

Extract from Tulipomania by Mike Dash

The first wild tulips originated in central Asia, on the slopes of the Tien-shan mountains. Brought east by nomads from whom the flower was a symbol of spring, they reached the Near East some time during the first millennium AD. Adopted by the Persians as a token of undying passion, wild tulips soon came to be admired by the Persians' enemies as well: the Seljuks of Asia Minor and their successors, the Ottoman Turks.

Chapter 3

Within the Abode of Bliss

Two hundred and fifty years before Dutchmen bid for bulbs in the taverns of Holland, the tulip came to the plain of Kosovo in the southern marches of Serbia. There, at a place called the Field of Blackbirds, a Christian army of 15,000 men led by a man named Prince Lazar stood and faced twice that number of Ottoman Turks under the command of their sultan, Murad I. The great battle which Murad and Lazar fought on St Vitus's Day in 1389 helped to seal the fate of the Balkans for the next 500 years.

The day did not begin well for the Serbs. The charge of the best and bravest Christian knights which opened the battle was beaten back, and Lazar himself was captured in the confusion. On the Turkish side, meanwhile, Murad directed his men with the skill to be expected of a sultan who had spent most of his 30-year reign on campaign. His position at the centre of the Ottoman army seemed secure; he was screened by three lines of camels, chained one to another to present an impenetrable obstacle to the Christian cavalry and intended, like Hannibal's elephants, to terrify an enemy which had never encountered such exotic creatures before. And yet, somehow, one Christian soldier did reach the sultan. According to legend, this man was a Serb whom Lazar had publicly accused of treachery on the previous evening, and who now proved his loyalty by impaling Murad with such force that the dagger thrust into the Turk's chest sprouted from his back.

The sultan fell, mortally wounded, but he remained alive just long enough to summon the captive Prince Lazar and order his immediate execution. Thus the Christian and the Turk joined the thousands of their men who lay dead upon the Field of Blackbirds. And a Muslim chronicler recalling a battle-ground thickly covered with the fallen, and strewn with severed heads still wearing brightly-dyed turbans, wrote that he was put in mind of a gigantic bed of tulips, their gaudy red and yellow petals echoing the brilliant colours of the Turkish head-dresses.

In fact, it is quite possible that tulips really were present at the Battle of Kosovo – not merely in the poetic phrase of the chronicler, but in the more physical form of talismans. In the course of the fourteenth century, the Ottomans seem to have adopted this most holy of flowers to guard them against misfortune. They used it in a slightly peculiar way. Partly for protection, and partly because the religious proscription against images of living things still had force, the tulip was embroidered not onto banners and surcoats, but onto underclothes. The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul still displays a simple cotton shirt, made to be worn beneath armour and richly decorated with verses from the Koran on the front and embroidered tulips on the back, which was taken from the tomb of one of the Ottoman generals who fought at Kosovo. This was Sultan Murad's second son, Bayezid, a young prince who had scarcely reached manhood when he led a division of the Turkish army against Prince Lazar. Bayezid is the first man in history who can be personally identified with the tulip.

He is supposed to have donned the shirt as a protection against evil, but also as a good luck charm. If that is so, the flower served him well at Kosovo. Acclaimed as sultan by his men, Murad's younger son succeeded his father on the Field of Blackbirds while the battle against the Serbs still raged. He began his reign as he would go on – quite ruthlessly – by ordering the execution of Yakub, his elder brother and chief rival

for the throne. This unfortunate prince was quickly garrotted with a silken bow-string in compliance with Bayezid's decree. The new sultan thus secured the Ottoman succession for himself in the most testing of circumstances.

Bayezid proved to be a ruler of immense energy and ambition. He tightened the Ottomans' grip on the Balkans and, in 1396, utterly defeated the last great crusading army, a force of some 16,000 men, at Nicopolis in Bulgaria. After the battle, the sultan personally supervised the beheading of about 3,000 Christian captives. It was hardly surprising that his subjects began to call him Yildirim, 'the Thunderbolt'.

For fully 13 years, in fact, Bayezid triumphed at every turn, crushing Christian resistance in the Balkans and slaughtering Persians in the east. But the power of his talisman had now exhausted itself. In 1402, near Ankara, he fought a ruler even greater and more implacable than himself: Tamerlane, a crippled Mongol born in the shadow of the Pamirs, a soldier almost as able as Genghis Khan, but even more bloodthirsty. Bayezid's army was scattered, and the sultan himself was overtaken by Mongol archers as he fled the field and brought to grovel at the feet of his conqueror in Tamerlane's own tent.

The tulip king was shown no mercy. Tamerlane seized the women of the sultan's harem for himself, and forced Bayezid's wife Despina to wait on him, naked, at his table. The sultan he confined within an iron cage, which the Mongols took with them as they travelled. On state occasions, Tamerlane had the once-proud Bayezid dragged before him so he could use him as a footstool.

Bayezid survived only eight months of this treatment. His end remains obscure; some say he died of apoplexy, but the playwright Christopher Marlowe, in *Tamburlaine the Great*, has him dash out his own brains against the bars of the cage in despair at his plight. At any rate, he was dead before the tulips flowered in 1403.

The sultan's capture temporarily halted the tulip's westward progress and left the fledgling Ottoman empire in a state of chaos from which it took the Turks half a century to recover. The principal beneficiaries were the shattered remnants of the Christian states which had ruled the Balkans before the sultan's time, and particularly the Greeks of Byzantium. Bayezid's greatest ambition had been to take Constantinople and make it the new centre of his empire, and he had even besieged the city for five years at the end of the fourteenth century, but he was never able to break down the massive fortifications which enclosed it.

Admittedly Constantinople was something of a shadow city by 1400, its decline reflecting the fading fortunes of its Byzantine rulers. In fact it was more than half-empty, the seven long miles of its walls enclosing a town of no more than 50,000 people, scattered now among what were effectively large villages separated by ruins, working farms and orchards. But in size and situation and repute it was still the greatest city in the world. It was fit to be the capital of the Ottoman Empire – and the new home of the tulip too.

Bayezid's demise did not save the Byzantines; it merely postponed their end. Within half a century, the Ottomans had regrouped and returned under the command of the dead sultan's great-grandson, Sultan Mehmed. This time Constantinople was weaker, and the Turkish army considerably larger and equipped with the latest cannon and catapults. After a desperate siege lasting less than two months, Mehmed's troops forced a breach in the walls and the Turks poured into Constantinople. The last Byzantine emperor threw away his imperial insignia and sought an anonymous death in the press of the fighting. Then, amid terrible scenes of massacre, the Ottomans took Constantinople and made it Istanbul.

Even by the remarkable standards of the Ottoman sultans, Mehmed – who was henceforth always known as Mehmed the Conqueror – was a complicated character. Warlike but cultured, sensuous but implacable, he was a ruthless monarch but a humble man. When he gave thanks for his victory at the Byzantine cathedral of St Sophia on the day Constantinople fell, he knelt and scattered a handful of earth over his turban as an act of obeisance to god. He was also the author of a gloomy Turkish couplet:

Footman, pour me some wine, for one day the tulip garden

will be destroyed;

Autumn will come soon, and the spring season will be no more.

But realist though he may have been, the sultan had no intention of relinquishing the Ottomans' hold on their new capital just yet. On the contrary, the once-great city began to recover under his rule. New buildings appeared on the skyline; four huge minarets rose alongside St Sophia, which became the Aga Sofia mosque; the land walls were repaired, new palaces begun. And in places that had been abandoned to ruin under Byzantine rule, the Turks built a myriad of gardens.

Blessed though it was by one of the most perfect physical situations in the world, Istanbul craved such adornment. It had been built at the very edge of Europe, with water on three sides, and contained seven great hills; even as the Byzantines had left it, the city offered gorgeous views at every turn. Taking full advantage of its emptiness, the Turks planted trees and flowers so their natural beauty complemented and offset the city's buildings, old and new. Within a few decades of the conquest, the Ottoman sultan alone could enjoy more than 60 private gardens scattered along the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara. Dozens more kitchen plots supplied fruit and vegetables to his palaces. Other Ottomans built sunken gardens which offered shade

in the heat of the summer, terraced gardens full of vines, pleasure gardens in public places, and private 'paradise gardens', enclosed within the walls of their own homes and filled with flowers.

This profusion of greenery distinguished Istanbul, in the eyes of visitors, from any European city. And the Turks planted their gardens in ways that startled western horticulturists. They hated the corseted regimentation of the formal gardens that were in fashion at the courts of England, France and Italy. Ottoman gardens were impressionist spectacles in comparison, planted not to impress the eye with geometrical precision, but to seduce it with visions of lushness and of plenty. An Ottoman garden was designed as a place where its owner might seek refuge from the cares of the world and a retreat from the heat of the day. Within its walls, the Turks grew soft fruits and created fountains and melodic streams. It was intended as a little piece of heaven here on earth.

Europeans who travelled to Istanbul during the high days of the Ottoman empire that Mehmed and his successors now built were generally surprised not merely by the city's size and opulence, but by its masters' manners and good taste. This was a city of culture and coffee-houses, which tolerated the religious diversity of its inhabitants in a manner inconceivable in Europe. Yet the western notion of the Turk was all to do with cruelty and lust – the savagery of the Ottoman armies was a popular theme, as was curiosity about the hidden pleasures of the sultan's harem – and certainly the Turks themselves were as capable of cruelty as they were appreciative of beauty.

Sultan Mehmed himself was a man of just such contradictions. One of his earliest acts was to order the construction of a wonderful new palace at the eastern end of the city, poetically named the Abode of Bliss by its creator but better known today as the Topkapi. It was specifically intended to outdo in its magnificence anything built during the Byzantine millennium, combining – in the words of one chronicler –

‘variety, beauty and magnificence’, and in which ‘on every side, inside and out, shone and glittered gold and silver, ornaments of precious stones, and pearls in abundance’. Mehmed, a passionate gardener who collected rare plants from every part of his domain and could often be seen labouring in person among his flowers, saw to it that the Abode of Bliss was surrounded by ‘very vast and very beautiful gardens, in which grew every imaginable kind of plants and fruits; where water, fresh, clear and drinkable, flowed in abundance on every side, and flocks of birds, both of the edible and of the singing variety, chattered and warbled’. Yet when this cultured man discovered one day that one of his prized cucumbers had been stolen, he had the palace gardeners brought before him and disembowelled, one by one, in the hope of ascertaining which of them had eaten it.

Later Ottoman rulers more than matched Mehmed the Conqueror in both cruelty and their enthusiasm for exquisite palaces and gardens. The greatest of them all – Mehmed’s great-grandson Suleyman the Magnificent, who came to the throne in 1520 and stretched the Turkish empire from the gates of Vienna to the Persian Gulf and from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Caspian Sea – was a byword for ruthlessness among those Christians unfortunate enough to encounter his armies. To Europeans he was ‘the Grand Turk’, the title by which subsequent sultans were also known to the west, and he was acclaimed, among his many other titles, ‘Possessor of Men’s Necks’. But Suleyman’s subjects revered him as ‘the lawgiver’, and he was a pious man who – exceptionally for an Ottoman – had little use for the harem and lived a chaste life with his favourite wife.

By Suleyman’s day, in the first half of the sixteenth century, the tulip had established itself as the quintessential Turkish flower. It was still unknown in Europe, but its popularity among the sultan and his servants was such that – now the old proscription on the portrayal of living things was being relaxed – it had become one of the favourite motifs of Ottoman artists and artisans, appearing with increasing frequency

on flower vases and tiles. Tulips graced the sultan's robes, and not merely his underclothes as they had done in Bayezid's time: Suleyman's cream-coloured imperial brocade gown, which still survives, was embroidered with hundreds of blooms. The royal armour, worn on campaign in Hungary and Persia, was embossed with a single glorious tulip, nine inches long, and the sultan's helmet, a masterpiece of the armourer's craft, was adorned with tulips shaped in gold and set with precious stones.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, tulips were becoming much more commonplace within the Ottoman Empire, and other Turks beside the sultan were also making copious use of the flower. They were embroidered onto the prayer rugs sewn by brides for their trousseaux and painted onto water bottles or woven into the velvet coverings that ornamented elaborate Turkish saddles. And just as gardeners planted tulip bulbs to help their souls ascend to paradise, so the women of the Turkish empire sewed thousand upon thousand images of the flower as religious tokens, and offered them up with prayers for a husband's safe return from war.

It was under Suleyman, it seems, that the Turks first began to cultivate the tulip and to breed new varieties to suit their tastes. The wildflowers which had been grown in Istanbul since Mehmed's day were short and rounded, almost egg-shaped, and not unlike many of the varieties still popular today. Perhaps as early as the late sixteenth century, however, the Ottomans began to look with favour on new cultivars* which the capital's gardeners had begun to produce. These 'Istanbul tulips', as they became known, may have been bred from species which the Turks had discovered on the northern shores of the Black Sea, in the land of their allies the Crimean Tatars. Istanbul tulips – of which there were eventually as many as 1,500 varieties - were more delicate and far more elegant than their predecessors. Their petals were

* Flowers systematically cultivated and improved by man.

enormously long and slender, and needle-pointed at the tip. The most sought-after varieties were shaped like almonds, with dagger-like tepals. They were coloured vermilion or russet or sulphur.

The first gardeners to devote themselves entirely to tulips lived in Suleyman's time and grew some of the earliest cultivated tulips. One, named Seyhulislam Ebusuud Efendi, is known to have possessed a particularly beautiful flower known as Nur-i Adin, 'The Light of Paradise'. Other varieties of the flower were given equally evocative titles which reflected their value and their beauty: Dur-i-Yekta, 'The Matchless Pearl'; Halet-efza, 'Increaser of Pleasure'; 'Instiller of Passion'; 'Diamond's Envy'; 'Rose of the Dawn'.

To begin with, such tulips were great rarities. Even Seyhulislam – who died, at the greatly advanced age of 84, in 1574 – would have possessed only a handful of bulbs of the Nur-i-Adin. And in an age when the art of coaxing new varieties from old was barely understood, so that growers who wished to produce crimson flowers might attempt to do so by pouring dark red wine over their tulip beds, cultivation was a slow and somewhat haphazard business, and one which failed to interest most Turkish gardeners. The majority of new Ottoman cultivars seem to have emerged by accident rather than design.

Nevertheless, the Ottoman sultans gradually increased their stock of bulbs, and used tulips and other flowers to adorn their palaces and gardens. Some of these blooms were grown in Istanbul, where there were, by the 1630s, about 80 flower shops and 300 professional florists. Others were imported, sometimes in great bulk. New varieties of tulip came from the Black Sea coast and Crete, or from Persia, taken by force during one of the interminable campaigns the Ottomans fought there. In 1574 Suleyman's son, Selim II – a keen gardener whose other passion, alcohol, led to his becoming known to history as Selim the Sot – instructed the Sheriff of Aziz, in the

Turkish province of Syria, to send him 50,000 tulip bulbs for the imperial gardens. 'I command you not in any way to delay,' the sultan added. 'Everything should be so well and quickly done that it should give rise to no disappointment.' Even though Selim made it clear that money to pay for the purchases could be had from the treasury in nearby Aleppo, such orders must have caused great consternation in those receiving them, as perhaps the sultan intended.

Of all the sultan's gardens, those hidden within the walls of his own home, the Topkapi Palace, were by far the most magnificent. But then everything about the Abode of Bliss was meant to demonstrate the magnificence, wealth and taste of the Ottoman royal line. Even the public portions of the palace were built on the grandest scale, and the private quarters, which only the highest-ranking Turks and their personal servants usually saw, were of a size and complexity unrivalled in the west.

In order to reach the inner sanctums where the sultan's tulips were displayed, a visitor would have had to approach the Abode of Bliss via a thoroughfare which led past the Aga Sofia mosque and opened onto a plaza. Once there, he would have seen the palace's outer walls, bristling with fortifications and guards and pierced by a huge outer gate, above which the sultan's lengthy official title was inscribed in golden script. This gate led into the first of the four great courtyards of the palace, each of them more sacred than the last. The outer courtyard, through which all visitors to the inner portions of the palace had to pass, was open to all the sultan's subjects and seethed with an indescribable mass of humanity. Any Turk had the right to petition for redress of his grievances, and several hundred agitated citizens usually surrounded the kiosks at which harassed scribes took down their complaints. Elsewhere within the same courtyard stood several armouries and magazines, the buildings of the imperial mint and various other arms of the Ottoman government, even stables for 3,000 horses. Also present were a pair of white marble pillars on which were placed the severed heads of notables who had somehow offended the sultan, stuffed with cotton

if they had once been viziers, or straw if they happened to have been lesser men. Reminders of the sporadic mass executions ordered by the sultan were occasionally piled by the entrance gate as an additional warning: severed noses, ears and tongues.

A sturdy double gate led from this circle of hell into the second, quieter court, forbidden to all but Ottoman functionaries, soldiers and important visitors. This courtyard held the Hall of the Divan – the Ottoman’s council chamber, where the sultan lay on a sumptuous chaise longue, concealed from the gaze of his subjects by a shimmering green silk curtain, to hear the reports of his senior officials or receive the ambassadors of foreign powers. Beyond this second court, and through a third gateway known as the Gate of Felicity, lay the monarch’s private chambers and the imperial harem, guarded by black eunuchs brought to Istanbul from Africa. The third courtyard was a place so sacred that no westerner, and practically no Ottomans, could claim to have actually set foot in it for almost 100 years after it was built. Finally, a fourth locked double gateway led from the seraglio into the imperial gardens, which lay at the extreme end of the entire palace complex and commanded magnificent views across the glinting waters of the Bosphorus. Their position, at the very heart of principal symbol of Ottoman power, underlined the regard the Turks had for their plants and flowers.

The grounds of the Topkapi were not merely magnificent but extensive. The enormous palace complex contained every sort of garden, as well as flower beds and fountains, pools and orchards. The imposing Second Court, where the Turks’ elite troops assembled each month to be paid in cash from great sacks of money, even contained some quite extensive areas of woodland where deer wandered between the cypress trees and across shaded walks, while to the north of the palace, where the land sloped down to the famous harbour known as the Golden Horn, the gardens also extended beyond the walls all the way down to the water.

Flower beds were planted chiefly in the Fourth Court, where they were often enjoyed by the sultan alone. The only windows which overlooked them were those of the Treasury and a building called the Hall of the Pantry, which housed the royal larders; and these could be shuttered if the Grand Turk so decreed. The gardens of the Fourth Court were the sultan's principal retreat from the cares of state, and successive monarchs vied with each other to make them ever more beautiful. The rose, the carnation, the hyacinth, the narcissus and, of course, the tulip were all planted in great profusion in this part of the grounds, and particularly on the slopes which led to the highest point of the whole Topkapi complex, a hillock at the northern end which commanded unrivalled views across the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara. Upon this promontory, and elsewhere in the gardens, the Ottomans built wooden pavilions called kiosks. They could be used as meeting places or as the focal points of festivals, but were also provided with solitary divans positioned to catch each passing breeze and offer breath-taking views when the gardens were in flower. Here, more than at any time in his crowded and often violent life, an Ottoman sultan might feel alone and at peace.

Everything about the Abode of Bliss was designed to impress visitors with the extent of Turkish power. The palace's scale was tremendous, its architecture was magisterial, its apartments were decorated in the most opulent fashion. And even the most cosmopolitan European merchants would have been awed by the cosmopolitan stream of supplies required to feed the imperial court: cartloads of rice, sugar, peas, lentils, pepper, coffee, sena, macaroons all trundled through the Topkapi's gateways, as well as plums preserved in lemon juice, 199,000 hens and 780 wagons of snow each year.

In Suleyman's time, no fewer than 5,000 servants toiled among the four courtyards. They ranged from humble watchmen to exotic specialists such as the Chief Turban Folder and the Chief Attendant of the Napkin, whose staff in turn included a full-time

Pickle-Server. Among these servants of the sultan were a considerable body of gardeners, the bostancis, almost 1,000 strong. Their duties in the palace were actually many and varied, and extended far beyond weeding the sultan's tulips – though certainly they performed that function too. Bostancis worked as guards, porters and removers of refuse. The 5,000 additional members of the corps who worked outside the Topkapi itself formed a royal bodyguard and acted as makeshift police and customs-men around the capital.

Most unusually of all, the bostancis doubled as the sultan's executioners. It was the royal gardeners who sewed condemned women into weighted sacks and dropped them into the Bosphorus, and the tread of an approaching group of red skull-capped bostancis, wearing their traditional uniform of white muslin breeches and cut-off shirts exposing muscular chests and arms, heralded death by ritual strangulation for many thousands of Ottoman subjects down the years.

When very senior officials were sentenced to death, they would be dealt with by the sultan's head gardener, the bostanci-basha, in person. The bostanci-basha also held the post of chief executioner, and he was required to play a leading role in what was surely one of the most peculiar customs known to history. This was the race held between a condemned notable – a deposed vizier or a chief eunuch – and the man commanded to kill him. As soon as sentence of death had been passed, it was the practice to allow the condemned man to run as fast as he was able the half mile or so through the gardens and down to the Fish-House Gate, which stood at the extreme southern end of the Topkapi and was the appointed place of execution. If he reached the Fish-House before the head gardener, his sentence was commuted to mere banishment. If, on the other hand, the condemned man found the bostanci-basha

waiting for him at the gate, he was summarily executed and his body hurled into the sea* .

One of the bostancis' less fearsome duties was the provision of cut flowers to decorate the living quarters of the palace. In general, the Turks rarely displayed plants in this way, preferring to leave them in the gardens in which they were grown. But the custom flourished within the walls of the Abode of Bliss. Paintings show the sultans' favoured rooms brightened by a profusion of flowers displayed singly or, more rarely, in small groups. Tulips, of course, featured heavily in such arrangements. They were placed in fine glass vases which were often embellished with filigree using a technique known as Cesm-i Bulbul – 'the Nightingale's Eye' – and scattered about a series of low tables.

It was thus, in all likelihood, that westerners first encountered the cultivated tulips of Istanbul. They came as ambassadors and envoys first, responding to the terrifying successes that Suleyman's armies enjoyed as they captured Rhodes, the apparently impregnable stronghold of the crusading Knights of St John, in 1522, then crushed the armies of the King of Hungary in 1526 and besieged Vienna three years later. This glorious string of victories elevated the Ottomans to the rank of the greatest power in the Mediterranean and forced the Christian monarchs of Europe to negotiate with them. Later, mercenaries and merchants also made their way to Istanbul, to enlist with the Turks or seek permission to trade with them. It was one of the minor consequences of the rise of Ottoman power that by the time of Suleyman's death, in 1566, many hundreds of travellers such as these had journeyed to Turkey, a country which had for several centuries been all but closed to the west.

* The last man to save his neck by winning this life-or-death race was the Grand Vizier Haji Salih Pasha in 1822-23.

The westerners found much to remark on. Everything about Ottoman Empire seemed exotic, from the rowdy vigour of the bazaar to the sensuous grace of Istanbul's mosques. The Turks' passion for flowers, and the remarkable skill with which they tended them, were also among the novelties that drew comment; even the cultivation of plants purely for their beauty seemed strange to visitors accustomed to think of them as things to eat or pound into primitive herbal medicines.

The slender and irresistible tulips displayed in every fashionable garden could not fail to attract attention. Whether the travellers who found themselves gazing on the splendid Ottoman gardens were ambassadors or army officers, whether they loved flowers or were indifferent to them, they could hardly fail to see that the Turks favoured this one bloom above all others.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, at the latest, the tulip had come at last to Europe's notice. It was ready to resume its journey west.

--

Notes

Horticulture is hardly central to the history of the Ottoman empire, and features scarcely at all in conventional histories. The best guides to the story of the tulip's time in Turkey have been accounts of Istanbul. The best of these is certainly Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (London: John Murray, 1995). For the Ottoman palaces, the indispensable source is Barnette Miller, *Beyond the Sublime Porte: the Grand Seraglio of Stambul* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1931). Dr Miller was probably the first westerner to gain access to the inner courtyards of the Topkapi, and she did so at a time, early in the twentieth century,

when they still looked much as they did in earlier times. She worked hard to reconstruct those institutions – such as the Harem and the gardens – which had fallen into disuse or disrepair, and her work has formed the basis for all subsequent descriptions of Ottoman palace life.

Battle of Kosovo Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: a Short History* (London: Macmillan 1998) pp.58-80. For the chronicler, see Anna Pavord, *The Tulip* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998) p.31.

Bayezid Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: the Classical Age 1300-1600* (London: Phoenix, 1994) pp. 14-18; John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: the Decline & Fall* (London: Viking, 1995) pp.343-5, 364-9.

Bayezid's shirt There is some dispute about the age of this garment. The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts dates it to c.1400, but Yildiz Demiriz, 'Tulips in Ottoman culture and art', in Michiel Roding and Hans Theunissen, *The Tulip: a Symbol of Two Nations* (Utrecht/Istanbul: Turco-Dutch Friendship Association, 1993) p.71 suggests that the style dates the shirt to about 1550. The tradition therefore remains unproven – but even if Demiriz is right, it is certainly not impossible that Bayezid wore a similar shirt.

Constantinople and Sultan Mehmet Mansel, chapter 1.

Sultan Mehmet's gardens Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Ottomans: Dissolving Images* (London: Penguin 1995) pp.26-9, Mansel pp.57-8.

Sultan Suleyman and the Istanbul tulips Arthur Baker, 'The cult of the tulip in Turkey', *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, September 1931, p.240; Baytop pp.52-3; Demiriz pp.57-8, 74-5. Some authorities argue that Istanbul tulips were not in fact bred until the second half of the seventeenth century (cf. Pavord pp.39, 45.); the matter is unclear.

Florists in Istanbul Baytop p.51.

Sultan Selim and bulbs from Persia and Syria Ibid p.53; Baker app.238-40.

The sultan's palace and gardens Demiriz pp. 59, 67; Mansel pp.60-1, 71, 73-5, 221-2; Barnette Miller, *Beyond the Sublime Porte: the Grand Seraglio of Stambul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931) pp.4-21, 151-6; NM Penzer, *The Harem: an Account of the Institution as it Existed in the Palace of the Turkish Sultans, with a History of the Grand Seraglio from its Foundation to Modern Times* (London: Spring Books, 1966) pp.40, 252-60; Lavender Cassels, *The Struggle for the Ottoman Empire 1717-1740* (London: John Murray, 1996) pp. 53-4, 57-8.

The bostancis Mansel pp.74-5, 221-2; Cassels p.53; Penzer pp.62, 185.

The head gardener's race It does not seem to be known when exactly this weird custom originated. Miller pp.145 & 250n31.