

Migrations | Migrations within the Ottoman Empire | Traders and craftsmen

Professional skills and knowledge help to consolidate links between people and civilisations.

Many economic migrants within the Ottoman empire were traders, artisans, craftsmen and skilled labourers looking for reliable patronage and a more prosperous future. Although officially the Ottoman government sought to restrict people's individual movement and often directed it, many succeeded in seeking their fortunes away from their homelands. Beyond the capital Constantinople, many headed for the most dynamic, quasi-independent courts in the 19th century to seek business or work for the ruling elite. Architects, construction workers, wood and stucco workers, potters, jewellers and calligraphers were among those leaving home to find work elsewhere, and much of the architecture and material culture that survives in the region today attests to their presence all over the Arab and Ottoman world.



Working Number: TN 109

Name: Request to the Bey of Tunis by Tunisian merchants in Istanbul

Holding Museum: Archives Nationales

Date: 19th century

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This document, written on behalf of Tunisian traders based in Constantinople in the 19th century and addressed to the Bey of Tunis, bears witness to the mobility of craftsmen and traders within the Ottoman Empire.



Working Number: TN 112

Name: Letter from the Tunisian merchants of Egypt to the Bey of Tunis

Holding Museum: Archives Nationales

Date: 1820

Materials: -

Curator Justification: This letter to the Bey of Tunis, dated 1820, is signed by some hundred Tunisian traders resident in the Egyptian cities of Cairo and Alexandria. It is to thank him for appointing his new governmental representative in Alexandria, who was their point of contact for legal and economic matters or in times of crisis.



Working Number: TR2 032

Name: The Grand Bazaar

Holding Museum: Pera Museum

Date: Second half of the 19th century

Materials: Oil on canvas

Curator Justification: The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul was the Ottoman Empire's most important focus for traders, artisans and craftsmen from all over its lands. Each craft or trade had its own designated area.



Working Number: TN 018

Name: Suqs

Holding Museum: -

Date: 17th, 18th and 19th centuries

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The old medina of the Regency of Tunis sustained an important economic network in the form of specialised corporate suqs. Local and migrant craftsmen and traders mainly set up around the Grand Mosque of Zaytuna. Each suq had a particular name, including the suq of the Turks, the suq of the Bey and the suq of the perfumers.



Working Number: TN 004

Name: Quran

Holding Museum: Musée des Arts Islamiques de Kairouan

Date: 19th century

Materials: Paper

Curator Justification: In Islamic culture, calligraphers and book makers have always enjoyed high status and been highly sought after. As a result they could travel widely at the invitation of patrons. This Qur'an manuscript, written in Maghrebian cursive script with Ottoman illumination, symbolises the confluence of different artists and their traditions, combining local North African with pan-Ottoman styles.



Working Number: TN 005

Name: Book cover

Holding Museum: Musée des Arts Islamiques de Kairouan

Date: 19th century

Materials: Red leather

Curator Justification: Numerous Turkish craftsmen came to work in Tunis in the early 19th century. They help to develop bookbinding techniques and decoration, represented by this beautiful book cover executed at the time.



Working Number: TN 007

Name: Small earthenware jar

Holding Museum: Musée de la Céramique Sidi Kacem Jelizi

Date: Late 18th century

Materials: Terracotta

Curator Justification: Potters also were often on the move when patronage waned in their homelands and better prospects beckoned elsewhere. This archetypal Tunisian jar from the 18th century combines local artistic traditions with those of Andalusian and Turkish migrants, brought in over centuries.



Working Number: TN 009

Name: Decorated panel featuring a mosque

Holding Museum: Musée National du Bardo

Date: Late 18th century

Materials: Terracotta

Curator Justification: This colourful 18th-century tile panel, on which an arch encloses an Ottoman-style mosque above and a flower vase below, symbolises a fusion of artistic tastes brought to Tunisia by Andalusian and Ottoman Turkish migrants over the centuries.



Working Number: TN 010

Name: Panel with a large bouquet

Holding Museum: Musée National du Bardo

Date: 19th century

Materials: Ceramic

Curator Justification: This colourful 19th-century tile panel with its exuberant flower vase within an arch symbolises a fusion of artistic tastes brought to Tunisia by Andalusian and Ottoman Turkish migrants over the centuries.



Working Number: TN 015

Name: Stucco panel

Holding Museum: Musée National du Bardo

Date: 19th century

Materials: Terracotta

Curator Justification: Carved plaster decorations were highly prevalent in 18th- and 19th-century Tunisian palaces and mansions. Many were executed in a style that represented a fusion of tastes reflecting the country's diverse cultural legacy – Arab, Berber, Andalusian, Ottoman and later also Italian and French.



Working Number: LB 055

Name: Jewellery for horses – Type 1

Holding Museum: Lebanese Heritage Museum

Date: 19th century

Materials: Silver

Curator Justification: Within Arab and Ottoman lands and across North Africa, jewellery making was often the speciality of migrant artisans of – among others – Jewish, Armenian or Circassian background. Wherever they moved, they combined their indigenous traditions with local tastes.



Working Number: LB 069

Name: Two pistols

Holding Museum: Lebanese Heritage Museum

Date: 19th century

Materials: Cast steel; wood

Curator Justification: Ottoman weapons such as these flintlock pistols were not only made in Constantinople but also copied by skilled craftsmen all over the Empire and beyond. Many of the craftsmen were ethnically and religiously diverse, itinerant or migrant specialists, such as the Roma in the lands of the Balkans.



Working Number: JO 037

Name: Yemeni dagger

Holding Museum: Jordan Museum for Costumes and Jewellery, Department of Antiquities

Date: Early 20th century

Materials: Silver, leather, fabric; casting, weaving

Curator Justification: This dagger bears witness to the skill and professional expertise of the Yemeni community living in Jordan.



Working Number: LB 078

Name: Jacket

Holding Museum: Lebanese Heritage Museum

Date: 1860s

Materials: Embroidery; wool

Curator Justification: Costume from the Arab and Ottoman world and North Africa best represents the demographic complexity and constantly changing migration patterns of the time. This Ottoman-style jacket, once owned by Yusuf Bey Karam, a Lebanese resistance fighter against Ottoman rule, perfectly reflects the confluence of Ottoman, Levantine and even European impulses.



Working Number: JO 003

Name: Wedding dress

Holding Museum: Jordan Museum for Costumes and Jewellery, Department of Antiquities

Date: Late 19th century – early 20th century

Materials: Linen with silk; hand weaving, hand embroidered, natural dyes

Curator Justification: Palestinian costume reflects the great diversity and richness of 19th-century Palestinian life, based in both towns and the countryside. The arrival of thousands of Jews from Persia, Russia, Yemen and Morocco in the course of the century heralded significant demographic change with consequences still grappled with today.



Working Number: JO 026

Name: Dress

Holding Museum: Jordan Museum for Costumes and Jewellery, Department of Antiquities

Date: Early 20th century

Materials: Silk fabric; hand embroidered

Curator

Justification: This female dress forms part of the traditional costume of the Druze, traditionally based in the lands of Mount Lebanon and other parts of the Levant. A fiercely independent, ethnically and religiously distinct group, they were often forced to migrate – within the region and later abroad – for political and economic reasons.



Working Number: LB 050

Name: Dawud Pasha's bedroom

Holding Museum: Lebanese Heritage Museum

Date: 1860s

Materials: Silk; embroidery; needlework

Curator

Justification: In the 19th-century, Ottoman officials and their entourage also had to migrate regularly, as they were posted to the provinces to assume representational duties. The material culture they surrounded themselves with always reflected the reality they lived in, showing a fusion of European-style, traditional Ottoman and regional influences.



Working Number: LB 053

Name: Fountain

Holding Museum: Lebanese Heritage Museum

Date: 19th century

Materials: Marble; mosaic

Curator

Justification: In the 19th-century, Ottoman officials and their entourage also had to migrate regularly, as they were posted to the provinces to assume representational duties. The material culture they surrounded themselves with always reflected the reality they lived in, showing a fusion of European-style, traditional Ottoman and regional influences.



Working Number: JO 014

Name: Arab coffee pot

Holding Museum: Jordan Museum for Costumes and Jewellery, Department of Antiquities

Date:

Materials: -

Curator Copper; casting, hammering

Justification: This coffee pot represents the traditional hospitality of the Arab Bedouin people, regularly migrating within Arab and Ottoman lands,

be it for trading, with the seasons for more fertile pastures, or in the wake of ecological or political turmoil.



Working Number: JO 061

Name: Dinar

Holding Museum: Numismatic Museum (Ahli Bank)

Date: 1922

Materials: Gold

Curator
Justification: This gold coin, a Hijazi dinar, was struck in honour of Sharif Husayn, the Governor of Mecca, proclaimed "King of the Arabs" by the Arab tribes of the Hijaz after World War I. It was not the first time that the tribes, moving constantly within and beyond the Arabian Peninsula, had decisively affected the economy and historical developments of the region.
