First, in 1985, it was the Festival of India which, through two handsome large exhibitions in Washington and New York, several smaller ones in other cities, and a great deal of publicity, provided the American public with a vision of worlds other than its own, of desirable exotic cultures. Next it was Turkey, or rather the Ottoman Turkish world of the sixteenth century, whose relationship to today’s Turkish republic is as remote as that of Charles V and the huge Hapsburg empire to the republic of Austria, but whose architectural masterpieces adorn the three cities of Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul, and whose treasures and other remains are found, for the most part, in the Topkapi Museum.

The exhibition, *The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent*, which opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in the winter of 1987, summered at the Art Institute in Chicago, and made its New York debut the following fall, was one of the most exquisite expositions of objects I have ever seen. It consisted of some twenty-seven examples of writing on paper or of aspects of book-making such as bindings; fifty-nine paintings, nearly all of them miniatures and most of them illustrating a text; sixty-one objects in various techniques of industrial or decorative arts; fifty-three textiles or rugs, and forty-eight ceramics. Their shapes were heterogeneous: at times they were totally two-dimensional; at other times they were meant to be viewed from several directions or even in movement (as, for example, with the fabulous robes). Their functions are prosaically mundane (underwear, a simple jug) or ceremonially and symbolically unique (a crown, an imperial signature, a map of conquered lands).

Shapes and functions made particularly arduous the task of designing an appropriate setting for objects which were all refugees from places other than museums. They were different from each other and collectively most of them deviated from the norm of exhibited objects of Western art in which two-dimensional paintings and drawings made to be seen in public or semi-public contexts dominate. The National Gallery’s presentation of such unusual and unexpected objects was truly spectacular. I did not see the Chicago version of the show, but the New York one, while spacious and softly mysterious, all too often had sets of objects so far from each other that the connection between them was lost. The visual judgments I shall produce are based primarily on the impressions given by the Washington exhibition.

Brilliance of presentation may have been the designers’ responsibility, but the Turkish government deserves the credit for the show’s very existence. It was a law passed as recently as 1985 that allowed for the lending of so many treasures from Turkish collections to foreign museums, although quite a few of the exhibited objects were in fact shown in a Smithsonian Institution exhibition which circulated between 1966 and 1968. The true creator of this show was Dr. Esin Atil, long-time curator of Islamic art at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, for whom this had been a labor of love for many years. Her diplomatic efforts and skillful tact brought the exhibition together, and for this all must be grateful.

Following the pattern of many of her earlier and more modest shows, Dr. Atil also produced two books to accompany the exhibition. The first, *The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent*, is both a catalogue, in the sense that it contains a list and illustrations of all exhibited objects, and a series of essays on the media (manuscripts, precious objects, textiles, ceramics) of the exhibited objects and the organization of artistic patronage and labor in the sixteenth-century Ottoman world. The second, *Süleymannname: The Illustrated History of Süleyman the Magnificent*, is a beautifully executed quasi-facsimile edition of the Süleymannname, the one available complete section of a dynastic epic written in the manner of the Iranian Shāhnāma and illustrated with sixty-nine miniatures. The manuscript was included in the exhibition, but of course only a few of its miniatures could be seen at a time.

All the objects shown originated in the sixteenth century and in the Ottoman court symbolized by the presence of Süleyman I. He was born in 1494, crowned sultan in 1520 when he succeeded his father, who had been the conqueror of Egypt and the Levant and was
known ominously but justifiably as Selim the Grim; he had died in 1566 while campaigning in Hungary. He was known as the Magnificent in the West and as the Lawgiver (ganun) in Ottoman historiography. His long reign was filled with wars, successful ones for the most part, but thanks to a well-established and well-trained bureaucracy, it also included decades of reasonable internal and social order and of administrative reorganization. It was the time of the great architect Sinan, the only builder from the Muslim world until Hassan Fathy whose name was known in the West. Sinan's mastery of domical forms transformed the profile of Ottoman cities and remained until the nineteenth century the standard against which all Ottoman buildings were measured.

It is noteworthy that the past decade has witnessed several other major publications on Ottoman art written in English and an enormous scholarly effort in Turkish. The results of the latter are unknown to most scholars and amateurs who are not Ottomanists. The existence of books in English and the accessibility to tourists of Turkey and other formerly Ottoman lands have not as yet propelled the Ottoman world at its heyday in the sixteenth century into the mainstream of historical culture, nor even among the pleasures of jaded jetsetters. Yet a look at any map shows that in the times of Charles V, Henry VIII, Francis I, Ivan the Terrible, Shah Tahmasp, Babur, Michelangelo, Titian, Palladio, Calvin and the Counter-Reformation, only the Ottomans had dealings, peaceful or otherwise, with all the protagonists of sixteenth-century Eurasia except China. Their culture and therefore their art cannot a priori be seen simply as an "Oriental" exoticism.

It has long been recognized that Sinan's mosques are major examples of a grand tradition of domical compositions from the Pantheon to Sir Christopher Wren. But the other arts clearly have nothing in common with Michelangelo and Mannerism, nor even with Benvenuto Cellini. Why not, especially after a late fifteenth century that had many artistic connections with Italy? What is it that makes (or made) architecture so different from other arts? Or, to introduce a different way of understanding the arts, at what point do differences constitute otherness? Is it a definable, measurable yardstick of values which makes an art or a culture different? Or is it a subjective decision of a historical moment or of today's observer to proclaim some arts or some artistic traditions as alien to one's own?

These questions, with obvious implications for other places and other times, are central to our understanding of Ottoman art. They are not the questions which led to the exhibition and to the books, nor are they raised by them. Yet, precisely because the books and the exhibition arose from needs other than the questions of global historians and of comparative art historians, they bring to the elucidation of the latter a documentation gathered with the common and straightforward desire to present and explain within their own context a sizable collection of items associated, rightly or wrongly, with Suleyman the Magnificent. I shall first review the impact made by the exhibition, then relate it to evidence from the two books before returning to the wider issues raised at the beginning.

The primary statement made by the exhibition can be deduced from the objects shown in it. There is a bizarre but commonly held belief that objects speak for themselves. They do indeed, provided one knows their language, and on one level everyone does know the language of this particular selection. There was no way of escaping the dazzling display of gold. It was the medium for manufacturing nearly everything there, for emphasizing designs on miniatures or clothing, for embroidered textiles, for stamping bookbindings with involved arabesques. If one got tired of gold, there was a brilliant array of reds, stunningly tactile on robes, suddenly rising out of the surface of ceramics, enlivening the design of book illuminations, or reflecting light off hundreds of rubies. Even relatively mundane manuscripts, like Matraki's celebrated depictions of cities throughout the empire or the puppet-like soldiers and dignitaries of the historical manuscripts, were full of all sorts of reds. Less systematic but no less striking were the blues, greens, and whites found on objects or as precious stones nearly everywhere.

This display was attached to things whose functions are, for the most part, easily recognizable. There were books with pictures or simply with non-representationational illuminations which are meant to be read or simply perused. There were endless practical objects like ewers, plates, lamps (although there is some uncertainty as to whether the peculiarly shaped ceramics we usually know as "mosque lamps" were really that), canteens, bottles, shields, belts, buckles. There were clothes, undershirts or nightgowns, trousers, and, of course, the great ceremonial robes. There were magnificent swords and daggers, so beautifully decorated that they no longer threaten. It was easy enough for the viewer to extrapolate from