

THE ART OF JEWELRY IN THE OTTOMAN COURT



The court records dating from 1526 indicate that there were 90 jewelry artisans in the service of the Sultan. The art of Ottoman jewelry making reached its peak in the 16th century, with gold and precious stones applied not only to wearable jewelry but also to articles of everyday objects such as bookcovers, utensils, weapons etc. using a variety of materials such as leather, ivory, glass, bone, mother-of-pearl, horn, wood and metals such as zinc.

Ottoman jewelry had to be ornate and extremely colourful. Jewellers used a variety of metals in order to fashion a piece of jewelry, which is the main difference from European jewelry where the same metal is repeated. Another feature of Ottoman jewelry is that instead of strict symmetry, the nature of the stone and metal are given prominence. For instance, the natural characteristics of a ruby and emerald reflect the Ottoman feature of jewelry. Jewelry was produced in the palace or in workshops elsewhere. Ottoman jewelry was designed using natural motifs which reflected the prevailing tastes. As the types of stones and the mines increased during the expansion of the Empire, jewelry production increased also. From the 18th century onwards, Western trends led to an exaggerated increase in the size of jewelry.

Aigrettes were used both by the Sultan and notable women of the Harem. It was the symbol of power because of its shape and appearance. It is known that Sultans gave the valuable aigrettes as presents or as awards to certain individuals. Jewelled aigrettes also enhanced the heads of horses during equestrian ceremonies. They attracted attention with their simple floral or drop designs and reflected the brightness of the precious gems on them. In later periods, the aigrettes were huge. In portraits the sultans usually wore one aigrette but sometimes they wore three. Women wore more than one aigrette but sometimes they put one on their forehead and another on the back of their head.



Pins were important pieces of jewelry in women's head ornaments. These ornaments were pinned to crests or put directly on the hair or sometimes they were put on the brooches of dresses. The "Titrek" or "Zenberekli" are typical Ottoman pins which dangle with each move of the body. Motifs from nature such as the tulip, rose, violet, floral bouquet, bird, butterfly and bee are mostly used in this type of jewelry. Jewelry with flower motifs was used on the hair.

Earrings have been widely used for centuries. They have many shapes from small pearl drops to long dangling ones. They have an important place in Turkish jewelry because they emphasized the beauty of the hairstyle and dress of Ottoman women. Earrings are classified according to how they dangle: the double dangling ones "pay-i çift" consist of three drops called the "üç ayakli", (three feet).

The simple gold bangles are not only considered to be jewelry but are bought as an investment to be converted into cash by their owners whenever needed. The women of the Ottoman Palace bought these bracelets from time to time. There are many other styles of bracelets which women favoured such as the twisted type. Signet rings encrusted with precious gems like rubies, emeralds and semi-precious gems like carnelian, amethyst and jade were favoured by Ottoman women. They wore them on one or more fingers. Solitaires and rose shaped diamond rings and 'divanhane çivisi' which has one more diamond layer around the rose shaped ring are Ottoman ring styles. The "Dinahane çivisi" motif is formed by continual rows of diamonds around one large diamond at the top. This design was used in bracelets and necklaces. It was used in silver and gold rings, too. They are depicted in the works of the late 18th and early 19th century famous painters Konstantin Kapidagli and Antoine de Favray.

Chokers and long necklaces were used by Ottoman ladies. Gold coins were strung on long gold or silver chains or on a string of pearls. Such necklaces were worn by rich women. The 18th century British Ambassador in Istanbul wrote that Hafize Sultan, the wife of Sultan Mustafa II, wore a string of pearls down to her knees with a diamond as big as a turkey egg and two strings of emeralds.

Jewelled golden, silver, crystal, mother-of-pearl or ivory belts were the essential accessories of the Ottoman woman. Belt buckles with floral or geometric motifs decorated with diamonds, rubies, turquoise, and emeralds were sometimes worn at the waist and other times over the hips.