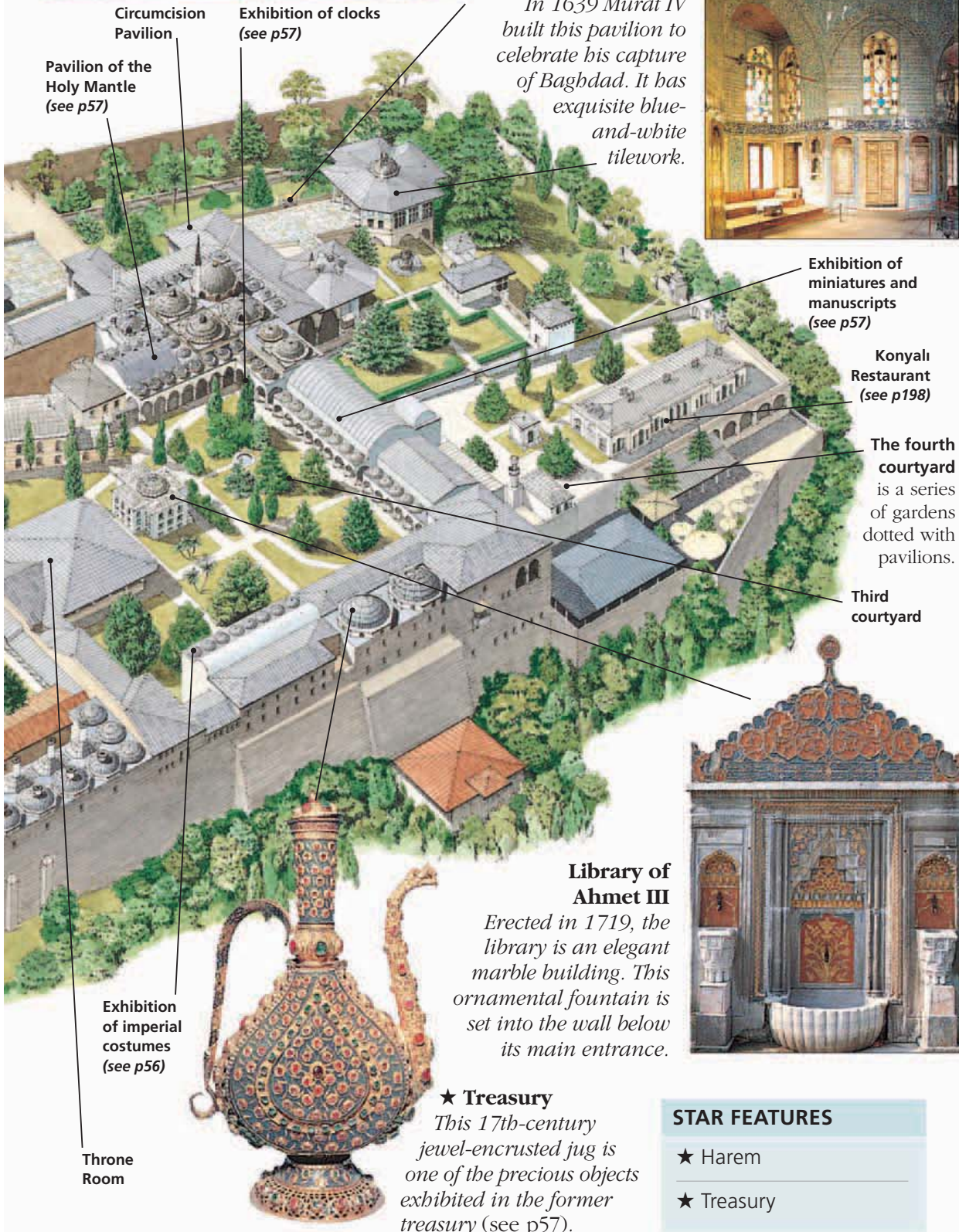
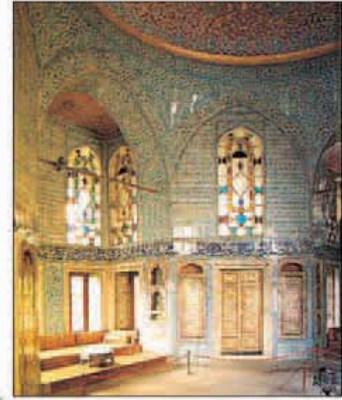
Standing between the Baghdad and Circumcision pavilions, this canopied balcony provides views down to the Golden Horn.

VISITORS' CHECKLIST

Babühümayun Cad. **Map** 3 F3.
Tel (0212) 512 04 80.
 Sultanahmet. ☉ 9am–4pm
 Wed–Mon. 🚶 🚗 🚊 **Harem**
 ☉ 9:30am–3:30pm Wed–Mon.
 📅 (book early). 📄

Baghdad Pavilion

In 1639 Murat IV built this pavilion to celebrate his capture of Baghdad. It has exquisite blue-and-white tilework.



Circumcision Pavilion
 Exhibition of clocks (see p57)
 Pavilion of the Holy Mantle (see p57)

Exhibition of miniatures and manuscripts (see p57)

Konyalı Restaurant (see p198)

The fourth courtyard is a series of gardens dotted with pavilions.

Third courtyard

Exhibition of imperial costumes (see p56)

Throne Room



Library of Ahmet III

Erected in 1719, the library is an elegant marble building. This ornamental fountain is set into the wall below its main entrance.



★ **Treasury**

This 17th-century jewel-encrusted jug is one of the precious objects exhibited in the former treasury (see p57).

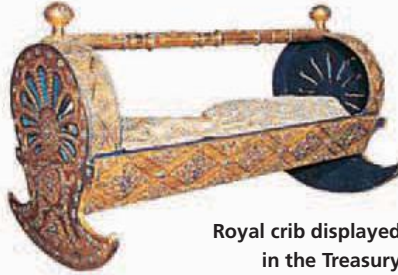
STAR FEATURES

- ★ Harem
- ★ Treasury

Exploring the Palace's Collections

During their 470-year reign, the Ottoman sultans amassed a glittering collection of treasures. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (*see p31*), this was nationalized and the bulk of it put on display in Topkapı Palace. As well as diplomatic gifts and articles commissioned from the craftsmen of the palace workshops, a large number of items in the collection were brought back as booty from successful military campaigns.

Many such trophies date from the massive expansion of the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Selim the Grim (1512–20), when Syria, Arabia and Egypt were conquered.



Royal crib displayed in the Treasury

CERAMICS, GLASS AND SILVERWARE

The kitchens contain the palace's collection of glass, ceramics and silverware. Turkish and European pieces are overshadowed by the vast display of Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Japanese porcelain. This was brought to Turkey along the Silk Route, the overland trading link between the Far East and Europe. Topkapı's collection of Chinese porcelain is the world's second best after China itself.



Japanese porcelain plate

The Chinese porcelain on display spans four dynasties: the Sung (10–13th centuries), followed by the Yüan (13–14th centuries), the Ming (14–17th centuries) and the Ching (17–20th centuries). Celadon, the earliest form of Chinese porcelain collected by the sultans, was made to look like jade, a stone believed by the Chinese to be lucky. The Ottomans prized it because it was said to neutralize poison in food. There are also several exquisite blue-and-white pieces, mostly of the Ming era.

Chinese aesthetics were an important influence on Ottoman craftsmen, particularly in the creation of designs for their fledgling ceramics industry at

Iznik (*see p161*). Although there are no Iznik pieces in the Topkapı collection, many of the tiles on the palace walls originated there. These clearly show the influence of designs used for Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, such as cloud scrolls and stylized flowers.

Much of the later porcelain, particularly the Japanese Imari ware, was made specifically for the export market. The most obvious examples of this are some plates decorated with quotations from the Koran. A part of the kitchens, the old confectioners' pantry, has been preserved as it would have been when in use. On display are huge cauldrons and other utensils wielded by the palace's chefs to feed its 12,000 residents and guests. This area is currently closed for renovation.

ARMS AND ARMOUR

Taxes and tributes from all over the empire were once stored in this chamber, which was known as the Inner Treasury. Straight ahead as you enter is a series of horse-tail standards. Carried in processions or displayed outside tents, these proclaimed the rank of their owners. Viziers (*see p29*), for

example, merited three; the grand vizier, five; and the sultan's banner, nine.

The weaponry includes ornately embellished swords and several bows made by sultans themselves (Beyazıt II was a particularly fine craftsman). The huge iron swords used by European crusaders look crude by comparison. Also on view are pieces of 15th-century Ottoman chainmail and colourful shields. The shields have metal centres surrounded by closely woven straw painted with flowers. This area is currently closed for renovation.

IMPERIAL COSTUMES

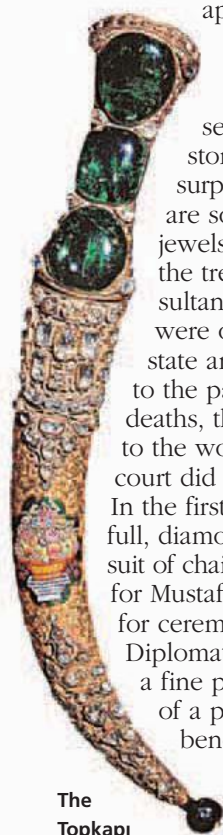
A collection of imperial costumes is displayed in the Hall of the Campaign Pages, whose task was to look after the royal wardrobe. It was a palace tradition that on the death of a sultan his clothes were carefully folded and placed in sealed bags. As a result, it is possible to see a perfectly preserved kaftan once worn by Mehmet the Conqueror (*see p26*). The reforms of Sultan Mahmut II included a revolution in the dress code (*see p30*). The end of an era came as plain grey serge replaced the earlier luxurious silken textiles.



Sumptuous silk kaftan once worn by Mehmet the Conqueror

TREASURY

Of all the exhibitions in the palace, the Treasury's collection is the easiest to



The Topkapı dagger

appreciate, glittering as it does with thousands of precious and semi-precious stones. The only surprise is that there are so few women's jewels here. Whereas the treasures of the sultans and viziers were owned by the state and reverted to the palace on their deaths, those belonging to the women of the court did not. In the first hall stands a full, diamond-encrusted suit of chainmail, designed for Mustafa III (1757–74) for ceremonial use. Diplomatic gifts include a fine pearl statuette of a prince seated beneath a canopy, which was sent to Sultan Abdül Aziz (1861–76) from India. The greatest pieces are in the second hall. Foremost among these is the Topkapı dagger (1741). This splendid object was commissioned by the sultan from his own jewellers. It was intended as a present for the Shah of Persia, but he died before it reached him. Among other exhibits here are a selection of the bejewelled aigrettes (plumes) which added splendour to imperial turbans.

In the third hall, the 86-carat Spoonmaker's diamond is said to have been discovered in a rubbish heap in Istanbul in the 17th century, and bought from a scrap merchant for three spoons. The gold-plated Bayram throne was given to Murat III (see p32) by the Governor of Egypt in 1574 and used for state ceremonies until early this century.

It was the throne in the fourth hall, given by the Shah of Persia, which was to have been acknowledged by the equally magnificent gift of the Topkapı dagger. In a cabinet

near the throne is an unusual relic: a case containing bones said to be from the hand of St John the Baptist.

MINIATURES AND MANUSCRIPTS

It is possible to display only a tiny fraction of Topkapı's total collection of over 13,000 miniatures and manuscripts at any one time. Highlights of it include a series of depictions of warriors and fearsome creatures known as *Demons and Monsters in the Life of Nomads*, which was painted by Mohammed Siyah Qalem, possibly as early as the 12th century. It is from this Eastern tradition of miniature painting, which was also prevalent in Mogul India and Persia, that the ebullient Ottoman style of miniatures developed.

Also on show are some fine examples of calligraphy (see p95), including texts of the Koran, manuscripts of poetry and several firmans, or imperial decrees. This area is currently closed for renovation.



Cover of a Koran, decorated in gold filigree work

CLOCKS

European clocks given to, or bought by, various sultans form the majority of this collection, despite the fact that there were makers of clocks and watches in Istanbul from the 17th century. The clocks



A 17th-century watch made of gold, enamel and precious stones

range from simple, weight-driven 16th-century examples to an exquisite 18th-century English mechanism encased in mother-of-pearl and featuring a German organ which played tunes on the hour to the delight of the harem.

Interestingly, the only male European eyewitness accounts of life in the harem were written by the mechanics sent to service these instruments.

PAVILION OF THE HOLY MANTLE

Some of the holiest relics of Islam are displayed in these five domed rooms, which are a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. Most of the relics found their way to Istanbul as a result of the conquest by Selim the Grim (see p26) of Egypt and Arabia, and his assumption of the caliphate (the leadership of Islam) in 1517.

The most sacred treasure is the mantle once worn by the Prophet Mohammed. Visitors cannot actually enter the room in which it is stored; instead they look into it from an ante-chamber through an open doorway. Night and day, holy men continuously chant passages from the Koran over the gold chest in which the mantle is stored. A stand in front of the chest holds two of Mohammed's swords.

A glass cabinet in the ante-room contains hairs from the beard of the Prophet, a letter written by him and an impression of his footprint.

In the other rooms you can see some of the ornate locks and keys for the Kaaba (see p39) which were sent to Mecca by successive sultans.

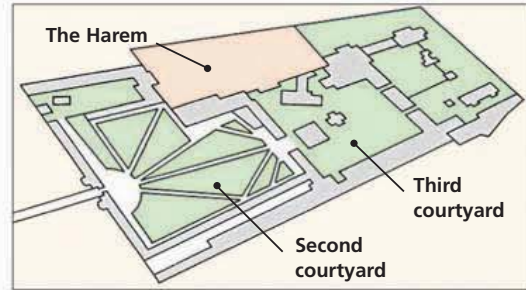
Topkapı Palace: The Harem



Stained-glass window in the Paired Pavilions

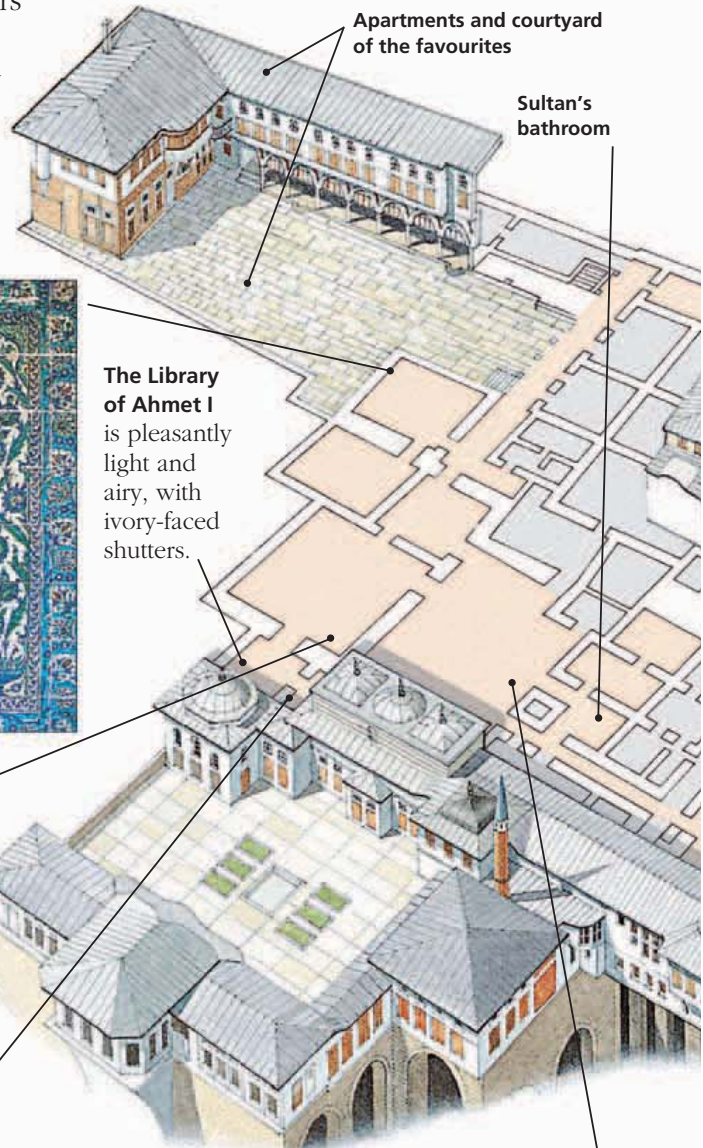
The word Harem derives from the Arabic for “forbidden”. A Harem was the residence of the sultan’s wives, concubines and children, who were guarded by black slave eunuchs. The sultan and his sons were the only other

men allowed access to the Harem, which also included the Cage, a set of rooms where the sultan’s brothers were confined to avoid destabilizing succession contests. Topkapı’s Harem was laid out by Sultan Murat III in the late 16th century and is a labyrinth of brilliantly tiled corridors and chambers.



LOCATOR MAP

See main illustration of the palace on pp54-5



★ Paired Pavilions

These twin apartments, built in the 17th century for the crown prince, boast superb İznik tiles (see p161) and a dome lined with gilded canvas.



The Salon of Murat III, built by Sinan (see p91), has fine tiled walls, a handsome fountain and a large hearth.

★ Dining Room of Ahmet III

A sumptuous array of fruit and flowers is painted on to the walls of this 18th-century chamber, which is also known as the Fruit Room.

Imperial Hall

The largest room in the Harem, this hall was used for entertainments. Against one wall stands a large throne, from which the sultan would view the proceedings.





LIFE IN THE HAREM

The women of the Harem were slaves, gathered from the furthest corners of the Ottoman Empire and beyond. Their dream was to become a favourite of the sultan (see p28) and bear him a son, which on some occasions led to marriage. Competition was stiff, however, for at its height the Harem contained over 1,000 concubines, many of whom never rose beyond the service of their fellow captives. The last women eventually left in 1909.

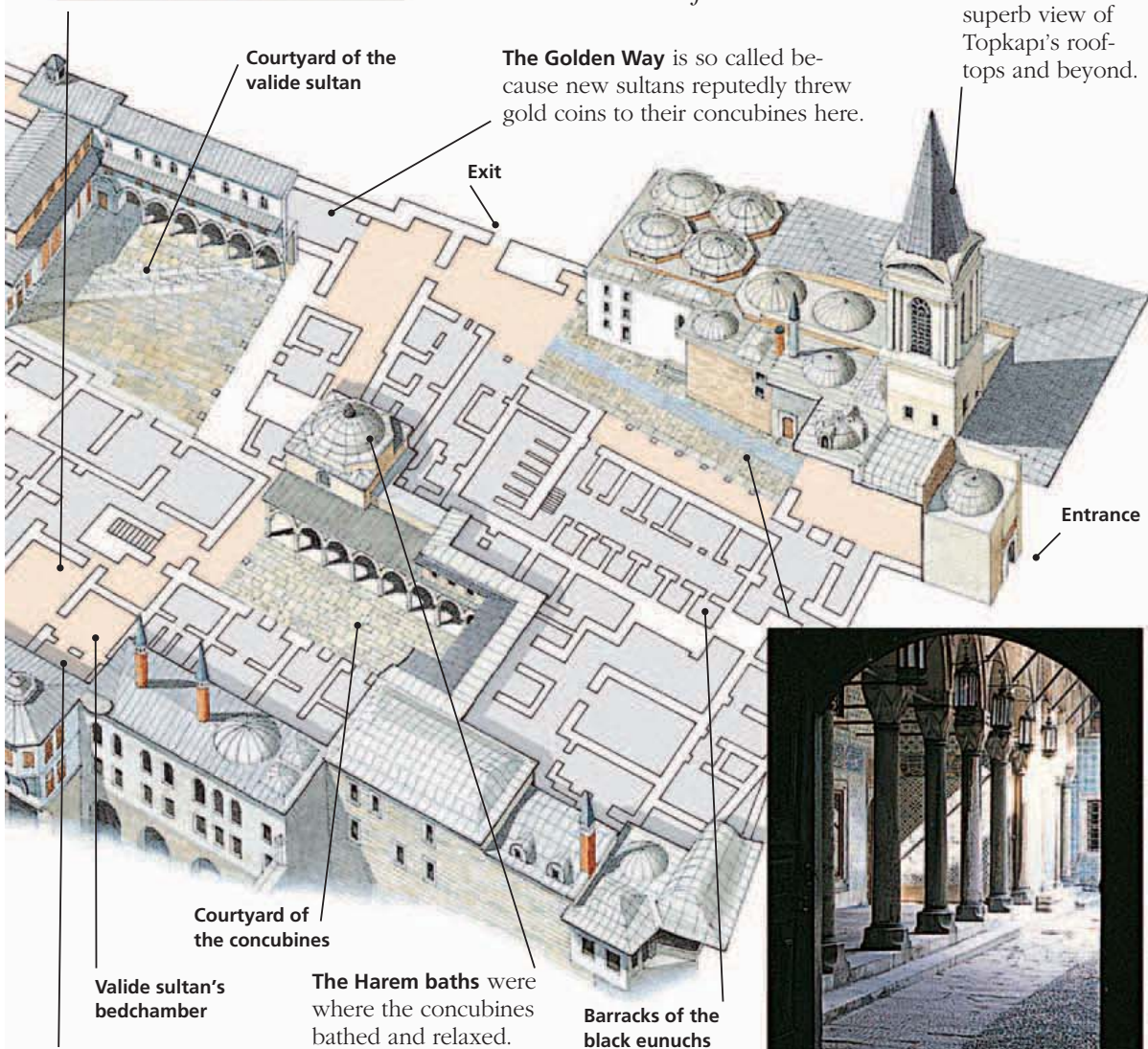


A western view of Harem life in a 19th-century engraving

Salon of the Valide Sultana

The sultan's mother, the valide sultana (see p29), was the most powerful woman in the Harem and had some of the best rooms.

The Tower of Justice offers a superb view of Topkapi's rooftops and beyond.



The Golden Way is so called because new sultans reputedly threw gold coins to their concubines here.

Valide sultan's prayer room

KEY

- Rooms open to the public
- Areas closed to the public

STAR FEATURES

- ★ Paired Pavilions
- ★ Dining Room of Ahmet III



Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs

Marble columns line this courtyard, which still has some old-fashioned, wrought-iron lamps.