Picturing the square, the streets, and the denizens of Istanbul: Practices of Urban Space and Shifts in Visuality

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Abstract Exploring intersections of spaces, practices, and representations of urbanity and the city in late sixteenth-century Istanbul, the paper traces the emergence of a set of new themes centered on the street and on the main public square of the Ottoman capital in illustrated court histories of the period (and following shortly, in a set of other genres). It considers visual and textual images of the city that located actors in public spaces in view of the changing urban life of an expanding metropolis and its frequently conflicted political environment. It proposes an expanded interpretative framework for these products of the court that incorporates a perspective on the urban, and suggests that a changing regime of visuality shaped the city center and its images at the turn of the seventeenth century. In attempting to locate and understand images of city and urbanity at this particular juncture, the paper simultaneously pursues questions of connectivity within a larger Eurasian sphere of cultural production and circulation. The images I discuss were produced through a broad web of connections within and beyond the Ottoman world, as their makers entered into dialogues with a diverse range of representational practices: they responded to Persianate book painting of the later sixteenth century; they reinterpreted European city views circulating in the Ottoman domains in manuscript and in print; they evoked the poetic genre of the shehrengiz, which in turn evoked related genres of city poetry in contemporary Persian and Mughal realms.

Bio Çiğdem Kafescioğlu is associate professor and chairperson at the Department of History at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. She works on the urban, architectural, and visual culture of the early modern Ottoman world, with current research interests in representations of city and urbanity in arts and letters in connection to urban and spatial practices, and in practices and spaces of water use in early modern urban environments. She has contributed chapters and articles to a number of books and journals, and is the author of Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), which won the Spiro Kostof Award of the Society of Architectural Historians. She has held scholarships from the Giles Whiting Foundation, the Getty Foundation, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University.