

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



European Portrait of Sultan Suleiman II

Europe, 17th century

Oil on board

15.5 cm high, 12.5 cm wide

Stock no.: A6110

Provenance: Prominent US private collection.

A small portrait on oval board, identified in the inscription as the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman II.

The sitter wears a tall turban known as a *Selimi Kavuk* topped with a crescent moon alem. Ostrich feather plumes are held in a bejewelled band. Under a white, fur-lined cape, he wears a gold brocade jacket with an orange sash. The Latin inscription around the edge of the portrait reads:

Sultan Soliman Ghan, Turc : Imp[erator] : Coron[atus] Constant[inopoli]... A[nno] 1687.

[‘Sultan Suleiman Khan, Emperor of the Turks: Crowned in Constantinople... in the year 1687.’]

Only a privileged few Europeans had access to the Ottoman court. Those that did were often attached to diplomatic parties, such as Nicolas de Nicolay, who accompanied the French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire under Suleiman the Magnificent in 1551 and created drawings of costume and ethnicity in Istanbul which were then engraved and published in the *Quatre premiers livres des navigations*; Melchior Lorichs who in 1555 accompanied the Holy Roman Empire's ambassador to the Ottoman Court; Georges de la Chappelle, who accompanied the French ambassador to Istanbul in ca. 1648, sketching the women of the court;¹ Jean-Baptiste Vanmour, who accompanied the French ambassador to Istanbul in 1699, staying in the city for almost 40 years.² A majority of 17th- and 18th-century European portraits of Ottoman subjects were copied either from the original paintings by these artists, or the engravings based on their work. The same engraving could be used as a model for multiple different people, so portraits like this one are unlikely to be accurate depictions of the stated sitter.

Several similar versions of this portrait exist, suggesting a shared source material.³ These have often been described as 'after Vanmour'. Though there are some similarities between the present portrait and works by Vanmour such as *Le grand seigneur* (see [1871.1209.2973](#) in the British Museum), this painting is not related to a known Vanmour portrait. It bears some resemblance to a watercolour portrait of Suleiman II in an album called *Figures Naturelles de Turquie*, compiled in 1688 by Guillaume Raynal.⁴ The facial features and dress also closely resemble an engraving by Michel van Lochem (1601-1647), however this is described as Murad IV (see <https://onb.digital/result/110454EA>).

[1] St. Clair, Alexandrine. *The Image of the Turk in Europe*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973, cat. 31.

[2] Renda, Günsel and Zeynep İnankur. *Portraits from the Empire: The Ottoman World and the Ottomans from the 18th to the 20th century with selected works of art form the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation Collection*. Istanbul: Pera Museum, 2005.

[3] See Sotheby's, London, 2021 (<https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/old-master-british-works-on-paper-including-works-from-the-collections-of-carlos-alberto-cruz-and-the-late-timothy-clowes/portrait-of-a-gentleman-early-18th-century>); Christie's, London, 2011 (<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5480381>); Bukowskis, Stockholm, 2001 (<https://www.artnet.com/PDB/FAADSearch/LotDetailView.aspx?Page=1&artType=FineArt&subTypeld=354>)

[4] See <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84559196/f12.item>